

# CHAPTER 17

## Exploring Subjective Wellbeing and it's Relationships to Lifewide Education, Learning and Personal Development

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### SUMMARY

The concept of wellbeing comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity, engagement and fulfillment are characteristic of someone who has a positive experience of their life. Equally important for wellbeing is our functioning in the world and the opportunities we have to be ourselves and become the people we want to become. Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one's life and having a sense of purpose are all important attributes of wellbeing (Huppert 2008). These are important concerns for lifewide education with its focus on holistic self-directed personal and social development through all the experiences and opportunities an individual's life affords. Drawing on an extensive literature, the chapter examines what wellbeing means, considers key concepts and perspectives drawn from a range of disciplines, and offers a perspective on the relevance of these ideas for lifewide learning and how these ideas might be utilised within an educational process that encourages, supports and recognises individuals' lifewide learning and development.

### INTRODUCTION

Lifewide learning embraces all the activities in an individual's life through which they learn and develop (Barnett 2011, Jackson 2011). In embracing the whole of a person's life spaces, activities and experiences, the roles and identities they display, and their development as a person, it might be assumed that there will be a relationship to how a person feels about themselves and their life; their sense of wellbeing or personal fulfillment. In this chapter, the author draws on a number of sources to outline the key concepts relating to wellbeing and its measurement, and offer a perspective on the significance of wellbeing for lifewide learning and education. Chapter C3 utilises some of the thinking tools provided in this chapter to analyse the results of a survey of individuals' wellbeing.

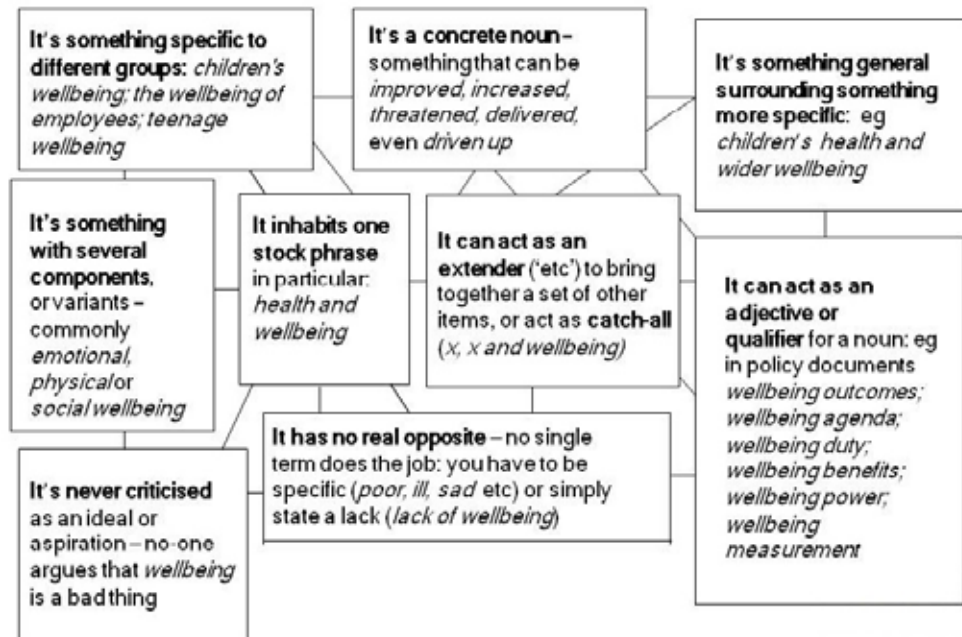
### What does wellbeing mean?

Research on 'wellbeing' has gathered pace in the last two decades as it has become prominent in Government policies around the world (eg Diener et al 1999; Kahneman et al 1999; Keyes et al 2002; Stratham and Chase, 2010; Seligman, 2002, 2011). However, very early on in the research Ryff and Keyes (1995) identified that, the absence of theory-based

formulations of wellbeing is puzzling, ' The question of how wellbeing should be defined (or spelled) still remains largely unresolved, which has given rise to blurred and overly broad definitions of wellbeing' (Forgeard et al 2011:81).

