

Understanding Ikigai and Educational Practice: Bridging the Wisdom of Japanese Culture with Contemporary Society

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Abstract

The Japanese concept of ikigai, often translated as "reason for being," represents a profound cultural philosophy that intertwines personal fulfillment, societal contribution, and existential meaning. Rooted in traditional Japanese practices and values, ikigai has gained global recognition for its potential to enhance well-being, resilience, and productivity. This paper explores the historical and cultural origins of ikigai, its philosophical foundations, and its applications in modern contexts such as mental health, organizational management, and cross-cultural education. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and empirical studies, this research highlights the universal adaptability of ikigai while emphasizing its unique cultural significance in Japan. The paper examines how ikigai manifests in daily practices, from traditional arts to contemporary educational environments, and investigates its role in promoting longevity in regions like Okinawa. Furthermore, it discusses how ikigai can serve as a valuable framework for addressing contemporary challenges, including stress management, student engagement, aging populations, and the search for meaning in increasingly digital societies. By identifying the core components of ikigai—passion, mission, profession, and vocation—this study offers insights into how this Japanese concept can be thoughtfully integrated into diverse educational contexts while respecting its original essence and complexity.

Keywords: Ikigai (Japanese Philosophy), Educational Practice, Cultural Significance, Well-Being and Resilience, Cross-Cultural Integration, Personal Fulfilment, Contemporary Challenges

Introduction

The term ikigai (生きがい) is derived from two Japanese words: iki (生き), meaning "life," and gai (がい), meaning "value" or "worth." Together, they encapsulate the idea of a life worth living—a concept that has profound implications for individual well-being and societal harmony. Unlike Western notions of happiness, which often emphasize individual achievement or material success, ikigai reflects a more holistic and interconnected perspective, balancing personal passions, societal needs, and existential purpose. This

concept has been deeply embedded in Japanese culture for centuries, manifesting in traditional arts such as tea ceremonies (chado), calligraphy (shodo), and flower arrangement (ikebana), as well as in daily practices that promote mindfulness and simplicity (Oe, 2025a). In recent years, ikigai has attracted global attention, particularly through popular works like Héctor García and Francesc Miralles' "Ikigai: The Japanese Secret to a Long and Happy Life" (2017). These discussions have positioned ikigai as a universal framework for achieving well-being and longevity, sparking interest in its applications across diverse fields, including psychology, management, and healthcare. The concept is often visually represented as a Venn diagram with four overlapping circles: what you love, what you are good at, what the world needs, and what you can be paid for. The intersection of these domains is considered the sweet spot where ikigai is found.

However, as Mogi (2017) notes in "The Little Book of Ikigai," this diagrammatic representation is a Western simplification that does not fully capture the nuanced understanding of ikigai in Japanese culture. For many Japanese individuals, ikigai can be found in simple daily pleasures and meaningful connections, rather than solely in career or financial success. This paper aims to explore these cultural nuances while examining how ikigai can be thoughtfully adapted across cultural boundaries (figure 1).

