Individual production of social well-being
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**CHAPTER SEVEN**

**QUALITY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL PRODUCTION FUNCTIONS: METAGOALS IN THE PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL WELL-BEING**

7.1. Introduction

In the chapters 5 and 6, an empirically grounded elaboration of some elementary parts of the hierarchy of goals in Social Production Function theory was presented. In chapter 5 I have proposed a more thorough conceptualisation of the three first-order instrumental goals for social well-being, including an inventory of aspects that should be taken into account when assessing levels of these goals empirically. In chapter 6 I have presented a general inventory of the main production factors for these goals, as well as a systematic approach to investigating these production factors.

As we have seen in chapter 3, however, the elaboration of parts of the SPF hierarchy of goals that are already in there, is not sufficient to accommodate existing insights concerning the structure and causes of ‘happiness’, ‘life satisfaction’ or ‘overall subjective well-being’. The basic theoretical framework of SPF theory does cover the affective part of subjective well-being, in the explicitly elaborated hierarchy of goals that consists of social and physical well-being as universal goals and comfort, stimulation, status, behavioural confirmation and affection as first-order instrumental goals. There are, however, no equally explicit elements in the basic model of SPF theory that could accommodate the cognitive components of overall subjective well-being, which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, boil down to three main categories, namely the cognitive components that are associated with social comparison, with goal attainment, and with anticipation and recollection of one's situation at different times than the present.

Lindenberg (e.g. 1996; 2001a,b) has repeatedly stressed that in addition to the substantional goals people for (social and physical well-being and the instrumental goals), attention should also be paid to procedural or so-called ‘metagoals’: goals concerning the quality of people’s social production functions or the ways in which they produce social and physical well-being. In section 3.5.2. I have argued that these ‘metagoals’ may prove to cover the cognitive component of overall
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subjective well-being adequately. Whether in fact they do depends of course on how this category ‘metagoals’ is filled in. Lindenberg (ibid.) has suggested a number of metagoals that appear to be quite convincing, but as yet there has been little empirical research on these metagoals nor on the exhaustiveness of the suggested set of metagoals.

Before trying to assess the extent to which the metagoals in SPF theory may cover the cognitive component of subjective well-being, it is thus desirable to explore the metagoals people strive for empirically. What cognitive aspects of social production functions are relevant for the resulting level of overall subjective well-being? Is the set of metagoals that Lindenberg (1996) suggests exhaustive, or does the present empirical study give reason to extend this set with additional or more specific metagoals? In the present chapter an answer is sought to the last research question that was formulated in section 3.6.:

What goals that cannot be interpreted as instrumental goals in the basic model of SPF theory do people strive for, can these goals be modelled as metagoals (concerning the qualities of production functions) and if so, to what extent do they accommodate the cognitive component of overall subjective well-being?

This research question can be split up into three subquestions:

1. **What are the metagoals in people’s production of social and physical well-being?**
2. **How are these metagoals related to each other, i.e. can they be modelled in an instrumental hierarchy?**
3. **To what extent may we consider the cognitive component of well-being as it is known from the literature to be represented in the (hierarchy of) metagoals in SPF theory that is now specified?**

The first two subquestions necessarily leave aside the overarching objective of this study, the exploration of the potential of SPF theory as a quality of life theory, for the time and concentrate on SPF theory proper: the further specification of its conceptual framework in relation to observed empirical reality. Only after answering the first two subquestions, we are in the condition to meet the third, which returns to the adequacy of SPF theory to deal with the central issues of quality of life studies.

The first subquestion concerns the specification of the content of the abstract term ‘metagoals’. In section 7.2., I discuss the present state of knowledge and theorising as regards metagoals in SPF theory. Lindenberg’s (1996, 2001a,b) notions about the metagoals are discussed there, leading to the formulation of a conceptual framework that is taken as the point of departure for search for additional and more specific metagoals in my empirical data.

In the qualitative study, I have collected extensive qualitative data on people’s goals, motivations and preferences concerning social well-being and the production thereof. In chapter 5 I have reported how from these data the empirical manifestations and aspects of the three first-order goals for social well-being have been distilled. In section 7.3., we will find out what further goals, motivations and preferences, that do not fit as instrumental goals for social or physical well-
being, could be discerned in our data and whether these preferences and goals fit into the conceptual framework as metagoals.

The second subquestion concerns the way in which goals pertaining to the quality of people’s social production functions are interrelated. More specifically, the question is asked whether they can be modelled in an hierarchy like the substantive goals in SPF theory. In section 7.4, an answer to this second subquestion is proposed for the set of metagoals or ‘quality aspects of social production functions’ that resulted from the analyses in sections 7.2 and 7.3.

The third subquestion leads us back from a sole focus on SPF theory to a point of view that allows inspection of its position vis-à-vis other approaches and the existing body of knowledge in quality of life studies. In section 7.5, it will be asked to what extent the (hierarchy of) metagoals in SPF theory that is now specified, accommodates the main elements of the cognitive component of overall subjective well-being as it is known in the literature. This question requires a concise review of the main cognitive aspects of subjective well-being known from the literature and other quality-of-life research, and a confrontation of these cognitive components with the metagoals that are identified in section 7.3.

Section 7.6, finally, presents a recapitulation of what this chapter has yielded in terms of SPF theory proper and in terms of the investigation of its suitability as a quality of life theory. Concluding this chapter, the robustness of the yields and the possible implications of flaws in the research method are concisely discussed.

7.2. A conceptual framework relating metagoals to the production of well-being

The basic model of SPF theory (Lindenberg 1986; Lindenberg & Frey 1993) did not explicitly acknowledge any other goals directing and motivating people’s behaviour than goals that are instrumental for, or contribute to the production of the five first-order instrumental goals: comfort, stimulation, status, behavioural confirmation and affection. SPF theory is strictly a theory of substantial goals. However, being firmly located within the framework of rational choice theory, SPF theory is automatically linked to a specific behavioural theory. This behavioural theory does not posit any particular substantial goals, but it assumes a universal striving of people to maximise utility (cf. Lindenberg 1996). It is this assumption from the behavioural theory underneath SPF theory that has led Lindenberg to suggest that besides the instrumental goals for physical and social well-being, people are also likely to hold preferences concerning the form and quality of their production functions; these preferences they referred to as ‘metagoals’.

Lindenberg (1996; 2001a,b) suggests that, in addition to the hierarchy of substantial goals in SPF theory, there also is a different type of goals people strive for, namely goals that are instrumental

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1 The terms ‘metagoals’ and ‘quality aspects of social production functions’ are used in exactly the same meaning. Although the term ‘quality aspects of social production functions’ is more adequate and precise than the term ‘metagoals’ for what we mean by it, I will in the remainder of this chapter as a rule use the term ‘metagoals’ for reasons of brevity.
to achieving and maintaining the ‘quality’ of social production functions. These goals are referred to as metagoals.

People are not only interested in what they produce – social and physical well-being – but also in how they produce it and how the yields of production are distributed over time. Lindenberg (1996, p. 175-178) proposes seven metagoals: maximisation of utility or well-being; efficiency; multifunctionality; consistency; time perspective; limited vulnerability and variety. These seven goals seem to belong to different levels of an (eventual) instrumental hierarchy of metagoals. Although Lindenberg (1996) does not explicitly place these seven preliminary metagoals in an instrumental hierarchy, in the discussion that follows I will attempt to reconstruct the implicitly suggested instrumental relations between these seven goals.

Lindenberg (1996) starts out from the assumption that people strive to maximise well-being. From this assumption it follows quite logically that people will want to produce well-being as efficiently as possible: well-being is maximised through achieving the lowest possible cost-benefit ratio in production. Efficiency is thus proposed as a general, universal metagoal.

One important means to achieve efficiency in the production of well-being that Lindenberg calls attention to the use of multifunctional activities. He mentions sports and love making as examples of activities that usually yield social and physical well-being at the same time. In terms of efficiency it is quite obvious that people, if they can choose between activities that yield only one form of well-being, say stimulation, or activities that, in addition to stimulation, provide one or more other forms well-being as well, they will choose the latter. This is simply a matter of reducing the cost-benefit ratio.

Besides multifunctionality, consistency is a second metagoal that appears to be instrumental for increasing the efficiency of social production functions. Consistency refers to the interrelatedness of a persons’ social production functions: the extent to which the ways and contexts in which a person produces one form of well-being are consistent and compatible with the prevalent norms in the contexts where he produces other goals. For example: do a person’s recreational activities and friends ‘suit’ the norms in his professional context? Are his occupation and the way he spends his Sundays consistent with the religious norms of his wife and parents? Inconsistency between production functions may lead to additional production costs in the form of social disapproval, from others or oneself.

Lindenberg (1996) also points to the mitigating effects of people’s time perspective on the main motive of maximising well-being. People do not only care about their present well-being, they also want to insure that they will be well off in the future. Often, this leads people to invest in future well-being or future production capacity, usually at the cost of immediate maximisation of well-being. In deciding about investments, people also consider anticipated life events (Sanders 1991). Clearly, people have to balance the immediate maximisation of well-being and their investments to achieve maximal well-being in the future. There exists an extensive literature on the problems and complexities involved in this issue (e.g. Kahneman & Tversky’s Prospect

\[\text{Possibly, multifunctionality is also instrumental to the maximisation of well-being when it is not just simply a matter of getting additional benefits from one’s productive efforts. The assumption of limited substitutability of the five first-order goals for subjective well-being suggests that a minimal level of all five goals is required for overall subjective well-being. This may imply that, apart from the improvement of the cost-benefit ratio of production, multifunctionality may also be instrumental to overall well-being by helping to preserve the minimal levels of all five instrumental goals for social and physical well-being during production.} \]
Theory, 1979; Loewenstein’s work on time discounting, e.g. Loewenstein & Elster 1992, etc). For now it suffices to note that within the overarching motive to maximise well-being two partly competing goals may be distinguished, namely the goals to increase immediate efficiency and the goal to ensure a positive development of well-being and productive capacity for the future. In fact, the very notion of production functions presupposes a time perspective. However, in the context of metagoals, the role of people’s time perspective is more specific and may more adequately be indicated as the metagoal to achieve an optimal development of productive capacity over time.

The last two metagoals that Lindenberg (1996) proposes are directly related to people’s productive capacity over time. One of these is the goal to avoid or limit vulnerability. If one’s social production functions depend strongly upon one or few production factors, a minor change in external conditions may cause a large disruption of one’s production of well-being. That is the reason that people may prefer ‘variety’, i.e. social production functions consisting of and depending on a much broader and more varied set of production factors. ‘Variety’ would thus be a lower order metagoal that is instrumental for decreasing the vulnerability of one’s social production functions. Both the goal to avoid or limit vulnerability and the instrumental goal of variety in one’s social production functions may in concrete situations conflict with immediate efficiency: in many cases immediate efficiency may be maximised by specialisation in production (e.g. in the case of women choosing to be a ‘fulltime mother’, workaholics, or people who neglect all other things when they have just fallen in love) but such specialisation increases the vulnerability of their social production functions (what happens when the child leaves, or the one’s employer goes bankrupt, or the infatuation ends?). This example illustrates the potential conflict between efficiency and the optimal development of productive capacity over time.

Because of the potential conflict between these two general metagoals, I will consider them as parallel goals in the eventual instrumental hierarchy of metagoals.

Recently, Lindenberg (2001a) has suggested that instead of using the assumption of utility maximisation it may be more adequate to assume that people generally strive to improve their condition. Improving one’s condition then means to do better than before - i.e. improvement of one’s condition compared to oneself in a previous time interval - or to do better than some others with whom one compares oneself. There are several good arguments for preferring the assumption of a universal goal to improve one’s condition over the earlier assumption of utility maximisation (cf Lindenberg 2001a). In the remainder of this chapter I will therefore, in accordance with Lindenberg (ibid.), assume that the motive to improve one’s condition is the single overarching goal under which both the hierarchy of substantial or ‘hedonic’ goals (aimed at improvement of one’s subjective well-being) and the hierarchy of metagoals (aimed at improving one’s productivity and productive capacity) can be subsumed.