Ereaut and Whiting (2008) argue that wellbeing is a cultural construct: 'wellbeing is no less than what a group of people collectively agree makes a good life'. Using Discourse Analysis (DA), these researchers mapped how the term 'wellbeing' was being used in policy documents and in different discursive contexts.

Figure 1 How 'wellbeing' behaves in real life usage (Ereaut and Whiting 2008)



The research showed that the word 'wellbeing' behaves somewhat strangely and contains a number of anomalies and puzzles. Firstly, wellbeing seems to have no clear opposite. It might be argued that we need to know what 'unwellbeing' means in order to understand wellbeing. The lack of a clear opposite to 'wellbeing' is an interesting quirk, but it also provides a clue as to the nature of what is being claimed or evoked by some common uses of the word. It seems it commonly represents an ideal, a generically desirable state. It is 'just good' - but not set against any specific kind of 'bad'. Secondly, wellbeing often functions as a filler, extender, catch-all or very general signpost. It signals that wellbeing is clearly 'a good thing' and something that is perhaps expected to catch the attention - but avoids the difficulty of definition. Thirdly, wellbeing is written in three different ways - 'wellbeing', 'well-being', and 'well being'. Even in policy documents where you might expect consistency in the use of a key term there is little consistency between or even within texts. Such inconsistency might reflect the unstable, shifting and often fuzzy ground around the concept of wellbeing, or a multiplicity of associated subtleties in distinction within a common concept.

## A social construct within multiple discourses

Wellbeing is clearly an individual and therefore subjective construct - only I know how I feel about myself and my life. But the socio-cultural environment I inhabit influences my sense of

wellbeing and my appreciation of subjectivities. I cannot detach my own wellbeing from the world of which I am a part. White (2008: 5) suggests that it is hard to justify an objective category for the concept of wellbeing, since this has to be person-centred. For all persons, including officials and academics, see and speak from a particular position, and hence none has an unbiased, universal vision.

Because wellbeing is a social construct, its meaning cannot be fixed. It is a primary cultural judgement; just like 'what makes a good life?'. What it means at any one time depends on the weight given at that time by the speaker/writer/listener/reader to different philosophical traditions, world views and systems of knowledge. How far any one view dominates will determine how stable its meaning is, so its meaning will always be shifting.

there is no 'objective' reality, outside culture or society, which can be set against people's subjective, encultured, perceptions of their circumstances. Rather it is culture and society which defines what is seen as objective, the limits of what is taken as possible or probably (White 2008:5)

The concept of wellbeing is located in a number of different discourses. Discourses are more-or-less coherent, systematically-organised ways of talking or writing, each underpinned by a set of beliefs, assumptions and values. Different discourses effectively offer different versions of 'common sense'. That is, they are not just different ways of talking, but different ways of making judgements and dealing with new information - deciding what things really mean, what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and unacceptable, and what flows logically from what. They offer a palette of sense-making devices; ready-made building blocks for talking and thinking that can be put together in specific situations to make our case, explain our own actions, predict what might happen next, and so on.

*Wellbeing and the medical and psychological heritage:* The expression 'health & wellbeing' appears in texts mostly concerned with other ideas of wellbeing. It seems consistently to link into the discourse of 'modern' medicine, where the remit of medicine goes beyond bodily health. It is now taken for granted that minds and bodies interact - and that 'health' must entail the health of both. The growth of positive psychology (Seligman 1999) has done much to develop mental models of wellbeing. We might call this 'proto-holism' - the addition of psychological and social elements of what was once an entirely physical, science-based medical model. The very frequent juxtaposition of 'health and wellbeing' seems in practice to embody this shift - in context it means the extension of concern with physical health to mental or emotional health, and perhaps 'relationships'. This 'medical/psychological' reading of wellbeing is probably the closest we have today of a dominant discourse of wellbeing.

*An operationalised discourse with outcomes and indicators:* An operationalised discourse is in which a concept is defined and treated as real in terms of a particular set of indicators or measures, as for example in the world of policy. In such contexts wellbeing is given a specific set of meanings, however, once outside the policy domain this version of 'wellbeing' must compete with all other constructions of wellbeing.