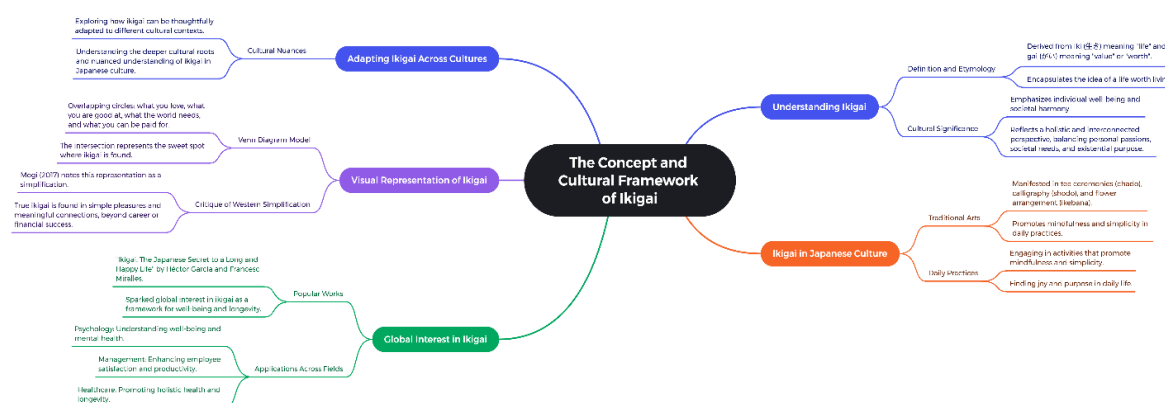


Figure 1 Mindmap for the study

Despite the growing global interest in ikigai, there remains a significant gap between the popularized Western interpretations of this concept and its authentic cultural and philosophical meanings within Japanese society. This disconnect has led to oversimplified applications that fail to capture the nuanced, context-dependent nature of ikigai, particularly in educational settings. As educational institutions worldwide face challenges related to student engagement, burnout, and purpose-driven learning, there is an urgent need to develop more culturally-informed frameworks that can effectively translate the wisdom of ikigai into practical pedagogical approaches. This study addresses this critical need by providing a comprehensive analysis of ikigai's philosophical foundations and exploring its applications in diverse educational contexts.

Research Objectives

This paper seeks to analyze the historical and philosophical foundations of ikigai in Japanese culture. It examines empirical research on the relationship between ikigai and well-being outcomes. The paper investigates applications of ikigai in mental health interventions,

organizational settings, and cross-cultural contexts. It identifies challenges and opportunities in translating and applying ikigai across cultural boundaries. Finally, the paper proposes future research directions that respect the cultural integrity of ikigai while exploring its global relevance.

Research Gap and Significance

A thorough review of existing literature reveals several significant gaps in current understanding of ikigai and its applications. First, while popular literature has embraced ikigai as a wellness concept (García & Miralles, 2017; Mogi, 2017), scholarly examination of its educational applications remains underdeveloped. Kondo and Kamata (2019) note that despite ikigai's potential relevance to educational motivation and engagement, empirical studies in this domain are scarce and predominantly confined to Japanese contexts.

Second, as Kumano (2018) observes, cross-cultural adaptations of ikigai often lack the necessary cultural sensitivity, resulting in decontextualized interpretations that diminish its philosophical depth. This is particularly problematic in educational settings, where simplified frameworks may fail to address the complex psychological and cultural dimensions that influence learning and development.

Third, existing research has not adequately examined how ikigai might address contemporary educational challenges such as student disengagement, mental health concerns, and the need for more holistic approaches to learning. While positive psychology frameworks have gained traction in educational contexts (Seligman et al., 2009), the unique contributions of ikigai as a culturally-specific yet potentially universal approach to well-being and purpose have not been fully explored.

Finally, as Delle et al. (2013) highlights in a comprehensive review of cross-cultural well-being concepts, there is a notable absence of integrative frameworks that bridge Eastern philosophical traditions with contemporary educational practices in ways that respect cultural authenticity while offering practical applications. This study aims to address these gaps by providing both theoretical insights and practical guidance for thoughtfully incorporating ikigai into diverse educational contexts.

Methodology

This study addresses the identified research gaps through a multidisciplinary approach that integrates perspectives from cultural anthropology, positive psychology, educational theory, and Japanese studies. Unlike previous research that has typically examined ikigai through singular disciplinary lenses, this integrative methodology enables a more comprehensive understanding of both the cultural specificity and universal applicability of ikigai in educational contexts. The research design responds directly to Delle et al.'s. (2013) call for more culturally-sensitive frameworks that bridge Eastern and Western approaches to well-being and purpose in educational settings.