Summarising, both the hierarchy of substantial goals and the (hierarchy of) metagoals can be conceived as driven by the overarching motive to improve one’s condition. The hierarchy of metagoals can be conceived to consist of two branches: one branch of metagoals contributing to the general universal metagoal of efficiency and one branch of metagoals contributing to the
development of productive capacity over time. This conceptual framework can be represented as follows (Figure 7.1):

The qualitative data are used to investigate whether more metagoals appear to be general enough to warrant inclusion in the still tentative instrumental hierarchy of metagoals in this conceptual framework.

In the next section, I present the goals and preferences that respondents in the exploratory study reported which do not belong to the basic SPF hierarchy of goals, and discuss whether and how these appear to be instances or particular translations of the two universal metagoals, ‘efficiency’ and ‘development of productive capacity over time’.

7.3. Besides the realisation of social and physical well-being: what do people strive for?

In the exploratory analysis I have taken stock of the characteristics of the way of production of status, behavioural confirmation and affection that emerged from the interviews as being possibly relevant.

In the phase of open coding, I have - among other things - given codes to the statements of respondents that refer to characteristics of the way in which they produce social or physical well-being or to the preferences they have regarding how they organise their life, their activity pattern and behaviour. It is a practical impossibility to code statements without imposing at least some measure of interpretation rooted in the conceptual framework in one’s mind. In this particular case, I had to distinguish between statements referring to goals or preferences at the one hand, and
statements that did not refer to goals or preferences at the other. This distinction could not be
based simply on whether respondents themselves explicitly present a statement as referring to a
goal or preference, for in the majority of cases they do not, and when asking them specifically
about goals and preferences, one is likely to elicit only a small and rather haphazard selection of
respondents’ actual set of goals and preferences in response. Therefore, I had to judge all
statements from the qualitative data myself, as to whether they involved goals or preferences.
After thus distinguishing between statements that did and statements that did not refer to goals or
preferences, the former set was distinguished further into a set referring to goals that were clearly
instrumental to the realisation of one or more of SPF theory’s first-order instrumental goals, and a
set of miscellaneous goals and preferences. For deciding which statements belonged to the first
subset, the elaborated conceptualisation of the first-order goals for social well-being (cf. Chapter
5) was taken as a guideline, together with the easier to apply criterion of statements referring to
ways of reaching physical well-being.
Thus, from all statements in the initial data set I have only excluded those statements that either
directly refer to one of the first-order instrumental goals (comfort, stimulation, status, behavioural
confirmation or affection) or that refer directly to a concrete production factor (resources and
activities such as, say, paid work, sports, practical support, siblings, gardening etc). In a few
cases, statements or terms that I judged to refer to a first-order instrumental goal or to a concrete
production factor, appeared yet to allow an interpretation that would relate them to the quality of
social production functions as well. Sometimes this was suggested directly by the way in which
respondents formulated these goals (e.g. “It is also important how you organise your life, for
instance, I think your life is better if ...”), while in other instances I believed the interpretation of a
statement in terms of (aspects of) first-order instrumental goals or production factors did not quite
exhaust the full meaning of it. These statements were therefore not excluded from the set of
potential metagoals, and will thus also be scrutinised below.

| 1. Agency / being in control | 14. Making investments |
| 2. Self realisation | 15. Avoiding vulnerability |
| 4. Certainty of results / risk avoidance | 17. Harmony / well-structured production functions |
| 5. Taking up challenges | 18. Single activity production function |
| 6. Having a clear goal | 19. Using a multi-activity strategy |
| 7. Independence | 20. Multifunctionality |
| 8. Simpleness | 21. Instrumentality |
| 10. Hope and expectation (time horizons) | 23. Being busy |
| 11. Having and maintaining norms and values | 24. Safety / protection against criminality |
| 12. Avoiding moral (norm-) conflict | 25. Giving account to others / being accountable |

*Table 7.1. Goals and preferences reported by respondents that fall outside the basic SPF model*

All statements referring to goals or preferences that could not be categorised unambiguously as
(only) instrumental for the realisation of social or physical well-being, were thus classified as
potential ‘metagoals’. The list of different goals and preferences in this set is presented in Table 7.1. For the sake of concise presentation, I have given interpretative codes to all statements about (potential) metagoals, which may be considered as preliminary designations of the metagoals or qualities of social production functions these statements refer to.

Some of the items in table 7.1. resemble general values or virtues, while others have a more instrumental or technical character. Some refer primarily to the individual himself, and others refer rather to the individual’s place among others. In order to get a better comprehension of the goals or preferences regarding the production functions proper that underlie the items in table 7.1., I will now discuss each of them, presenting some of the typical statements which they were used to code. What goals and considerations did respondents report in the interviews that have led me to distinguish the 26 items from table 7.1.? And, given the two general metagoals, efficiency and the development of productive capacity over time, that form the sensitising concepts for this analysis, which items should be accepted as metagoals and which not?

1. **Agency / being in control**

In the interviews, respondents frequently referred to the extent to which they perceive to be in control of their own doings, in control of what happens and of the level of well-being that they realise. Being in control of one’s doings and of one’s production of well-being, or, in a different term, the *agency* aspect of the production of well-being appeared an important theme in many statements.

Johan Berghuis: “The most important thing for me is being independent, financially and otherwise. Being in control and responsible for your own well-being. That you are free to decide how to spend your money, no matter whether that is little or much.”

Related to this, it appears that, as a rule, people like to perceive causality, thus they like to experience a causal relation between what they do and subsequent events or states of well-being. Loss of control over one’s fate or loss of the causal relation between one’s own doings and subsequent changes in well-being are perceived as severe problems which people will do much to escape.

Edwin Eijkhof: “When I received unemployment benefits and had to report to the local welfare office every week, I felt humiliated. I had always been used to take care of myself and then I had to go there and beg for help. It is not their fault, but I was inhibited and obstructed at every side. I wanted to start again, to begin my own business. But I got no chance whatever, because as soon as I tried to set some steps towards that, they reacted: ‘Oh you are not available for the labour market right now?’ And the benefits were stopped at once. That made it impossible for me to get started. Highly frustrating. So I resigned and accepted the first suitable employee-job and I did not start my own business.”

Cobie Strating: “When will there be a stable period once more? When will there be a situation in which a clear and definite decision is made by the institutions? A situation from which I can move on at last and begin to build up my life again? Because now I just can’t undertake anything. Because each year something different happens, rules are changed, temporary
decisions reversed, regulations adapted. When I want to enter a course, get some schooling: ‘Oh no, no use, I’d better wait, because they may change the rules again next year’. It is a chaotic and unstable life I have right now.”

Cobie feels to have lost the control over her own life, and feels that this impedes the (re)construction of her social production functions she desires.

The theme of agency and being in control of one’s own level of well-being also emerged in the interviews in relation to having affective relationships. Some respondents suggested that parents, for whom the level of social well-being they can realise strongly depends on the affection, time, care and support they get from their children, may feel out of control of their own life. This is even exacerbated by the interdependency of well-being that characterises many affective relationships (cf. section 5.4.).

Irene van der Wal: “When we got children, I stopped working to be a full-time mother. I lived for that. But when my children left the home I really hit my face in the mirror. What now? I had a very hard time. And now we hardly see them, they could as well live at the other side of the country as just ten kilometres from our house, because they are so busy. When you see or speak them it is hurried: ‘all well dad, all well mum? Yeah, we will come some time soon, but we are so busy.’ We have so much less contact than I should want so very much.”

Annette de Hoog: “I can’t really be happy if one of my children is having problems. No matter how well things are for me, it always troubles me that my son has little chance of ever getting a good job.”

In a similar vein, having a partner, however productive in the realisation of the diverse substantial goals, implies a partial loss of control over one’s life:

Conny van Ooij: “My partner has been out of work for a while and that has been tough on both of us. Mostly because you are waiting for something, you don’t know how long you’ll have to wait, even though you are confident that he will find a job eventually. But till that time you can’t get on with your life: you cannot yet seek and buy a house because if he will find a job elsewhere we would have to move again. That was what I hated most about it, being unable to plan things. You just have to... I am getting the age that you should seriously consider whether you want to have children...And we just had to postpone all such decisions. That’s worse than having little money.”

One’s neighbours and neighbourhood are frequently mentioned too as factors beyond one’s own control that do affect the realisation of social well-being:

Frank Zuidema: “When my neighbour suggested to make a volleyball-court of the grass court in front of our houses, and start a neighbourhood volleyball-competition, and when he wanted my son and me in his team. I did not like that at all. In such cases you just cannot say no, to keep relations fine, but I was not happy about it. I like to decide such things for myself, and in this situation I felt I couldn’t.”
Hetty Stubbe: “When you live in a small village there is strong social control. It can become really oppressive, the way they control you. You feel you lose all your privacy. Sometimes when I sit all back in our sitting room, my neighbour walks by and waves her hand. And I don’t like that, not when I am sitting all back in the room: she just looks in intently to see where I am and what I am doing.”

Of course people do have control over the neighbours they live amongst, in the sense that they can move away, but the costs of ‘exit’ in this sense are of course considerable.
Some respondents mentioned the taking on of financial obligations as a deed by which one may stealthily lose autonomy and control over one’s own production functions. Overall, it appears that the factors or situations that may pose a threat to one’s control over one’s own production functions are those which one can only escape from at high costs.
There is one exemption from this rule, which appeared in the data. The control of one’s own life can also be restricted by the ‘shadow of the past’, which it is also difficult to escape. Prejudices and patterns of interaction based upon a person’s past way of living may severely restrict his set of behavioural alternatives. Some respondents even mentioned the escape from the ‘shadow of the past’ as one of the main benefits of moving to a new town:
Mirthe Ganzevoort: “You never lose the stigma people give you when you are young. Only when you move to a very new place. I moved from the small village in the south of the Netherlands to Groningen, and then I could make a brand new start.”

Greetje Brink: “When my husband had to find another job, having to give up farming because of problems with his back, it meant we had to move to the city. It felt like being released from all these prejudices from the past. In our new place, no one knew me, I could do whatever I wanted without being talked about. Now, when I visit my old neighbourhood again, I feel I never want to go back. There I am still ‘that daughter of Smith’. And once someone said to me in a tone of amazement: ‘weren’t you that shy girl of Smith’s?’ I said, yes, and you would not have guessed, eh? Years ago I may have been shy. But that’s how it goes: you get a stigma and it sticks to you a lifetime.”

Agency or being in control of one’s own life can obviously contribute to the efficiency of one’s social production functions as well as to the realisation of growth and stability of productive capacity over time (cf. Campbell 1981 who already found that internal locus of control is a main contributor to SWB). It is instrumental, almost a prerequisite to these general quality dimensions, and thus should be included as a lower order metagoal.

2. Self realisation
In the interviews and the questionnaire, respondents frequently mentioned the realisation, exploration and development of their own potential, their talents and capacities as goals or as important aspects of their life. It appears that norms prescribing self realisation are broadly recognised: people feel it as a normative duty to develop their talents and put them to use. Consider this dialogue between Cobie and Frank:
Cobie Strating: “You say that paid work is not ‘it’ for you. But then I want to ask...Each man has of course been given talents and capacities. And now you work only 12 hours per week....don’t you feel the urge to develop your talents and capacities and employ them in society? To do something with your potential? Should not everybody try to do so?”

Frank Zuidema: “I think I do use my talents. I also have been raised somewhat religiously, so that idea of not hiding your light under the bushel...No, I believe that in the things I do, my job and other things I do, I sufficiently use my talents and exploit my capacities.”

This norm appears, by the way, to be closely related to the norm, signalled below where the role of religion or ideology is discussed, to contribute to society according to one’s potential. Some respondents appeared hardly able to make a distinction between self realisation and making a career:

Irene van der Wal: “What I needed was simply to have a job. What I felt was: why can’t I earn something myself, even if it be but a dime, but to realise myself...!”

Others, who have chosen not to pursue a career in paid work, however, clearly distinguish between the two, and report that they do strife for self realisation:

Barbara van Kesteren: “For me, the main goal is very general. Although its concrete form is influenced and affected by the time in which you live and your own age, the general goal is to be something valuable, to be able to be ‘someone’ for others. It is an abstract goal, it does not translate simply in obtaining a better position or better salary, but in finding a way to become valuable… finding what you can be.”

Not surprising, education is seen frequently mentioned as an important means to develop one’s talents and abilities. More importantly, respondents suggest that getting to know and developing one’s own talents and capacities can contribute to finding the most efficient ways of realising social well-being, both in the form of social approval from others as in the form of the stable part of self-approval.

Cobie Strating: “Getting older I found out what my talents are. I am on the organising committee of a singles club, and I have found out that organising things is my main talent. The things I organised work out perfectly. When I was younger I felt much more need to keep things under control. Very tense about how exactly things should run. While now, when something unexpected happens, I enjoy it, because I feel confident that I can handle it. And when I have organised something, and someone tells me that I did a good job, I get home very satisfied and happy.”

The interview data further suggest that self realisation is positively related to agency:

Hylkje Brouwer: “My whole life, all the things I wanted to do, were not so extreme, but in my parents’ eyes they were. They disapproved of it. But that just stimulated me to find my own way and to do so on my own. Meeting these counterforces just gave me much strength, and the drive to realise my own talents.”
It appears that, through exploring and developing one’s gifts and talents, it may become increasingly clear ‘who one is and what one can do’, which is a prerequisite for feeling in control of one’s life (and sometimes for actually getting control over things). Reversely, for self realisation to occur, it requires some extent of freedom to make one’s own choices and some extent of control over one’s own life:

Johan Berghuis: “A good thing of our present society is the opportunities it offers to people to develop their potential to the full. Everyone has access to good education, no matter what background they come from.”

Edwin Eijkhof: “When you work in a firm and you have a low position, you are told what to do and what not. But when you succeed in obtaining a management position, you not only get a better salary, but you also have better opportunity for developing yourself and realising your potential.”

Irene van der Wal used the Dutch term ‘jezelf waar maken’ when she talked about self realisation (see her quote above). Although literally the same as the English term, the meaning of these words in Dutch language are exactly revealing what it is all about: self realisation means realising one’s potential, both for oneself and in relation to others, but it also means, literally, making your self into a reality, not remaining as a reflection of others, but clarifying the boundaries between oneself and the others:

Simon Goudsmid: “For me the aspect of individuation is very important. Self realisation, the philosophy of Jung. I would not have made it without that. The first two floors of the ‘house’ that was there when my parents delivered me to the adult world, I have been able to restore, but by now I have added six more floors to that, new ones. This opened many ways for me.” Self realisation is thus seen to be instrumental to both efficiency and to one’s production potential over time. Therefore, it should be included as an instrumental metagoal of social production functions.

3. Religion / ideology
Respondents frequently mentioned things that ‘give meaning’ to their life, that provide them with ‘real purport’ or a ‘real goal’. In short, they reported that their beliefs and convictions about life, whether religious or not, played an important role in their well-being. Many respondents associated ‘meaning in life’ with doing paid or voluntary work. This seems to derive from a broadly held idea that meaning in life can be found in meaning something for others, in being needed and useful to society. In the Calvinistic tradition, the mission to ‘inhabit and work the earth’ is essential to people’s meaning in life, and it obviously inspires the great value that is attached to (paid) work in this tradition.

Cobie Strating: “What really bothers me is the idea, when I receive my social benefits each month, that I think: ‘one more month that I did not do a thing to earn this’. That is the worst of it, getting that money without having earned it, society just does not need your help. I was raised in a Calvinistic tradition. Work provides meaning to life. You know: ‘thou shall inhabit and work the earth’. So you have to find something worthwhile to put in your best efforts, no matter what kind of work it is.”
Several respondents, however, emphatically locate ‘meaning’ not in (paid) work, but rather in abstract terms like ‘being able to mean something for others’:

Anneke de Wit: “Giving informal care to your mother is also useful and gives meaning to your life. You help her, but you also benefit yourself, because it feels good and meaningful.”

or, much more concrete, in e.g. contributing to environmental preservation:

Annette de Hoog: “Buying ‘Fair Trade’ clothing, and chemical-free vegetables and so on, sometimes makes me feel really happy, because in this way I can help to preserve nature and contribute to the long-term chances of the earth.”

Some statements also suggested that religious beliefs and convictions, if they encompass some ideas or perspectives concerning the future of the earth and the human race or about life after death, may extent people’s time perspective beyond their own lifetime. A similar extension of one’s time perspective may result from beliefs that involve a strong sense of connectedness with others. Extension of one’s time perspective beyond the own lifetime may be comforting in some situations, and it may justify all sorts of investments in the future of which the pay-off in the individual’s own lifetime is precarious.

Adherence to a religion or ideology appears to be a relevant metagoal that is instrumental to the realisation of both general quality dimensions: it may contribute to efficiency through enhancing the consistency in one’s social production functions, and it may contribute to perceived development of productive capacity over time through providing a perspective of life after death or through extending one’s time horizon beyond the own life time.

4. Certainty of results: risk avoidance

Whereas the previous goals (1. through 3.) were reported by practically all respondents, only about half of the respondents explicitly mentioned a conscious desire to have certainty about the results of what they do. This suggests that having certainty about the results of activities is more important for some people than for others. Certainty about the results of what one does should be understood to refer to risk avoidance, or abstaining from activities with uncertain success.

For example, Frank Zuidema tells us that he does not like skating at the indoor oval. As he does not feel sure whether he will round the curves without falling, he fears that other skaters might make fun of him, and therefore he avoids the situation. For Anneke de Wit, risk avoidance appears to be an important and general operative goal:

Anneke: “What determines the quality of my life is in the first place order. Just having things going as usual. No unexpected things. And I like, I really like to know exactly what is going to happen. I am not an adventurous person. I do not need...eh...I have never been on a plane; I do not need to go abroad on holidays. We have been going to the very same summerhouse for years, and I am very happy with that. And I really don’t like doing things of which I cannot oversee how they will turn out.”

In the case of Anneke de Wit, it might seem that the desire to have certainty about outcomes follows from the fact that, overall, she has little control over her own production functions and that her production functions are highly vulnerable and precarious, providing hardly any
opportunities for substitution in case of need. However, there were also respondents who controlled their own life to a high extent, who reported high levels of well-being and stable production functions, who yet reported to prefer certainty about the results of actions over more risky activities:

Johan Berghuis: “I find an activity satisfying if it presents a certain challenge, yet such that I know I will succeed. I do not let myself be challenged to do things that I am not sure I am up to. So what I like is doing things that are new, that you have not done before, but that I know I can do. That is crucial, for I’m not going to start something that may lead to failure. Constructing something, making things. And then the moment that it is finished, that it actually works...That is the moment that your environment shows admiration. Something like that should be part of it, or I won’t take up a challenge.”

Annette de Hoog: “If someone asks you to take up a volunteer job, to join some committee, then I consider whether it sounds like something useful or fun and whether I think I can do it. I must feel confident that I am up to it. If I think I can do it, I go for it.”

In general, the respondents’ life stories suggest that some extent of certainty about the results of activities is important for all. Even respondents who have taken daring and risky steps in their life, incurring considerable uncertainty, appeared to have done so only in the certainty of some part of the result. For example, Barbara van Kesteren, whose husband was offered a good job at the other side of the country, had to decide whether she wanted to give up her job and the vicinity of her family and friends to move with her husband to a tiny village where she knew no one and had no chance of finding a job. In deciding to move with her husband, she accepted a considerable uncertainty about the consequences. But, as another respondent remarked:

“It wasn’t a leap in the dark. You did go to something new and unknown, but you took along an important certainty: you took along your husband.”

Both on the basis of the qualitative study and of insights from the literature concerning loss aversion and choice behaviour under risk (e.g. Tversky & Kahneman 1991), it seems clear that risk avoidance or the desire for certainty of results belongs, being instrumental to both main metagoals, to the specific lower order instrumental metagoals. It may be more or less salient, depending on the vulnerability of one’s production functions and the expected difficulty of substitution if negative outcomes occur.

5. Taking up challenges
This goal is the counterpart of the previous goal. It presents the preference most people have at times for trying new things, trying ones strength against new, challenging tasks, attempting possibly advantageous or profitable new activities, et cetera. Per definition, the outcome of the attempt is uncertain here, if one succeeds there may be an attractive reward, but one may as well fail the challenge.
Respondents, when talking about taking up challenges as a goal or preference, usually emphasise the importance of keeping a good balance between this risk taking and risk avoidance:
Mirthe Ganzevoort: “Among the main important factors for a high quality of life I would reckon both stability and adventure. It is difficult to keep these balanced. You just need a stable base. And you may find your stable base in different things than those in which you seek the adventure. You may seek adventure in your job by taking on free-lance assignments, while making sure that your private life provides the stability that you also need, for example in the form of being settled in marriage and parenthood or whatever. And I think both aspects should be balanced, at least for me.”

What further emerges from the respondents’ statements, is the enjoyment they find in taking up challenges - which may be considered a way of realising stimulation and possibly also behavioural confirmation -, its relation to self realisation and the exploration of one’s own potential, and related to that, the function it performs in checking possibilities for improving one’s production functions.

Barbara van Kesteren: “I love a challenge. And that may be anything from presiding a conflictuous meeting to ironing a fancy shirt. My mother has taught me in detail how to iron such delicate clothes, and when it turns out neatly - for usually I have no patience - I feel very satisfied. But I really enjoy the more important things too. Say, when you have fought for two years to preserve some facility for your community, and you have to meet all sorts of bureaucracies that put up resistance, and when then finally you do succeed after all... I get a kick out of that which gives me loads of energy for months. I find that delicious!”

Annette de Hoog: “I think, when people ask you to do something, like organising things or being on a board of some organisation, you should not refuse too easily. Not just because you may do something useful, but also... how else can you find out what you can do, when you just shrink back from tasks that scare you? You may be very talented for something and never come to know it.”

Johan Berghuis: “I now know which things I should not try to do. I mean, if you know you’re no good at it, why should you spill effort on it? I know I’m no good at any ball games. So I don’t play tennis. I have tried all these things when I was younger, just to see if I could do it. I wanted to know.”

For the realisation of both main metagoals it may thus sometimes be necessary or worthwhile to take up challenges; as it may lead to the discovery of more profitable ways of producing well-being. It may become worthwhile or necessary to take a challenge mainly in two kinds of situations. Firstly, when one has little to lose, the potential gains that may result when accepting the challenge may make it advisable to do so. Secondly, when one is instead highly secure, having a high level of well-being with strong and stable production functions and a safe stock of production factors, taking up challenges may be worthwhile because the costs that one risks in case of failing the challenge are subjectively small, while the potential benefits are relatively higher. Thus, ‘taking up challenges’ appears to be a situationally salient instrumental metagoal for both main metagoals.
6. Having a clear goal
As a rule, people appear to feel unhappy when they lack a sense of purpose. Respondents in majority spontaneously mentioned ‘having a clear goal’ as one of the main prerequisites for happiness. When the goal is abstract, like ‘being a good person’, ‘contributing to the happiness of others’, or ‘achieving the best I can’, it may better be understood as part of - what I have named above - endorsing religious or ideological convictions about life. But when the goal is clear and concrete, having it per se appears to affect the quality of people’s social production functions, as well as the way they go about producing their own (social) well-being. One of the functions of having some concrete goal is the framing it presents for all one’s doings. If one has some goal, even the activities that do not contribute to its realisation gain an interpretation, as being leisure, a moment for oneself, for relaxation. Having a concrete goal thus provides structure to people’s perception of their own productive activities.