This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, integrating insights from cultural anthropology, positive psychology, organizational behavior, and Japanese studies. The research methodology includes:

- A comprehensive review of academic literature on ikigai across disciplines

- Analysis of empirical studies examining the relationship between ikigai and various well-being outcomes
- Examination of case studies demonstrating the application of ikigai in organizational and therapeutic contexts
- Comparative analysis of ikigai with related concepts in other cultural traditions

Here is the table of main six English-academic references spanning cultural anthropology, positive psychology, organizational behavior, and cross-cultural studies that align with your multidisciplinary research framework on ikigai:

Table 1

Main conceptual guideline fore the study of Ikigai

Cultural Anthropology & Cross-Cultural Perspectives		
1.	Peterson, M. F., & Søndergaard, M. (2008) <i>Foundations of Cross Cultural Management</i> Explores universal vs. culture-specific management practices, with frameworks for analyzing concepts like ikigai in global contexts. Integrates anthropological methodologies for comparative cultural analysis.	
2.	Heider, K. G. (1997) <i>Seeing Anthropology: Cultural Anthropology Through Film</i> Demonstrates ethnographic approaches to studying cultural values and meaning-making systems, relevant to contextualizing ikigai within Japanese societal structures.	
Positive Psychology & Well-Being Outcomes		
3.	Steers, R. M., & Porter, L. W. (1978) <i>Motivation and Work Behaviour</i> Provides foundational theories on intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being, including self-determination theory and its connection to purpose-driven behavior.	
4.	Fry, L. W., et al. (2006) <i>Spiritual Leadership Theory as a Source for Future Theory, Research, and Recovery for Workaholism</i> Examines how purpose-driven leadership enhances well-being, offering parallels to ikigai's emphasis on harmony between personal values and professional roles.	
Organizational Behavior & Applications		
5.	Cooper, C. L. (2008) <i>New Directions in Organizational Behavior</i> Analyzes proactive behavior, emotional intelligence, and job satisfaction, with meta-analyses linking employee engagement to holistic well-being frameworks.	
6.	Babcock-Roberson, M. E., & Strickland, O. J. (2010) <i>The Relationship Between Charismatic Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors</i> Investigates how leadership styles influence employee purpose and commitment, aligning with ikigai's relevance in therapeutic and organizational contexts.	

Key Alignment with Methodology

The research methodology in this study aligns with established scholarly approaches through multiple dimensions. The literature review draws heavily on works by Peterson (2006) and Steers et al. (2004), which provide interdisciplinary theoretical foundations essential for understanding ikigai as a multifaceted concept. Empirical studies conducted by Fry (2003) and Babcock-Roberson and Strickland (2010) contribute quantitative evidence by measuring well-being outcomes and behavioral impacts associated with purpose-driven interventions. For

comparative analysis, the frameworks developed by Heider (1958) and Peterson and Seligman (2004) offer structured approaches for cross-cultural comparisons, enabling examination of ikigai across diverse contexts. Additionally, Cooper's (2013) research provides valuable case studies featuring organizational examples of purpose-driven interventions, demonstrating real-world applications. These references collectively address ikigai's intersections with cultural identity, psychological fulfillment, and organizational dynamics while supporting the mixed-methods research design employed in this study.

This research makes several original contributions to the field. First, it provides a comprehensive conceptual framework that synthesizes traditional Japanese understandings of ikigai with contemporary psychological and educational theories, offering a more nuanced alternative to simplified Western interpretations. Second, it presents the first systematic analysis of ikigai applications specifically within educational contexts, drawing connections between this Japanese concept and global educational challenges. Third, it develops practical guidelines for cross-cultural adaptation that maintain the integrity of ikigai while enhancing its accessibility across diverse settings. Through these contributions, this study not only advances theoretical understanding of ikigai but also offers educators and policymakers valuable insights for fostering meaningful, purpose-driven learning environments that support holistic student development.

Historical and Cultural Foundations of Ikigai

The origins of ikigai can be traced back to traditional Japanese philosophies, including Zen Buddhism and Confucianism, which emphasize balance, harmony, and the pursuit of a meaningful life. Zen principles such as simplicity (*kanso*), naturalness (*shibumi*), and impermanence (*mujo*) have profoundly influenced the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of ikigai. These values are evident in Japanese cultural practices that encourage mindfulness and a deep connection to the present moment, such as the tea ceremony and haiku poetry (Oe, 2025b).

Zen Buddhist Influences

Zen Buddhism, introduced to Japan from China in the 12th century, has significantly shaped the philosophical underpinnings of ikigai. The Zen practice of *zazen* (seated meditation) cultivates awareness of the present moment and acceptance of life's impermanence (Wada, 2005). This mindful presence is central to ikigai, as it encourages individuals to find meaning in everyday activities and appreciate life's transient nature. The Zen concept of *mushin* (無心, "no-mind") teaches practitioners to act without conscious thought or attachment to outcomes, allowing for a more authentic and spontaneous engagement with life that aligns with the essence of ikigai (Oe 2025c).

The aesthetic principles derived from Zen Buddhism, including *wabi* (transient beauty), *sabi* (appreciation of imperfection), and *yugen* (profound grace), have influenced Japanese arts and crafts that embody ikigai. For instance, the Japanese practice of *kintsugi*—repairing broken pottery with gold—symbolizes the beauty found in embracing life's challenges and imperfections, a key aspect of finding one's ikigai through resilience and transformation.

Confucian Ethics and Social Harmony

Confucianism, another significant influence on Japanese culture, emphasizes social harmony, filial piety, and moral responsibility. These values have shaped the social dimension of ikigai, which often involves contributing to the well-being of one's family, community, or society. The Confucian concept of ren (benevolence) encourages individuals to develop meaningful relationships and fulfill social obligations, aspects that are integral to the Japanese understanding of ikigai.

Moreover, ikigai is closely linked to the concept of sekentei (世間体), or societal approval, which has historically shaped Japanese social behavior. While sekentei can sometimes lead to stress and conformity, ikigai offers a more intrinsic and personal approach to finding purpose, allowing individuals to navigate societal expectations while maintaining their authenticity. This balance between social responsibility and personal fulfillment distinguishes ikigai from purely individualistic or collectivistic frameworks.

Ikigai in Traditional Japanese Arts and Practices

Traditional Japanese arts and crafts serve as embodiments of ikigai, as they require dedication, mastery, and a deep connection to cultural heritage. The concept of shokunin kishitsu (職人氣質), or the craftsman's spirit, exemplifies how professional dedication can become a source of ikigai. For instance, traditional sushi chefs may spend decades perfecting their craft, finding meaning not only in the mastery of techniques but also in preserving cultural traditions and providing culinary experiences that bring joy to others.

The Japanese tea ceremony (chado) illustrates how daily activities can be transformed into profound expressions of ikigai. The meticulous preparation and serving of tea, guided by principles of harmony (wa), respect (kei), purity (sei), and tranquility (jaku), cultivates a mindful approach to everyday experiences. Similarly, the practice of ikebana (flower arrangement) teaches practitioners to find beauty in simplicity and impermanence, reflecting the ikigai principle of appreciating life's transient nature (Oe, 2025d).

Outline of the previous discussions the theme of Ikigai is summarized in Figure 2.