Irene van der Wal: “When my children left home, I got severely depressed. I had no job. My husband went to work early each morning to come back in the evening, earning our living. I did not need to do a thing, the money we needed was just handed to me, so there I was. It was horrible. All those months.... After my husband left for his work, I waved him goodbye, and then I lay down on the couch. Lying on the couch. I could lie there till 12 o’clock or later. Paralysed by lack of purpose. Hating myself.”

Mirthe Ganzevoort: “You just need a goal. That is also why I hope to get that job. If I get it, there is something to look forward to again, something to prepare for and to put effort in. Something to direct my thoughts and my doings.”

Only one of the 31 persons I interviewed, Mike Bos, did not think having concrete goals or a sense of purpose in necessary to achieve well-being. This young man, that emphatically stated not to have any goals whatsoever for himself, reported to be more than moderately happy and satisfied with his life. But in this Mike seems to be an exception.

In fact, the general notion of production functions in SPF theory almost appears to imply that people consciously pursue concrete goals. By and large, I think SPF theory indeed presupposes that people act in pursuit of concrete (instrumental) goals, but it should be stressed that the theory does not claim individual super-rationality: much of people’s behaviour may not be consciously goal-directed, and be only changed or terminated when the individual perceives that what he does runs counter his - may be somewhat vaguely conscious - interests.

In the eventual hierarchy of metagoals that is presented later in this chapter, having clear or concrete goals will be included as an instrumental metagoal, serving both the main metagoal of efficiency through enhancing the multifunctionality of production functions and avoidance of moral conflict, and - in a more general fashion – a positive development of productive capacity over time.

7. Independence / moral freedom to act
In the interviews, several times there surfaced a subject which I have - inadequately, I fear - labelled as ‘(in)dependence’. The cargo that goes under this label, is the mechanism that if a person knows that what he does and does not do affects the well-being of others, this awareness
poses moral restrictions to his freedom to act. Of course, this mechanism is a basic mechanism in the production of self approval (the self-rewarded component of behavioural confirmation) and is in that sense nothing new. What makes it of interest to the topic of this chapter, is that people’s production functions as a whole appear to differ in the extent to which the moral freedom to act is restricted by interdependency of production functions. And the overall extent of (in)dependence appears to be an aspect of the quality of social production functions. Respondents speak about their experiences with this mechanism in diverse ways:

Conny van Ooij: “At Christmas, we usually go to my parents. My sisters come too, with their families. But I am very anxious that it does not become a habit or tradition. Because if it does, you can hardly decide to do something different for once without disappointing your parents. So we always keep it very open and vague when we will come, and how long we will stay.”

Cobie Strating: “My sister lives on her own for twenty years now, but all of these years she has spent every weekend at my mother’s. She has her own house, but all the summer holidays she spends with my mother, Easter, Christmas… always with our mother. I sometimes think, and say to her: this is not healthy, what you are doing, you should lead your own life, have a life of your own. And then she says: ‘No, as long as our mother lives I will spend my time with her, because I feel I should. It would grief her if I would let my own pleasures prevail’. And in this way, a tension builds between my sister and me, because she suggests that if I would spend my weekends at my mother’s too, it wouldn’t be necessary for her to do so every week. So she lays a claim on my freedom, just by expressing herself as she does.”

Yasmin Rais: “My husband and my son know that I take care of them, so they count on that. And therefore of course I will not just join a sports club if the trainings are around dinner time, nor will I just go shopping in the afternoon if I feel like it … not if there are still things to do for my men. I feel responsible for them, and it would not be fun anyway to do things for my own pleasure if I knew it would cause them trouble.”

Independence in the sense of feeling free to act as one pleases without feeling restricted by expectations of others appears to be a relevant lower order metagoal, which can clearly be instrumental to the realisation of efficiency in production. It may be conceived of as a particular form of agency and being in control; which implies that in the eventual hierarchy of metagoals it belongs at a lower level than agency, as the levels in the hierarchy correspond both with instrumentality relations and with the degree of generality or specificity of metagoals. Feeling free to act as one pleases without being restricted by expectations of others may in some cases also contribute to achieving stability or growth of productive capacity over time, but there is no such clear instrumentality relation to this general metagoal as to efficiency. Freedom to act without feeling restricted by expectations of others will probably become a salient metagoal mostly in situations where an individual feels severely restricted in his choice of action by such expectations of other people, that is, where such expectations are many and restrictive and where the individual is either dependent on the others for behavioural confirmation or experiences interdependency of well-being (as in close affective relationships).
8. Simplesness
In the interviews, some respondents stated that they would want their life, and all their way of being, to be simple and straightforward. They stated that they believe that people who are able to remain plain and simple can achieve a kind of happiness and quality of life that is lost to people with more complex social production functions:

Irene van der Wal: “Close to our house there lives a couple of about forty, with a daughter of fifteen. They have never been abroad yet. When we went to Portugal last year, that man of forty asked me which countries we would traverse in order to get there. When I said that we would drive through Belgium, France and Spain, he could hardly believe it. That is how these people live. Pure, good people. They have the keys to our house, they water the plants when we’re not there. That family is, as far as we can judge, so completely happy. I have told my husband that this is something we have not seen for years. These people do not see beyond the end of their nose, almost literally, and they are so satisfied and happy. I do not believe that there is ever such tension or stress in that house. Always friendly and plain.”

It seems to me, however, that this idea that simplicity or being plain is a quality that is positively related to happiness for a large part relies on superficial perception, and perhaps also on envious comparison with one’s own situation of which one knows all complexity. Leading a plain and simple life may seem desirable to a person who is tired of the troubles and complexities in his own life, but it is doubtful whether such simple, plain and uncomplicated life really exist and, if so, whether persons who live more complicated life could ever change to a more simple state of being themselves. It can be imagined that under specific circumstances a person’s could de-complicate his life and thereby achieve an improvement of his well-being, such as via increased certainty of rewards, increased clarity and consistency of goals, et cetera. Yet, being plain or simple appears to be only instrumental to the quality of production functions under indeed highly specific circumstances, to be so only via several more general qualities of production functions that will be included in the hierarchy of metagoals anyhow. Therefore I decide against inclusion of ‘simplesness’ as a separate metagool in the instrumental hierarchy that will be presented below.

9. Honesty
A general value that was mentioned by a few respondents as a factor that they think may improve the quality of one’s social production functions (the quality of one’s way of living and the amount of well-being that may be realised), is honesty.
If one can, without sanctioning or loss of social or self approval, be open and honest in and about the various activities in one’s life, this is indeed likely to facilitate a higher level of well-being than if such honesty and openness is not possible. It seems to me, however, that this is just a different label for the quality of consistency, which will be discussed below: if the different activities in an individual’s life, and the norms and values of the various people with whom he interacts or is connected are at odds, certain activities by which the individual get approval from some people, would invoke the disapproval of others, if they knew about it. Honesty and transparency would in such cases inform all parts of one’s network about the things one does in other parts, and thereby invoke a loss of social approval and well-being. Being able to be honest and transparent without such a loss of well-being does, I think, mean that there is consistency (i.e.
absence of moral conflict) or even multifunctionality in one’s social production functions, and, as we will see below, these indeed are important metagoals.

The respondents who talked about honesty, however, appear to have simply meant the virtue or value of honesty as something that deserves and elicits social approval in itself. In that sense, honesty is ‘merely’ a value or norm, and observing it is a productive ‘activity’ for realising behavioural confirmation.

10. Hope and anticipation or savouring

Above, we have already discussed the role of having a clear and concrete goal, and the role of having certain (religious) convictions about life. Having hope, and savouring anticipated future events is closely related to these potential aspects of the quality of social production functions. If someone lacks hope or perspective in some area of life he deems important, he may experience sadness or depression and unhappiness.

Cobie Strating: “Formally, I still have to apply for jobs, but doing so makes me more and more unhappy. Because, let’s face it, I am forty-five years old, and every employer will reject me, because I am simply too old.”

Frank Zuidema: “Enjoying my life has much to do with anticipation. Doing nice things and looking forward to this. Reading about some good play or manifestation or concert, and then planning to go there. Not immediately, it may even be in a few months. That anticipation, yes, I like that. It keeps me going.”

Annette de Hoog: “Sometimes I have the feeling that the youth has such different values and goals than we had. It can make me feel very worried and depressed, thinking the world and the youth will come to no good. Thinking about the future, I see it all dark. But last month I asked the youth in the confirmation classes that I teach, to describe their future. What they expect, what they hope and dream of. And then it came out that they simply hope for health, a job and a partner, maybe children. Very classical, in fact exactly what we dreamt of when we were young. That gave me so much hope again, so much more confidence that the world will yet turn out all right...”

Hope thus appears to be important for subjective well-being, and to inspire efforts for the future even at times when the immediate perspectives seem discouraging. If one has hope, the savouring of the anticipated positive event may both increase the immediate subjective well-being and stimulate continued efforts for bringing about the hoped-for event. ‘Savouring of anticipated events’ is in fact implied in the assumption of people being forward looking and expecting (e.g. Lindenberg 2001a) and also in Prospect Theory (Kahneman & Tversky 1979). But in connection with having hope, savouring anticipated events may gain additional meaning as a motivating factor in adverse conditions.

It seems helpful to distinguish between ‘hope’ as the reflection of all improving aspects – which is, in fact, anticipation – and ‘hope’ as expectation or optimism without rational foundation, which is hope in the true meaning of the term. The latter kind of hope may be considered as a
relevant instrumental metagoal, which mainly serves the higher metagoal of realising stability or growth of productive capacity over time.

11. Having and maintaining norms and values
Practically all respondents talked about the role of norms and values in the realisation of social well-being, and several proposed that keeping norms and values is essential for ‘the quality of how you get well-being’ or ‘the quality of how you organise your life’. Overall, respondents considered the existence of norms as a prerequisite for social well-being, although in case there is a conflict or discrepancy between the norms of different people around you or between the norms of others and of yourself, the effect on your level of well-being may be ambiguous. Although respondents thus mentioned the existence of norms as one of the important factors or values that characterise a good life, we have seen in Chapter 6 that the existence of norms is one of the general relevant production factors for behavioural confirmation and self approval. In reconsidering the respondents’ statements with the research questions of the present chapter as searchlights, I have found no additional role or function of the presence of norms that would support presenting it as a possible metagoal.

12. Avoiding moral conflict / consistency
Whereas the presence of norms and values should be simply regarded as a production factor for behavioural confirmation, avoidance of moral conflict may properly be regarded as a metagoal; absence of moral conflict as a positive quality of social production functions. Some people may succeed quite well in avoiding moral conflicts in their life, but probably the majority of people face moral conflicts that they cannot evade.

Hylkje Brouwer: “My parents disapprove of the things that I want to do, of how I want to live my life. I can’t change that. But what I can do is make sure to find good friends who share my views on life, and who approve of what I do. My friends are very important for me. In my daily life they are far more important than my parents. So I do feel happy and valued, and the conflict between how I live and the ideals of my parents weighs less heavily; it has moved to the margins of my life.”

Johan Berghuis: “It is just a fact that I’d feel less happy if I lived in a neighbourhood with many unemployed or ethnic minorities. They have different ideas about how one should live and behave. So by choosing where you want to live, in a careful way, you may avoid a lot of conflicts and irritation. People feel best in an environment of people who have the same ideas about how one must behave towards others.”

Irene van der Wal: “We, people of around 50, come from such a different world, so different from what it is today. That may sound niggling, but it is just the way it is. Yesterday on TV I heard an interview with Leen Pfrommer, the skating coach, who resigned from his function. He said: ‘I do not feel at home anymore in the world of my pupils, so I can’t be a good coach for them no more’. He said: ‘I come from a totally different world of norms and values’. That words really made me realise: yes, that is exactly how I feel. I don’t feel at home anymore, we are side-tracked.”
Cobie Strating: “What matters is how you deal with it. When my father was dying, he was in the hospital, he told my sister and me that he wanted us to promise that we would always take very good care of my mother. My sister promised. And then he wanted me to promise too, so I said ‘yes of course, dad, we will’. But to what lengths must I go to keep that promise, how must I deal with that?”