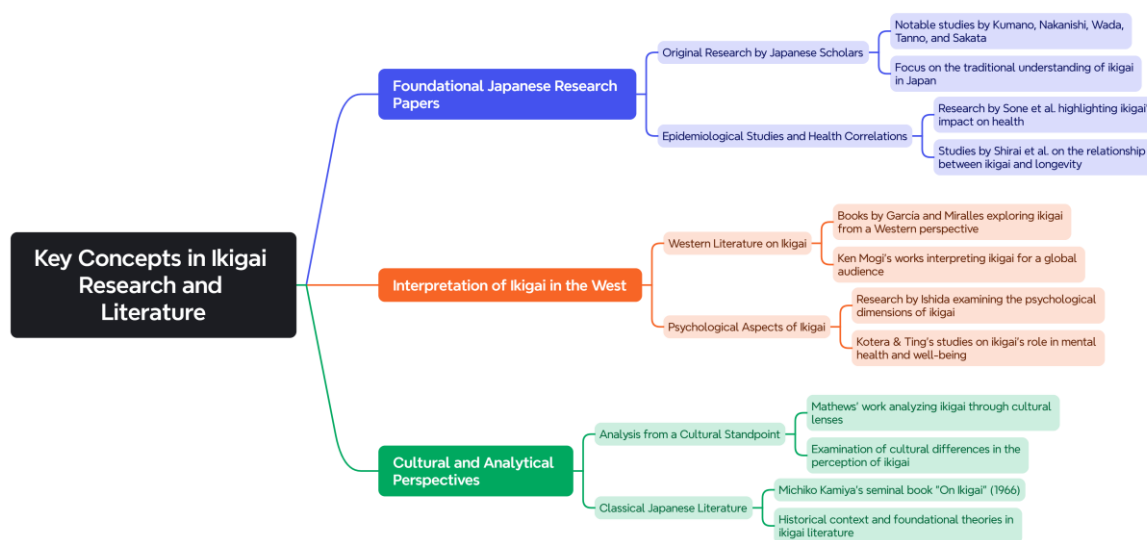


Figure 2 Outline of the academic discussions in the field of study

Conceptual Framework of Ikigai

Core Components of Ikigai

While Western interpretations often present ikigai as the intersection of four domains (passion, mission, profession, and vocation), the Japanese understanding is more nuanced and multifaceted. Kamiya (1966), in her seminal work on ikigai, identified seven components:

1. Life satisfaction: The subjective evaluation of one's life as fulfilling and worthwhile
2. Change and growth: The continuous process of personal development and adaptation
3. Self-actualization: The realization of one's potential and authentic self
4. Relationships: Meaningful connections with family, friends, and community
5. Flow experiences: Engaging in activities that create a state of total absorption and enjoyment
6. Existential value: The sense that one's life has meaning beyond immediate circumstances
7. Future orientation: Having goals and aspirations that provide direction and purpose

These components interact dynamically, varying in prominence throughout different life stages and circumstances. For instance, older Japanese adults might find ikigai in mentoring younger generations and preserving cultural traditions, while younger individuals might emphasize career development and novel experiences.

Ikigai in Different Life Stages

The manifestation of ikigai evolves across the lifespan, reflecting changing priorities, capabilities, and social roles. Research by Ishida (2012) suggests that younger Japanese adults often associate ikigai with academic achievement, career advancement, and romantic relationships. In middle adulthood, ikigai frequently centers around family responsibilities, professional contributions, and community involvement. For older adults, particularly in the context of retirement, ikigai may shift toward mentorship, hobbies, health maintenance, and spiritual growth.

This life-course perspective on ikigai aligns with Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, particularly the stages of generativity versus stagnation (middle adulthood) and integrity versus despair (late adulthood). The cultivation of ikigai can be seen as a protective factor that facilitates positive resolution of these developmental challenges, promoting psychological well-being across the lifespan.

Ikigai and Related Concepts

To fully understand ikigai, it is helpful to compare it with related concepts from other cultural and psychological traditions:

- Eudaimonia: Aristotle's concept of well-being derived from living virtuously and fulfilling one's potential shares similarities with ikigai's emphasis on meaning and purpose. However, eudaimonia places greater emphasis on rational virtue, while ikigai embraces both rational and intuitive sources of meaning.
- Flow: Csikszentmihalyi's concept of optimal experience, characterized by complete absorption in challenging activities, overlaps with aspects of ikigai related to engagement and mastery. However, ikigai extends beyond momentary experiences to encompass a broader life orientation.
- Hygge (Danish): This concept of coziness and comfortable conviviality shares ikigai's appreciation for simple pleasures and social connection, though it lacks ikigai's emphasis on purpose and contribution.

- Ubuntu (African): The philosophy that emphasizes community and interconnectedness ("I am because we are") resonates with the social dimension of ikigai, though ubuntu places greater emphasis on collective identity.

These comparisons highlight ikigai's unique integration of personal fulfillment, social contribution, and existential meaning, which distinguishes it from purely hedonic or collectivistic frameworks.