Structuring one’s life, one’s social production functions such that moral conflicts are minimised or even completely avoided is clearly instrumental to the realisation of efficiency in production. We may then speak of consistency in the individual’s social production functions. This is likely to become salient as an instrumental metagoal especially when a person experiences a high degree of moral conflict in his social production functions, either between different activities or settings he engages in, or between the norms of different people he deals with within the same setting or activity, or between the norms that guide the approval he gets from others and his own norms.

13. Balancing variation and predictability
In the interviews, some respondents mentioned the balance that is achieved between variation and predictability or stability as an important metagoal:

Frank Zuidema: “I really love variation. Of course, there needs to be some stable basis, like your relation with your partner, and knowing that all is well with your children. But if that is there, I like variation, and unpredictable events happening.”

Close consideration of this and similar statements of respondents, however, led me to conclude that for some part this goal coincides with the balance that is achieved between taking risks or taking up challenges (discussed under 5.) and risk avoidance or certainty of results (discussed under 4.), while the remainder just refers to the substantial goal of stimulation in SPF theory’s basic hierarchy of goals. There thus seems to be no ground to consider the balancing of variation and predictability as a potential metagoal.

14. Making investments
My respondents appeared to be aware of the desirability or necessity to invest in their future well-being, or rather: in future possibilities to achieve or maintain well-being. Most respondents explained some of their activities and choices by referring to the investment character thereof; many respondents also stated that, if in the total of one’s activities there is no provision for future times, this is ‘stupid’ or unwise. There appeared to be general consensus that they derived more satisfaction from activities that they know to be an investment in their future well-being than from activities that will decrease their future capacity to realise well-being. Thus, discounting of future well-being consequences of present activities appeared to be a common phenomenon.

3      Lindenberg (2001b) uses the term ‘identity formation’ to denote a way of improving the quality of one’s social production functions that is closely related to the metagoals that I have named ‘consistency’ and ‘self realisation’. Because of the many connotations of the term ‘identity formation’ in social psychology and because in this Chapter my objective is to disentangle metagoals rather than merge them into more complex concepts, I prefer to continue using ‘consistency’ and ‘self realisation’ as two separate metagoals.
Cobie Strating: “When I had my first long period of illness, and I lost my job, I realised that I had to keep on doing things, participate in something, make sure I would not get isolated. Because that easily happens in such a situation, and once it is a fact, it is so much harder to change it again...”

Cobie: “There is more for me than just my mother and sister. Even though they say that we should cling to each other, because it’s just the three of us left now. But I do not want to seek everything from them. Because, if my mother passes away, I would be left empty handed. And sometimes I try to warn my sister that it is stupid of her to spend all her time with my mother. I say: ‘when mama dies, what friends do you have?’ ”

Hylkje Brouwer: “I quit smoking because I knew it is bad. Not that I had any health problems already, but just to prevent that one day I would have respiration problems or cancer because of those cigarettes. Stopping was difficult, but it gave me a good feeling because I knew it was for my own good.”

Leonie de Zeeuw: “The first time after I had left my ex-husband was very tough. There have been times when I felt ‘why have I left him, because now it is even tougher for me and for Sarah, my daughter, then when we still lived with him.’ But then I’d force myself to think of how we would be in one or two years, and how much happier we’d be without him than with him. Knowing what we were fighting for made the troubles less hard, and I am so glad now that I went through all those difficulties to get a better life.”

In fact, one should not be surprised at the awareness people show concerning investment behaviour. Assuming people to be rational, forward-looking utility seekers, it is just what we should expect to find. Moreover, it is our common experience that we frequently do things that at the moment merely cost effort or money or whatever, in order to attain some desired future outcome. It then seems strange not to expect other people to be as rational and conscious of their own deeds and the probable consequences thereof.

Making investments is clearly instrumental to the realisation of stability or growth of productive capacity over time, and as such it will be included in the hierarchy of metagoals later in this chapter. Unlike some other instrumental metagoals, making investments is not only relevant under specific circumstances (although under some circumstances a person can spend a larger share of his efforts on investment activities than in other circumstances), it rather is a generally salient instrumental metagoal.

15. Avoiding vulnerability
Several statements of the respondents revealed that they consciously seek to decrease or limit the vulnerability of their social production functions. This goal was already proposed by Lindenberg (1996, see section 7.2), but since it came up in the interviews so clearly, it is worthwhile to illustrate it here with two exemplary statements. As far as people are aware of it, they strive to construct their social production functions in such a way that they are least easily disrupted, that they are least vulnerable.
Barend van der Weijde: “When you reach a certain age, you begin to realise that it is important to have a roof over one’s head, that we live in a country where there is sufficient food, but also that we have freedom to make our own decisions. And to have friends, not that you must see them everyday, but to know they are there. Relatives, health. These are important aspects for my quality of life. Because if these things aren’t there, you’re at risk. If then something happens...”

Annette de Hoog: “Having people you care about makes you vulnerable, makes your happiness precarious. The happiness of your children is so important for yourself. Our son is unemployed at the moment, and that destroys your own happiness. And nothing you can do about it.[...] In that respect the modern two-earner couples may be less vulnerable, because they have many things besides their children from which they get their happiness.”

The vulnerability of social production functions depends on a number of factors. Among these are the extent to which one is in control (discussed under 1), the extent to which one’s activities have an investment character (see under 14), the extent to which one has ‘sleeping resources’ (see below, under 16), one’s time horizon, et cetera. The goal of avoiding vulnerability is thus a more general goal than these factors on which it depends. In the hierarchy of metagoals that will be proposed below it should be placed as a specific metagoal serving the realisation of stability or growth of productive capacity over time, being itself served again by still lower instrumental metagoals such as the three just mentioned.

16. Having ‘sleeping’ resources

A quite strategic goal that was reported by some of my respondents, is what I have called the keeping of ‘sleeping’ resources. Or, as one respondent expressed himself: one should have a ‘back up power unit’ on which one can fall back in case of emergency.

Cobie Strating: “There is more for me than just my mother and sister. For if my mother passes away, I’d be left empty-handed. That is why I find it so important to have friends in one’s life. And also other relatives, nieces and so on, to keep in touch. So when I’d fall ill, there are people there for me. I think that is very valuable, for there may come periods in your life that you dearly need your relatives and friends.”

Frank Zuidema: “I don’t want to get close to my neighbours or so, but of course I do want friendly relations. I just do not want these social obligations, yet of course I would help them in case of need. And I am sure they will help me if I ever really need them. But we do not pay social visits or so.”

Gerda Passies: “Being divorced and unemployed, with two children is sometimes difficult. Financially, I mean. And although my parents are always willing to give or lend me some money, I have never yet turned to them. I prefer to manage on my own, even though that means that sometimes I have to deny my daughter something she fancies, or that I have to accept unpleasant jobs at unpleasant hours. Still, knowing that if I really need it, my parents are...”
there and wanting to help out, is of course very comforting. I need not worry as I would if they would not be there in the background.”

Having sleeping resources appears to be an instrumental metagoal reducing the vulnerability of the (continuous) production of social well-being and thus contributing to the stability of well-being over time. It appears to be - almost by mere logic - a metagoal that is salient under all conditions, not - like so many other instrumental metagoals - one that becomes salient only when threats actually arise. Having sleeping resources also creates a precondition that allows people to take up challenges (see under 5.).

17. Harmony / well-structured production functions
The term ‘harmony’ was used several times by respondents when they were asked what factors determine the quality of their life, the quality of their production functions. On careful consideration of the statements in which respondents used this term, it appeared that by and large they referred simply to having well-structured production functions. What these respondents said was in fact nothing else than that, besides the level of social and physical well-being that is realised at a particular moment, the metagoals in general are also important for one’s quality of life. These statements thus support the notion of this chapter, that people do have metagoals besides the substantial (hedonic) goals in the basic SPF hierarchy. As far as something else was implied in the respondents statements about ‘harmony’, this referred to the absence or avoidance of (moral) conflicts, a matter that has been duly discussed under 12. Thus, the term ‘harmony’ does not represent any further specific metagoal.

18. Single activity production function
In the interviews as well as in the time use study, it appeared that there is considerable variation between respondents in the variety of activities that constitute their social production functions. Of course, when investigating people’s activity patterns in detail, all people daily perform innumerable different activities, from putting off the alarm clock in the morning and brushing one’s teeth to locking the front door at night before going to bed. When we concentrate on the activities that people report as really meaningful or as important sources of well-being, however, it appears that there are people for whom but one or few activities are really central for their well-being, while there are also people whose production of well-being is distributed over a much larger number of different activities. In terms of Chapter 6, it may also be said that people differ in the number of fields of production in which they are involved. Some people seem to prefer a concentration of production functions in one or few activities or fields of production (others prefer the opposite, see under 19.). The usual argument for such preference is that concentration on a restricted number of activities promotes optimal performance of these activities. Some respondents referred to being a full-time housewife instead of having a paid job besides one’s housekeeping tasks. Others referred to not having many other activities besides their paid job, or to concentrating on one hobby instead of doing several activities alternatingly.

Anneke de Wit: “There is enough to do for a housewife. I never did anything besides my housekeeping. My father in law lived with us for sixteen years, so at noon he and the children had to eat, and in the evening I had to prepare dinner for my husband, so I cooked twice a day.
And took care of the children. I always say that if I had to do it over again, I would do it exactly the same way. I could not do anything besides it. When I now see the housekeeping of my children, who have two earner families, they just don’t clean anything. Not really clean, I mean. Of course I do not blame them, for they don’t have the time. But if you want to do the housekeeping well, it is a fulltime occupation.”

Johan Berghuis: “I had my job, my career, and my wife took care of the children. And I liked it that way, I have never regretted it. When you just know that all is marching well at home, you do not need to worry yourself about it, and it gives you the opportunity to make a success of your work. And my wife and children profited from the income I earned.”

Leonie de Zeeuw: “My hobby is painting. It takes a lot of practising to learn to paint well and to improve your technique. There have been times when I thought I wanted to do some sports too, and to read novels, play an instrument, et cetera, but eventually I realised that by trying to do everything I would never get any better either in sports or music or in painting. So I quit all those other things, and now painting is my only hobby. And I like it this way, because now I can concentrate on one thing and become better at it.”

Apparently, adopting a production strategy that concentrates on a single or only a few production activities may be instrumental to the realisation of both quality dimensions of social production functions: efficiency and stability or growth of productive capacity over time. It can take this effect via several instrumental metagoals at a higher level in the hierarchy than itself: via investments, via the avoidance of moral conflicts, and via the provision of a clear goal. I will therefore include ‘concentrating on small number of productive activities’, i.e. ‘specialisation’, as a lower order instrumental metagoal. Using this strategy is however but one possible option; as will be seen directly below, people may as well pursue the opposite strategy to their profit.

19. Using a multi-activity strategy
Whereas some people (see under 18.) choose to concentrate their production of well-being in one or a few main activities, others appear to prefer just the reverse. Several respondents stated that they like to engage in a considerable variety of activities and fields of production; in other words, they prefer to spread their production of well-being over a considerable number of activities and settings:

Frank Zuidema: “That is why I have deliberately chosen to work only part-time. I have a 30% job. There is more to life than just working. Of course, when you have a family there needs to be some guaranteed income, and I make sure that is there, or partly, for my wife also earns a part. But what I really experience now, is that I have room, or opportunity, to do other things. To bring in variation. I now have the time for that. Suppose I would have a normal job, then...then I would only have the evenings to do all other things I want to do.”

Barbara van Kesteren: “I would never accept being only a housewife. Of course some people choose such a life, but I have always chosen to do a lot of other things alongside, to have other functions and roles too. I have had jobs, and I have devoted an enormous lot of time and
energy in political parties and movements. I would never have accepted it if someone would have told me to choose either the one or the other. And it is not because of the income, for that’s negligible, but all this activity makes me intensely happy. Its just not imaginable that I would spend my whole day washing and cleaning and ironing…even though I do these things all the same.”

Nannie Doosje: “I work as assistant-accountant. And although I am a woman in a men’s world there, it is obvious that our clients put much trust in me. But still I often feel frustrated because I am not paid as much as others and I’m not given the opportunities to advance that they get, only because when I was young I did not get a certain certificate. But that frustration is not a serious problem, because I only work there half time, and the other half of my days I do volunteer work. And that gives such complete satisfaction. So the partial frustration in my job is compensated for by my volunteer work in the women liberation movement and the labour union and the church. And my family.”

Besides the quotes that are presented as examples, the statements of respondent 1 that I presented earlier, about wanting to spend time with friends and acquaintances too instead of concentrating solely on her mother and sister, may also illustrate the point.

The quote of Nannie Doosje suggests that compensating for shortcomings of the one activity by taking up other activities may be a reason why some people prefer to spread their production of well-being over multiple activities while others, as we saw above, rather concentrate on one or few activities.

It seems plausible be that concentrating on one or few activities (specialisation) is only a preferable strategy in terms of resulting levels of well-being if those few activities are highly multifunctional and entail little or no stress and frustration. It seems that it is not so much a trade-off that exists between multi- or single-activity production functions, but that it is rather a strategic decision over how many activities one needs to distribute one’s time and energy in order to realise optimal levels of the different components of well-being. These are not new insights; in section 7.2. ‘variety’ was already presented as an instrumental or lower order metagoal proposed by Lindenberg (1996) that would contribute to lowering the vulnerability of social production functions. ‘Dividing production efforts over multiple activities’ or ‘variety’ is thus a lower order instrumental metagoal that may contribute to both efficiency and to a desirable development of productive capacity over time. This contribution may take effect via the higher order instrumental metagoals of taking up challenges; finding hope (the more activities and settings one is involved in, the more likely it is that even if in many settings conditions are adverse, there remains good ground for hope regarding some other line of activity); making investments, avoiding of vulnerability and building up sleeping resources. It depends on the individuals’ specific resources and the prevailing circumstances whether a single- or a multi-activity strategy will be most profitable.

20. Multifunctionality

One goal or preference that people widely hold with regard to their social production functions is that the activities therein be multifunctional. Multifunctionality is a quality of activities that has
already been mentioned several times, both in this paragraph and in the literature on SPF theory. It has repeatedly been suggested as a metagoal in social production functions. In the interview data, evidence that respondents prefer (more) multifunctional activities over less multifunctional activities abounds.

Rosa Boogert: “Of course many things are just more fun, more worthwhile when you have someone, some people to share it with. Like when I prepare dinner, it is just for me. And I do like cooking, and experimenting with new recipes, but it is hardly worth the trouble when there is no one but yourself to enjoy it. When you have a partner, who says that it is delicious, and who praises your cooking, and with whom you can eat dinner in a nice and romantic sphere, or even when you just eat it with a friend, having an interesting conversation meantime, it is simply more worth while.”

Hylkje Brouwer: “I am not such a sports person. Even though it would be good for me, I just do not have the discipline to go to fitness class or have a run regularly. Because it is just for my health if I do it, I do not really enjoy all that jumping and hopping. The only way for me to get myself to do sports is when I arrange with a friend or a couple of friends to go together. Then I have more reasons to go, not just for fitness, and then I am much less inclined to do something else instead.”

Kees Nagelkerke: “This volunteer job as a computer teacher is so good, it one of the best things that could have happened to me. You know, I like the work, it helps me to get new contacts again, with people outside the alcoholic scene. It also helps me to get over my shyness, and to qualify myself for a real job in this line of work some time. And it provides me with structure in my days, which is very important when I have a difficult period staying off the alcohol... And it is satisfying because you can really help people, and they often show it too, that they are grateful for your help.”

Per definition, when an activity is multifunctional, it serves the realisation of more than one of the five first-order instrumental goals in SPF theory. The more multifunctional an activity is, the more of the first-order goals it contributes to. It is obvious that the more multifunctional activities there are in your social production functions and the more multifunctional of each these activities is, the higher the resulting level of overall well-being will be, given the input of resources. Multifunctionality is thus instrumental to the realisation of efficiency in production.

21. Instrumentality
In the interviews, several respondents mentioned instrumentality of activities as a relevant goal or quality of the way they organise their life. They expressed themselves in phrases such as: the things you do should lead to something, should have some result or serve a certain goal. It seems superfluous, however, to consider ‘instrumentality’ as a separate metagoal. The assertion that activities and efforts should lead to some desired result in order to be worthwhile, is inherent in the basic notions of SPF theory and the behavioural theory it rests on.

4 So is agency, but agency has a distinct contribution to efficiency and the development of productive capacity over time. It would be tautological to consider ‘instrumentality’ as an instrumental metagoal; for agency this is not the
22. Managing social comparisons
The role of social comparison in relation to the realisation of well-being appears to be ambiguous. From the respondents’ statements we can make out two distinct functions of social comparison in the realisation of well-being, each with different consequences for what may, in certain situations, be the best strategy in comparing oneself with others to optimise one’s production of well-being. One function of social comparison is that it provides more or less objective information concerning one’s position or achievements in relation to what is ‘normal’ and what is optimally feasible. In analogy to production processes of firms, this function of social comparison may be interpreted as the providing of relevant (strategic) business information.

Anneke de Wit: “I think it necessary that my husband would get more physical exercise, because his condition is not good. Mine is better at least. But may be my condition is not good either. It is hard to know such things. I would like to have that tested somehow, to know if my physical strength and fitness is like the average person of my age, or that it really needs working on. Just to know that for myself, to have some objective standard. But we are no sports people, so you do not know such things.”

This first function of social comparison is different from the second, which is to provide a basis for self ranking (and ranking by others) and thus serves the realisation of status. This is a function which itself does not belong to this chapter about metagoals. However, the choice of with whom an individual compares himself is relevant to both functions, and the compromise or trade-off that is achieved between these two different functions of social comparison is a metagoal. A tension will in many cases exist between the goals of collecting optimal objective and complete ‘business information’ and the goal of realising status. For the latter positive outcome of comparing one’s own position to that of others is necessary, which demands that one should seek reference groups that, on average, have lower ranking than oneself. In other words: the pursuit of status demands selective social comparison, looking to people who do worse than oneself rather than to those who have done better. Such selective downward comparison is, however, of limited value from the perspective of the objective indications one needs to find out if one achieves well and if one can achieve better (cf. Ybema 1994). Downward comparison directs one’s attention away from examples of how much better one might do. It may lead a person to believe he does as well as anyone may, thus incapacitating a potentially powerful source of stimuli to strive for improvement. For the quality of one’s social production functions as a whole it seems thus important that non-selective and objective information concerning one’s achievements as compared to others is sought, even though this may lead to less favourable outcomes of the individual’s self ranking then when he ‘chooses the right pond’ (cf. Frank 1985).

Rosa Boogert: “When I still had a job, I went on holidays twice a year. I love travelling. Now that my income is so much lower, I just can’t afford to go on holidays. Last summer I felt really upset about that, because all the people around me went abroad and I just sat here, looking at the Dutch rain. And of course I should look to people who are worse off than me, for many are. I would feel much less self pity then. But on the other side...it is good to be
realistic, and if I shut my eyes for what I miss by being unemployed, I might become satisfied with it and stop trying to get a job...”

In its function of providing ‘business information’, social comparison is clearly important for guarding the quality of social production functions. This may best be modelled by including both ‘managing business information’ and ‘managing social comparison’ as instrumental metagoals; the latter one level below and instrumental to the former. Adequate management of ‘business information’ is thus an instrumental metagoal that contributes to both efficiency and stability or growth of productive capacity over time. In principle, it may be salient under all circumstances, but it seems plausible that its salience grows in situations of uncertainty, say when large changes occur in a person’s social production functions, or when one is still inexperienced in the activities one is undertaking.

23. Being busy
In Chapter 6, we have seen that ‘being busy’ is widely perceived to indicate status, because of the scarcity of skills it suggest, leading us to include ‘being busy’ as one of the generally relevant production factors for status. The reason for yet discussing ‘being busy’ here again as a potentially relevant concept with regard to the quality of people’s social production functions, is found in the respondents’ statements on this subject.
The level of activity of one’s life, or the proportion of one’s time during which one is busy and engaged in various activities, was believed by several respondents to be an important factor in achieving a high level of well-being or quality of life:
Irene van der Wal: “I have the impression that the happy people, are usually those people who are very active. Those who participate in all kinds of things, who are always busy, and who have a finger in every pie. These are the people with a satisfying, wholesome life...”

The relation between being busy and happiness that is suggested in the above statement might well be spurious, however, as the people who are very busy, doing many things and having their days filled to the brim are generally those who have many skills and resources, and who have found pleasant ways to exploit these.
Carol Groothuis: “That is how it is with my brother. He works in a supermarket and it is just as if it is his hobby instead of his job. These days, he spends some sixty hours a week working there. He is so interested in everything that goes on there, and it also comes to him so easily. And then when I compare this to my half-time job as a postman, those twenty hours a week are sometimes so hard to get through, because, even though it’s an easy job and I have much experience, it does not suit my capabilities and my university degree. So it does not satisfy me, and that does not get better when I’d work thirty or forty hours, instead of just twenty.”

Not all respondents agree that having a full agenda and being very active contributes to quality of life. Probably, the ideal level of activity depends partly on the multifunctionality of one’s activities, and perhaps on personality traits. It seems also plausible that the level of activity that is ‘ideal’ varies with the relative contribution of each of the first-order instrumental goals to a person’s overall social well-being. If a person’s overall well-being relies relatively strongly on the
affection he realises, being busy and having a tight time schedule is likely to be more negative (remember the importance of ‘having time’ in the production of affection, Ch. 6) than if the largest component in a person’s social well-being is the status he realises (remember that ‘being busy’ in itself may yield status, see Ch. 6).

In the hierarchy of metagoals and corresponding production factors, the level of activity cannot be given one particular place. Still, although it cannot be said in general what level of activity is optimal for the quality of people’s social production functions, the level of activity seems to be a relevant, though difficult to interpret, quality-aspect of social production functions. I believe the concept to be most useful and relevant for characterising actual production functions that may be observed in empirical research.

An additional remark must be made concerning the activity level or, in different terms, the management of time restrictions. From the respondents’ stories, it appeared that time is relatively often the most scarce production factor, thus probably often the decisive factor in the design of people’s social production functions (cf. Van Bruggen, 2000, p. 177). Managing time restrictions in itself is not a metagoal; but the subjective experience of time pressure appears to indicate a lack of efficiency. The most obvious form of inefficiency that may result in a perceived time shortage is a lack of multifunctionality of activities, which can be exacerbated by the restricted discretion people have concerning the amount of time they want to spend on an activity. This holds in particular for informal care tasks within the family, and for paid work. Although the latter is one of the most multifunctional activities we know (ibid.), there always remain goals that paid work does not (sufficiently) realise. Combined with the fact that the choice for a paid job is rather a dichotomous choice than a choice from a continuum of alternatives - if one wants to do paid work, one has but little discretion as to the number of hours worked - doing paid work may easily lead to a subjective time shortage. Summarising: managing time restrictions should not be included as a metagoal in the hierarchy that will be developed later in this chapter, but a feeling of time pressure does indicate suboptimal quality of social production functions.

24. Safety / protection against criminality

In answer to the question of what aspects of their life respondents felt important for their well-being and the way they can realise it, several mentioned safety from (criminal) infringements on one’s person and one’s goods. Examples given by respondents included personal (un-)safety in public places - in particular for women, in lonely places and after dark - and (un-)safety from burglary or vandalism.