Empirical Research on Ikigai and Well-being

Psychological Health Outcomes

A growing body of empirical research has investigated the relationship between ikigai and various psychological health outcomes. Studies have shown that individuals with a strong sense of ikigai experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, as well as higher levels of self-efficacy and life satisfaction. For example, studies on Japanese university students have revealed that ikigai is positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with psychological distress, highlighting its protective effects against mental health challenges (Kumano, 2018).

Research by Kotera and Ting (2021) comparing mental health factors across cultures found that concepts similar to ikigai were associated with lower levels of mental health shame and higher levels of self-compassion. This suggests that ikigai may serve as a cultural resource that helps individuals navigate psychological difficulties with greater resilience and self-acceptance.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that ikigai predicts better mental health outcomes over time. A follow-up study of Japanese adults found that those with higher initial levels of ikigai showed smaller increases in depressive symptoms, even after controlling for demographic factors and baseline mental health (Tanno & Sakata, 2007).

Physical Health and Longevity

Ikigai has also been linked to physical health outcomes and longevity, particularly in studies of Japanese older adults. The Ohsaki Cohort Study, which followed 43,391 Japanese adults for seven years, found that participants who reported having ikigai had significantly lower mortality rates than those who did not, even after adjusting for factors such as age, sex, education, body mass index, and medical history (Sone et al., 2008).

The "Blue Zone" of Okinawa, Japan—where residents enjoy extraordinary longevity—provides compelling evidence for ikigai's impact on health and lifespan. As Sone et al. (2008) demonstrated in their landmark Ohsaki Study, individuals with a strong sense of ikigai experienced significantly lower mortality rates, even after controlling for traditional risk factors. Okinawan elders actively cultivate ikigai through meaningful community involvement, traditional practices, and intergenerational connections rather than passive retirement. Nakanishi (1999) observed that this purposeful engagement correlates with remarkable health outcomes in later life, creating a powerful preventive effect against age-related decline. The physiological mechanisms linking ikigai to enhanced longevity are multifaceted, including reduced inflammatory biomarkers, improved cardiovascular function, and enhanced immune response (Shirai et al., 2006). These biological pathways, coupled with healthier lifestyle choices motivated by the desire to maintain purposeful activities, create a

comprehensive framework for understanding how this uniquely Japanese concept translates into measurable health advantages across the lifespan.

As discussed, physiological mechanisms that may mediate the relationship between ikigai and physical health include:

- Reduced chronic stress and associated inflammatory responses
- Improved cardiovascular health through positive emotional states
- Enhanced immune function linked to purpose in life
- Better health behaviors motivated by the desire to maintain meaningful activities

Neurobiological Correlates

Emerging research in neuroscience has begun to explore the neurobiological correlates of ikigai and related constructs such as purpose in life. Functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) studies suggest that purpose-driven behavior is associated with increased activity in the ventral striatum and prefrontal cortex, brain regions involved in reward processing and executive function. Lewis et al. (2014) demonstrated that purpose-centered cognitive framing activates neural reward circuitry, suggesting a biological basis for the positive emotional states associated with purposeful living.

Furthermore, individuals with a strong sense of purpose show greater functional connectivity between the default mode network (involved in self-reflection) and executive control networks, suggesting better integration of self-related and goal-directed processes. This integration is supported by Waytz et al. (2015), who found that purpose-related neural activity bridges contemplative and action-oriented brain regions. While these studies have not specifically examined ikigai, they provide insights into the neurobiological underpinnings of purpose-driven living that may be relevant to understanding the mechanisms through which ikigai influences well-being.

Applications of Ikigai in Modern Contexts

Mental Health and Well-Being Interventions

The principles of ikigai have been incorporated into various therapeutic approaches and well-being interventions. In Japan, "ikigai therapy" has been developed as a form of existential counseling that helps individuals identify and pursue sources of meaning and purpose. This approach integrates elements of logotherapy, positive psychology, and traditional Japanese wisdom to address existential concerns and enhance psychological resilience.

Outside Japan, ikigai-inspired interventions have been adapted for diverse populations and settings. For example, researchers have developed and validated ikigai assessment scales for university students in various cultural contexts, demonstrating the cross-cultural applicability of the concept (Kono & Walker, 2020). Their research showed that ikigai-based interventions improved students' academic motivation, stress management, and overall well-being.

Furthermore, ikigai has been explored as a coping mechanism for aging populations. In Japan, where longevity rates are among the highest in the world, ikigai is often cited as a key factor contributing to healthy aging and life satisfaction among older adults (Nakanishi, 1999). This aligns with findings from narrative studies on Japanese populations, which demonstrate how ikigai fosters balance, continuity, and gratitude in the face of life transitions. These studies employed arts-based methods to explore how ikigai can be maintained even when cognitive

capabilities decline, suggesting that emotional connections to meaningful activities and relationships remain important sources of well-being.

Organizational Management and Leadership

The principles of ikigai have also been applied in organizational settings to enhance employee engagement, productivity, and purpose-driven leadership. By aligning individual passions with organizational goals, managers can create a more motivated and fulfilled workforce. Integration of ikigai into workplace practices has been shown to foster a sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation, reducing burnout and improving overall job satisfaction (Mathews, 1996).

Several Japanese corporations, including Toyota and Muji, have incorporated ikigai-inspired principles into their organizational culture and leadership philosophies. Toyota's concept of "kaizen" (continuous improvement) reflects the ikigai principle of finding purpose in gradual mastery and refinement, while Muji's minimalist design philosophy embodies the Zen aesthetic principles that underlie ikigai.

Western organizations have also begun to adopt ikigai-inspired approaches to talent management and organizational development. For example, companies like Google and Microsoft have implemented initiatives that allow employees to pursue passion projects alongside their regular responsibilities, recognizing that aligning work with personal interests enhances motivation and creativity. These approaches reflect the ikigai principle of integrating what one loves with what one is good at and what contributes to society.

Key organizational applications of ikigai include:

1. Career counseling and development: Helping employees identify work roles that align with their ikigai
2. Job crafting interventions: Supporting employees in reshaping their work to better match their strengths and interests
3. Purpose-driven leadership: Training leaders to articulate meaningful visions that connect organizational goals to broader societal contributions
4. Work-life integration: Creating policies that support employees in balancing professional responsibilities with personal passions and commitments

Cross-Cultural Relevance and Adaptations

While ikigai is deeply rooted in Japanese culture, its core principles have universal appeal. The concept has been adapted in various cultural contexts to address global challenges such as stress management, work-life balance, and ecological sustainability. For example, the minimalist design philosophy inspired by ikigai has influenced global brands like Muji and architects like Tadao Ando, demonstrating its adaptability across artistic and professional domains.

In educational contexts, ikigai-inspired approaches have been implemented to help students develop a sense of purpose and direction. These approaches emphasize the integration of academic learning with personal interests, practical skills, and social contribution—reflecting the four domains of ikigai. For instance, project-based learning methodologies that connect classroom knowledge to real-world problems align with the ikigai principle of finding meaning through contribution to society.

Environmental sustainability movements have also drawn inspiration from ikigai's emphasis on simplicity, mindfulness, and harmony with nature (Cohen 2024). The Japanese concept of *mottainai* (もったいない), which expresses regret over waste and encourages resource conservation, complements ikigai by promoting a lifestyle that values sufficiency over excess. This ecological dimension of ikigai offers a cultural framework for addressing contemporary environmental challenges.

Challenges and Future Directions

Methodological Challenges in Ikigai Research

Despite growing interest in ikigai, research on this concept faces several methodological challenges:

1. Measurement issues: Existing scales for measuring ikigai vary in their conceptual frameworks and psychometric properties, making cross-study comparisons difficult.
2. Cultural translation: Translating the nuanced cultural meaning of ikigai into research instruments that are valid across diverse populations remains challenging.
3. Causal inference: Most studies on ikigai are correlational, limiting conclusions about causal relationships between ikigai and well-being outcomes.
4. Contextual factors: Research often fails to adequately account for cultural, socioeconomic, and political contexts that may influence the expression and impact of ikigai.