Yasmin Rais: “I wish it were safer here for a woman to go somewhere. At night I mean. We live in a nice and decent neighbourhood, but at the other side of our street there is a park. And at night it is dark, and unsafe, there are all sorts of ... dangerous people around there. So I never go out after dark. The newspapers always tell about assaults and rape... It is an awful idea. Sometimes I feel nostalgia when I think about my youth, when you could just sit outside on a beautiful night, walking around and looking at the stars. Now you are crazy when you’d do that.”
Hylkje Brouwer: “I love living in the city, I left the village where I grew up as soon as I graduated from high school. I’d never go back. But there are also one or two drawbacks of city life. Criminality. Creeps. I am always scared and nervous when I get back from work at night, or after going out. I ride my bike home as hard as I can, even though I am not a particularly fearful person. But there are so many creeps carrying some weapon... So that lack of safety is really a drawback of living here.”

Barend van der Weijde: “We live in an apartment at the second floor of the flat. We have a central entrance, locked by an electronic door. So people first have to ring a bell and get a resident to open that door, in order to get to the stairs. It’s just pure necessity to have such a system. Otherwise you never know when you get home what you will find. We know several people who have been victim of a burglary. And it is just awful, they feel completely unsafe and vulnerable for months, and some of them have lost very precious belongings. Not just a collection of old coins, but also an antique clock that had been their grandmother’s. And so much was simply vandalised: a painting, a souvenir vase, some handworks from their children when they were young...”

The first two statements seem, at first thought, to represent merely a particular restriction of one’s behavioural alternatives, or rather, a particular kind of risk attached to some behavioural alternatives. The third statement seems to represent something similar to what we have above called the vulnerability of one’s social production functions, or, alternatively, loss aversion, or the general desire to gather and secure resources that may be used later.

It yet seems useful to consider ‘safety’, in this specific sense (thus different from the more general non-vulnerability), as a specific precondition for the realisation of high-quality social production functions as well, because it affects the perception of risks and thus the risks one is willing to take. When people feel unsafe, they will hardly deviate from the most secure and certain course of action, even though other actions are probably more profitable, be it also more hazardous. When people feel more safe from all sorts of (criminal) infringements on their person or goods, they are likely to be more willing to try the less certain and secure courses of action, if they may yield better outcomes, because the perceived risk of such courses is lower. Thus, feeling safe is a precondition that may contribute to both general dimensions of the quality of social production functions. It will generally facilitate a higher quality of social production functions and higher resulting levels of well-being. But, as it is hardly a condition that individuals can bring about through their own deeds, I think it should not be modelled as an instrumental metagoal itself (although seeking a safe environment might at a very low order be modelled as an instrumental goal for limiting vulnerability).

25. Giving account to others / being accountable

Several respondents spoke about situations in which they have to give account of their doings to others, and how they feel about that. Generally, it seems that people prefer not to be obliged to give account of what they do and don’t. To some extent, this is a specific aspect of what I have named ‘agency’ or ‘being in control’. Of course, the evaluation of being accountable to others depends strongly on the extent to which the norms of the other coincide with one’s own norms.
(cf. the avoidance of moral conflict, discussed under 12.): when one is accountable to someone whose norms are inconsistent with one’s own, being accountable is valued far more negatively than when there is consistency of norms.

In the latter case, having to give account of one’s behaviour may as a rule yield behavioural confirmation, and thus add to one’s level of overall social well-being.

In the data I have found that respondents signal two societal developments in opposite directions with regard to the accountability people have towards others. At the one hand, most respondents agree that in the present society people have more freedom in how they behave and what they do than, say, 50 or 100 years ago:

Simon Goudsmid: “I believe that thirty years ago being out of work was much harder to cope with than it is now. Nowadays there are so many alternative ways of making oneself useful, like helping in a refugee centre...Thirty years ago such things were much more difficult. Social judgements were different. Then, the norms and the organisation of society demanded that you did paid work when you were between twenty and sixty years. And that is changing, it seems.”

At the other hand, respondents point out that they feel that nowadays one is called to give account of what one contributes to society much more. Do you contribute according to your capacity?

Annette de Hoog: “It seems to be the norm that everybody should be busy. ‘What do you do?’ is the usual first question people ask you. And when I say I am a housewife, they immediately ask ‘yes, but what else do you do?’ That is what I mean: people ask you to give account of whether you do enough for society.”

I do not wish to suggest that these developments in society really take place, nor do I want to hypothesise about their generality. But if the developments signalled in the above statements are actually taking place, we may rephrase their meaning as a decrease of prescriptions as to what exactly people should or should not do, and how they should behave, accompanied by an increasing weight to the norm that one should contribute according to ones capacity to the economy or to society in general.

After thorough rereading of the statements referring to being accountable to others for one’s acts, I decided, however, that they do not contribute anything substantial to ‘agency’ as a metagoal. Not wanting to be accountable to others should thus be considered as a specific instance of having agency or being in control of one’s own production behaviour.

26. Consciousness of SWB and its components

In the interviews, it appeared that some respondents are largely unaware of their own social production functions and their level of social well-being, while others have clear ideas and perceptions of how much of the different components of social well-being they realise, and how these components of well-being result from their own behaviour. Previous to the interviews I had expected that in particular those people who have low levels of certain components of well-being would be acutely aware of this and of what they lack to repair this. During the interviews it appeared, however, that the awareness of one’s well-being and the components and causes thereof is frequently raised when one has - once - experienced an abrupt or large loss of well-being, such as respondent 1 who lost her job due to an episode of psychiatric inmate-ship, or the same
respondent losing her father, or respondent 2 who, after a period of sudden health problems, is now much more consciously planning her days and activities in order to be able to retain her active and busy way of life.

It also appeared that the extent to which one is conscious of one’s goals and resources in the production of social well-being is related to ‘consistency’, i.e. the avoidance of moral conflicts in one’s production of well-being. Some respondents reported that in their social normative environment the pursuit of social approval, and doing things with the objective to gain affection, is disapproved of.

Frank Zuidema: “When you asked about prestige and status...these are terms that I don’t use, so I can’t give you any reasonable answers about that. Yes, it is true that I want to be liked, I admit that, but that is something different that wanting to be part of a group, to belong, or to be looked up to... That is all so big, so...self-interested.”

Johan Berghuis: “I don’t know whether I do things to get approval. I don’t think I do. I just go my own way. It would feel odd to do something in order that an other may approve of you, it seems dishonest.”

Where such norms are dominant, a high level of consciousness of one’s own well-being and of one’s social production functions is inconsistent with the main norms that govern the realisation of approval from others and oneself. In such situations, the efficiency of social production functions is necessarily low.

The opposite situation appeared to exist too: some respondents stated that in their social environment the dominant norms are to live consciously and to work on the quality of your own life and well-being. For them, a high level of consciousness of their social production functions and the results thereof is positive and efficient:

Kees Nagelkerke: “After all these years that I have just spilled by being an alcoholic, I now feel that I have taken my life in my own hands. I have quit drinking, and now I am responsible to make something of the rest of my life. I feel really positive about my life now, and it feels good to work at it, to build up the parts that are still lacking. I started that volunteer job also because I hoped to find new friends there, friends who would do me good. And that is what they tell you also, the social workers that coach you: you must work on it, seek out ways to get good friends and build up a good life.”

Furthermore, being conscious of one’s social production functions and level of well-being is of course a different form of the ‘business information’ (see under 22. ‘managing social comparison’) people need in order to design their social production functions optimally. Consciousness of one’s level of well-being and one’s social production functions may thus be considered as a lower order instrumental metagoal that contributes to the quality of the production functions under specific conditions (if prevailing norms do not condemn the conscious pursuit of well-being, and when reconsideration or change of production functions is desirable), and this contribution may be modelled as taking affect via the more general metagoals of managing ‘business information’.
7.4. Incorporating the metagoals in the SPF framework

In the foregoing section, all preferences and goals reported by the respondents in our qualitative study, which could not be categorised directly as instances of the substantial goals from SPF theory’s basic model, have been discussed. In that analytical discussion, 14 of the initial set of 26 ‘miscellaneous’ goals were identified as instrumental metagoals, contributing to the two main categories of metagoals, efficiency and development of productive capacity over time. In the discussion, it became increasingly clear that the best way to model the various instrumental and often situation-specific metagoals in relation to the highly abstract general metagoals, might be analogous to the hierarchy of goals that constitutes SPF theory’s basic model for the substantial goals.

Table 7.2. shows the 17 instrumental metagoals that were identified, and summarises to which of the two main universal metagoals they contribute.

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<td>Self realisation</td>
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<td>Religion / ideology</td>
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<td>Risk avoidance</td>
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<td>Making investments</td>
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<td>Concentrating on few productive activities: specialisation</td>
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<td>Dividing production efforts over multiple activities: variety</td>
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Table 7.2. List of instrumental metagoals and the higher-order goals to which they contribute

Based on the discussion in section 7.3. of the mechanisms involved in the operation of the metagoals, we may now proceed to fill in the preliminary conceptual framework of metagoals that was presented in Figure 7.1. Guided by the results of the qualitative study and our interpretation thereof, a hierarchy of higher and lower order metagoals (i.e. of general and more specific instrumental metagoals) is now proposed which is to be interpreted in a similar fashion as the hierarchy of (substantial) goals in the basic model of SPF theory. It does not present an alternative or a competing hierarchy of goals to SPF theory's hierarchy of social- and physical well-being goals, but it is a complementary hierarchy in a different dimension of reality, which is concerned
with the cognitive components of overall well-being rather than with the affective components thereof.

Figure 7.2. represents the further filled-in hierarchy of metagoals. It contains the same metagoals as the preliminary hierarchy of Figure 7.1. that we started out with, but in addition, the instrumental metagoals that were identified in the qualitative study are filled in.
7.5. Metagoals and the cognitive component of subjective well-being: to what extent do they overlap?

Stepping back again from the sole ‘microscopic’ concentration on the (hierarchy of) metagoals in SPF theory, to consider the broader objective inspiring it, I will in this section discuss to what extent the hierarchy of metagoals which was elaborated above, accommodates the cognitive component of subjective well-being. It was already mentioned several times before that the ‘state of the art’ in quality of life studies distinguishes two components of overall subjective well-being: an affective and a cognitive component. Diener et al. (1999, p. 277) state that

“subjective well-being is a broad category of phenomena that includes people’s emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgements of life satisfaction. [...] Moods and emotions, which together are labelled “affect”, represent people’s on-line evaluations of the events that occur in their life. [...] In addition to studying affective reactions, SWB researchers are interested in cognitive evaluations of life satisfaction. Andrews and Withey (1976) found that life satisfaction formed a separate factor from the two major types of affect; and Lucas, Diener and Suh (1996) used multitrait-multimethod analyses to show that pleasant affect, unpleasant affect, and life satisfaction were separable constructs. [...] Few existing theories attempt to explain why variables differentially relate to the separate components of SWB.”

The affective component of SWB (which itself should be distinguished into a negative and a positive component) is the component that the basic model of SPF theory with its two general goals of social and physical well-being, represents. Although only in a minimal fashion, the above quote does give some definition of what the affective component of SWB is. However, the cognitive component of SWB, though emphatically recognised, is not in any way described or defined; not only in Diener et al. (1999), but also in all other major writings on subjective well-being research it remains rather vague what the contents of this component are. What we may infer from the above quote is that the cognitive component covers the life- and domain satisfactions of people, and that it concerns a more global judgement than the immediate ‘on-line’ reactions that people experience.

Later in their overview of three decades of subjective well-being research, Diener et al. (ibid.) discuss the main empirical findings concerning the relations of diverse variables with the components of SWB. The contents of the cognitive component of well-being are perhaps revealed best by the way it is related to these variables: other mental phenomena and processes. In the review of Diener et al., the cognitive component of SWB appears to be closely related to three kinds of mental phenomena.