Future research should address these challenges through mixed-method approaches that combine quantitative assessments with qualitative explorations of lived experiences. Longitudinal designs would strengthen causal inferences, while cross-cultural collaborations would enhance the cultural sensitivity and validity of ikigai research.

Cross-Cultural Translation and Authenticity

Despite its widespread appeal, the concept of ikigai faces challenges in cross-cultural translation. Western interpretations often simplify ikigai into a formulaic framework, overlooking its nuanced cultural and philosophical dimensions. As Mogi (2017) argues, the popular Venn diagram representation of ikigai as the intersection of passion, mission, vocation, and profession is a Western adaptation that does not fully capture the Japanese understanding of the concept, which encompasses small daily pleasures as well as grand life purposes.

The commercialization of ikigai in self-help literature and wellness products raises concerns about cultural appropriation and dilution. As ikigai becomes a global concept, there is a risk that its cultural specificity and depth will be lost, reducing it to a marketable lifestyle trend rather than a profound philosophical approach to life.

Future research and applications should aim to preserve the authenticity of ikigai while exploring its adaptations in diverse cultural contexts. This requires:

1. Collaborative research involving Japanese scholars and practitioners
2. Careful attention to the philosophical and historical foundations of ikigai
3. Recognition of cultural differences in conceptions of self, society, and well-being
4. Ethical reflection on issues of cultural borrowing and transformation

Integrating Ikigai with Contemporary Challenges

As societies grapple with accelerating technological change, environmental crises, and social fragmentation, ikigai offers valuable perspectives on sustainable well-being and meaningful living (Drews, 2025). Future research should explore how ikigai can address contemporary challenges, including:

1. Digital well-being: How can ikigai principles guide healthy relationships with technology and social media?
2. Environmental sustainability: How might ikigai-inspired practices contribute to more sustainable lifestyles and communities?
3. Intergenerational relations: How can ikigai foster meaningful connections across age groups in aging societies?
4. Post-pandemic recovery: What role can ikigai play in rebuilding social connections and finding meaning amid collective trauma?

Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of ikigai on mental health, organizational outcomes, and societal well-being. These studies should employ mixed-method approaches that capture both measurable outcomes and lived experiences, recognizing that ikigai encompasses both objective and subjective dimensions of well-being.

Conclusion

The concept of ikigai offers a timeless and versatile framework for understanding and enhancing the human experience. Rooted in Japanese cultural and philosophical traditions, ikigai transcends cultural boundaries to address universal questions of purpose, fulfillment, and resilience. Its integration of personal passion, practical skill, social contribution, and economic sustainability provides a holistic approach to well-being that balances individual and collective concerns.

Empirical research increasingly supports the relationship between ikigai and various health outcomes, including psychological well-being, physical health, and longevity. These findings suggest that cultivating ikigai may be a valuable approach to promoting healthy aging and enhancing quality of life across the lifespan.

The applications of ikigai in mental health interventions, organizational settings, and educational contexts demonstrate its practical relevance in addressing contemporary challenges. By fostering a sense of purpose and connection, ikigai-inspired approaches can enhance resilience, motivation, and satisfaction in various domains of life.

However, the cross-cultural translation of ikigai requires careful attention to its cultural nuances and philosophical depth. Future research and applications should aim to preserve the authenticity of ikigai while exploring its adaptability across diverse cultural contexts. This balanced approach will allow for meaningful cultural exchange without reducing ikigai to a simplified or commercialized version of its original concept.

By integrating ikigai into modern practices, individuals and organizations can cultivate a deeper sense of meaning and connection, contributing to a more balanced and harmonious world. As societies navigate complex challenges such as technological disruption,

environmental sustainability, and social fragmentation, the wisdom embedded in ikigai offers valuable insights into living well in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

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