The first kind of mental process that is closely related to the cognitive component of SWB, is that of social comparison. Wood (1996, p. 520) has defined social comparison as “the process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self”. In general, reactions to social comparisons may involve a variety of responses: behavioural, affective and cognitive (Diener et al. 1999, p. 282). In the framework of SPF theory, we assume the affective responses to social comparisons to be reflected in (fluctuations in) the level of status that one experiences and in the level of self-approval and self-liking. What Diener et al. refer to as ‘behavioural responses’, are what in terms of SPF theory might be referred to as ‘the continuation
or adjustment of production activities in response to processing ‘business information’. The ‘cognitive responses’ to social comparisons then constitute, I think, part of the cognitive component of SWB. It is not too difficult to imagine what such cognitive responses may involve: satisfaction and confidence about one’s production functions and productive capacities and possibly optimistic expectations about the future at seeing that one does better than the person(s) to whom one compared oneself; incremental goal setting (allowing for repeated evaluation of one’s progress towards those goals) and, possibly, concrete planning of activities and strategies that one sees to be effective for others, in response to comparing oneself with someone who does better than oneself.

Taking the above to be an adequate interpretation of the social comparison element in the cognitive component of SWB, it appears that all its facets are covered by the metagoals that were eventually distinguished in the previous sections of this chapter. The mental process of social comparison as it is found in the literature may in several ways be related to the metagoals of self realisation, taking up challenges, having clear and concrete goals, having hope, making investments, (recognising and) avoiding vulnerability, consciousness of SWB and of one’s social production functions and - obviously - managing business information and managing social comparisons. I find that the dissection of what is generally referred to as ‘social comparison’ in all these more specific and subtly different processes provides a better insight in the complicated and often unequivocal effects of social comparison on immediate SWB. Thinking or theorising and explaining in terms of the various metagoals proposed here, rather than from the general (container) concept of ‘social comparison’, reveals much more of the individual’s agency in achieving SWB and of the cognitive and productive processes through which this is achieved. It must be noted, though, that the content and functionality of the various metagoals that appear to incorporate some of the ways in which social comparison affects SWB, are not restricted to these effects of social comparison. Thus, from one point of view the metagoals proposed in this chapter are less general, more specific than a concept like ‘social comparison’, but at the same time they are also more general, and encompass more than the effects of social comparison alone. To understand this seeming inconsistency it must be pointed out that the metagoals we work with and a concept like ‘social comparison’ belong to different ways of catching complex reality in conceptual abstractions. They belong to different ‘languages’, one might say. ‘Social comparison’ is a concept that belongs to a way of catching reality in classes of behavioural actions, of ‘things one can do’. The metagoals, in contrast, belong to a language that attempts to catch reality in terms of productive functionality, in terms of production steps and processes. Which language one prefers is to a certain extent a matter of taste, but I think the language of the metagoals allows more clarity and precision in explaining processes and explaining outcomes.

The second kind of mental phenomenon Diener et al. (ibid.) report to be closely related empirically to the cognitive component of SWB is the phenomenon that people hold, and act in accordance with, diverse aspirations. In Chapter 2 we have already discussed Michalos’ (1985) Multiple Discrepancies Theory that suggests that subjective well-being is inversely related to the
discrepancies between one’s aspirations and one’s actual situation. Several empirical studies have shown that not one’s aspiration level as such (i.e. high or low aspirations) predict SWB, but rather the fit between one’s level of aspiration and what one may realistically achieve (e.g. Emmons & Diener 1985; Emmons 1992; Diener & Fujita 1995).

Furthermore, the (positive) effect of holding aspirations and having goals on the individual’s SWB is affected by the internal and external consistency of the goals and aspirations that one has. Goals can coincide more or less with general human needs or with a person’s individual motives and other goals (internal consistency), and with the values of the culture and subculture to which the individual belongs (external consistency).

The more an individual’s goals are in accordance with his motives and needs, the larger the positive effect of having and attaining these goals on SWB (cf. Kasser & Ryan 1993; Brunstein et al. 1998; Cantor & Sanderson 1999). Similarly, the better the fit between an individual’s goals and the goals valued by his social environment, the larger the contribution to SWB (Cantor & Sanderson 1999). In SPF terminology, this is a matter of consistency and avoidance of moral conflict. It must be noted, however, that it is not clear whether it is mainly for the affective or for the cognitive component of SWB that the internal and external consistency of the goals is relevant.

As regards the relation between holding realistic aspirations and the metagoals identified in this chapter, I think we may again safely claim that the metagoals fully cover the relevant facets of this second element of the cognitive component of SWB, and moreover exceed them, both in content and in detail of functional explanation. Out of the set of metagoals presented in Table 7.2., most seem related in some way with holding aspirations. The ones that seem to be most directly associated with ‘holding (realistic) aspirations’ are agency, having clear and concrete goals, having hope, making investments, dividing production efforts over multiple activities or - in contrast - concentrating on small number of productive activities, managing business information and managing social comparisons, and consciousness of SWB and of ones social production functions.

The last of the three kinds of mental phenomena that appears to relate closely to the cognitive component of SWB (Diener et al. 1999, p. 285) is a general desire of moving towards goals or moving towards one’s aspirations. The essence of this third mental phenomenon is not that one has particular goals or aspiration levels, but rather the experience of progress towards the realisation of one’s goals, and the structure that this intended movement towards one’s goals provides for one’s whole daily living.

Several theorists, such as Csikszentmihalyi (1990) or Carver et al. (1996) suggest “that the process of moving towards one’s aspirations may be more important to well-being than the end

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6 In fact, the distinction between the second and the third kind of mental process that I make here deviates from the distinction Diener et al. (1999, p. 283-285) make. They distinguish between holding and moving towards aspirations at the one hand, and having and striving to realise goals at the other hand. In my view, it is not clear, however, what the essential distinction is between goals and aspirations (especially as Diener et al. do count rather concrete matters as money and fame to be (extrinsic) aspirations too). I therefore prefer to make a distinction that I think is far more substantial between holding aspirations, that is, having anchors or reference points which provide orientation, and - at the other hand - the process and experience of moving towards one’s goals and aspirations, that is, the experience of progress.
state of goal attainment” (Diener et al. 1999, p. 283), which would imply that as long as people perceive to advance towards their goals at adequate pace, their satisfaction may be high even when their current situation is far removed from their aspirations. This suggestion agrees remarkably well with the views about human nature from which SPF theory starts out, i.e. the notion that people are rational, goal oriented, forward looking ‘producers’ that actively plan and design their own life and ways of achieving SWB. For the positive effects of goal achievement or progress towards goals, the degree of commitment to these goals has been shown to have a substantial mediating effect (e.g. Brunstein 1993; Oishi et al. 1999).

Other theorists put more emphasis on the structure provided by the perception of progressing towards one’s goals and on the extension of one’s time horizon by means of moving towards goals:

“Commitment to a set of goals provides a sense of personal agency and a sense of structure and meaning to daily life. Furthermore, commitment to goals may help individuals cope with various problems in daily life and hence maintain personal as well as social well-being in times of adversity” (Diener et al., ibid., p. 284).

When we confront this third element of the cognitive component of well-being with the metagoals that was arrived at in this chapter, I dare claim that all the ways in which and the mechanisms through which moving towards goals may contribute to the cognitive component of SWB are encompassed in the proposed theoretical framework of metagoals. As remarked above, the general notion that progressing towards one’s goals is a basic human desire, which if fulfilled will enhance (cognitive) well-being or life satisfaction, perfectly accords with the behavioural theory underneath SPF theory and its hierarchy of metagoals. But the overlap of the metagoals and this third element of cognitive SWB is not restricted to this general notion. At a more detailed level, the suggested ways in which moving towards goals might contribute to SWB, can be seen to be all encompassed in the diverse metagoals listed in Table 7.2. The diverse ways and mechanisms through which progressing towards goals may affect cognitive well-being and the relevant conditions for it to do so, seem to be covered in particular by the metagoals of agency, self realisation, taking up challenges, having clear and concrete goals, making investments, dividing production efforts over multiple activities or concentrating on a small number of productive activities, multifunctionality of production factors and consciousness of SWB and production functions.

Overall, it appears that the contents and meaning of what in the literature is referred to as the cognitive component of SWB may be summarised as the effects of three kinds of mental processes on life satisfaction and SWB. Confronting these three ‘elements’ of the cognitive component of well-being with the set of metagoals that was arrived at in the exploratory study reported earlier in this chapter, it appears that the metagoals fully cover the cognitive component of SWB, and that they are even more encompassing than the three elements of cognitive well-being I distilled from the review of Diener et al. (1999). The distinctions between the different metagoals are also at a higher level of detail than the distinctions one finds in the literature concerning the elements of the cognitive component of SWB, which justifies the claim that using
the instrumental hierarchy of metagoals as a theoretical framework for cognitive well-being allows better and more detailed - thus more understandable - explanations.

7.6. Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that, besides the substantive goals in the basic model of SPF theory (comfort, stimulation, status, behavioural confirmation and affection, and the instrumental goals serving these), there is also another category of goals on which the level of overall well-being people experience depends.

From the behavioural theory underlying SPF theory, a few highly abstract goals can be deduced, which are not so much competing goals to those of social and physical well-being, but complementary goals in a different dimension of people's experience. In section 7.2, we have reasoned about what goals would follow from the behavioural theory on which SPF theory is built, and in section 7.3, we have investigated and discussed the variety of possible goals that emerged in the qualitative interviews in this study.

It appeared that practically all potential goals and preferences that our respondents had mentioned in the interviews could quite straightforwardly be identified as belonging either to one or more of the abstract goals derived, in section 7.2., from the behavioural theory, or as manifestations of the already known substantial goals in SPF theory's basic model.

The criterion that we thus chose for deciding whether some goal is a metagoal or quality of social production functions or not, was whether the ‘goal’ in question presents a specific instance or is instrumental to the realisation of any of the goals that follow directly from the behavioural theory upon which SPF theory rests.

It should be noted that all miscellaneous goals that we have found in the qualitative study could indeed be categorised as either specific instances or instruments for the achievement of the general goals derived from the behavioural assumptions, or as specific instances or instrumental goals for the realisation of substantive goals leading to social and physical well-being. There were no ‘left-overs’ that could not be interpreted in either way.

I have modelled and approached the metagoals and qualities of social production functions that were identified in a fashion that is analogous to the treatment of the substantive goals in the basic model of SPF theory. That is, I have assumed that there are different levels of generality and specificity, and that the more specific goals are instrumental to the realisation of the more general and abstract goals. The instrumental hierarchy of metagoals and qualities of social production functions that resulted presents an analogous and complementary hierarchy of goals that steer people’s behaviour and affect their subjective well-being, to the original SPF hierarchy.

The identification and elaboration of the metagoals that was achieved in this chapter, is not only relevant for the further development and application of SPF theory, but it is also crucial for the question of SPF theory’s adequacy for filling the theoretical void in quality of life studies (cf. Chapter 2). Provided that SPF theory would meet all the requirements identified in Chapter 2 for doing this job, the final decisive question is whether SPF theory covers the full concept of
‘quality of life’ or ‘overall subjective well-being’. As I have argued in Chapter 3, the basic SPF hierarchy of goals, encompassing immediate social and physical well-being, does cover the affective component of overall subjective well-being, but not the cognitive component of SWB. It was argued that cognitive component might be covered by the ‘metagoals’ in SPF theory, but as this part of the theory was not yet elaborated as explicitly as the hierarchy of substantial goals, the extent to which cognitive well-being was indeed covered could not be assessed. The elaboration of the hierarchy of metagoals in this chapter now allowed the examination of the extent to which the cognitive component of SWB is covered in the ‘complete’ version of SPF theory. Section 7.5. reported on the confrontation of SPF theory’s metagoals with the cognitive component of SWB, and it was found there that the present version of SPF theory provides full coverage of the cognitive component of SWB. It thus seems justified to conclude that the overarching concept of ‘overall subjective well-being’ in SPF theory covers the whole of what is called ‘quality of life’ or SWB, and that the theory does not have to be discarded as a candidate to fill the theoretical void in quality of life studies on the ground of incomplete conceptual coverage.