*Wellbeing within the sustainability discourse:* Sustainability provides another emergent discursive context for wellbeing. Here, sustainable development is expressly linked to wellbeing, being defined as "(1) Living within environmental limits (ie the need for environmental sustainability) and (2) Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society (ie the need to

ensure well-being for all, now and in the future)". Wellbeing in this context is effectively 'super-holism' - perhaps a next-generation holism that includes all physical environments, and ultimately the planet, in its sphere of concern.

*Wellbeing within a discourse of holism:* Holism (Wikipedia) means that "...all the properties of a given system (biological, chemical, social, economic, mental, linguistic, etc) cannot be determined or explained by its component parts alone. Instead, the system as a whole determines in an important way how the parts behave". In Western cultures, holism (as a way of thinking, talking and knowing) has been moving from the fringe to a more mainstream, taken-for-granted position. As a cultural idea and 'way of knowing', holism may also resonate with emerging ideas in several other fields: chaos theory, 'emergence' networks, the 'wisdom of crowds' and more. Holism goes beyond bodily or emotional health, entailing other ideas like spirituality, environment and more - it goes well beyond that of the simple 'mind - body' connection seen in today's medical discourse.

*Wellbeing and philosophy:* Aristotle had a lot to say about 'wellbeing'- it had a specific meaning for him. For him, wellbeing was an ideal - the culmination of a person's idealised journey to 'actualise' all their potential. In this form, it certainly has no opposite - there is the ideal of wellbeing, and the person's potential for wellbeing, but no 'ill-being'. Aristotle influenced European thought about 'the good life' for 1500 years. The recent discourse of 'happiness' and growth of 'positive psychology' are perhaps reworkings for today of an Aristotelian construction of 'wellbeing'. Importantly, 'wellbeing' in this form continues to conjure a vision of all that is best and desirable for a person. But it does so theoretically: philosophical 'wellbeing' is a tool for thinking, an idealised aspiration rather than a real state to be attained or measured.

Figure 2 Some of the words used by people to describe their wellbeing (Willis in press)



## DEFINITIONS

Common everyday use of the word 'wellbeing' can be gauged from dictionary definitions that 'describe' rather than 'define' the concept. Typical examples include:

- a contented state of being happy, healthy and prosperous
- a state in which every individual realises his or her own potential
- a good or satisfactory condition of existence

Figure 2, in the form of a wordle, shows the words used by people to describe their wellbeing in a recent survey (Willis in press). It's clear that there are lot of different ideas associated with wellbeing, but considerations of balance and stability in life seem to feature quite prominently.

Diener (2006: 399-400) defines subjective well-being as "an umbrella term for the different valuations people make regarding their lives, the events happening to them, their bodies and minds, and the circumstances in which they live."

Knowing the historical background to the study of wellbeing is necessary to formulating the definition of wellbeing. Dodge et al (2012: 223) describe two traditions: the hedonic tradition, which accentuates constructs such as happiness, positive affect, low negative affect, and satisfaction with life (eg, Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984; Kahneman et al 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999); and the eudaimonic tradition, which highlights positive psychological functioning and human development (eg, Rogers, 1961; Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Waterman, 1993).

### A life in balance

After reviewing the history of the development of the idea, and taking account of the emerging belief that most researchers now believe that wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct (eg Diener, 2009; Michaelson et al 2009; Stiglitz et al 2009), Dodge et al (2012) focus on three key areas: the idea of a set point for wellbeing; the inevitability of equilibrium/homeostasis; and the fluctuating state between challenges and resources. They propose a new definition of wellbeing 'the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced' (Dodge et al 2012:229-30). Interestingly, the idea of balance and stability were prominent in the lifewide learning survey of perceptions of wellbeing (Figure 2). Dodge et al (ibid) represent this idea in a simple graphic, Figure 3.

Figure 3 Definition of wellbeing (Dodge et al 2012:230)



subjective

In essence, stable wellbeing for individuals has the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals face challenges greater than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing. (ibid 337) describe it in these terms.

Each time an individual meets a challenge, the system of challenges and resources comes into a state of imbalance, as the individual is forced to adapt his or her resources to meet this particular challenge (ibid 337).

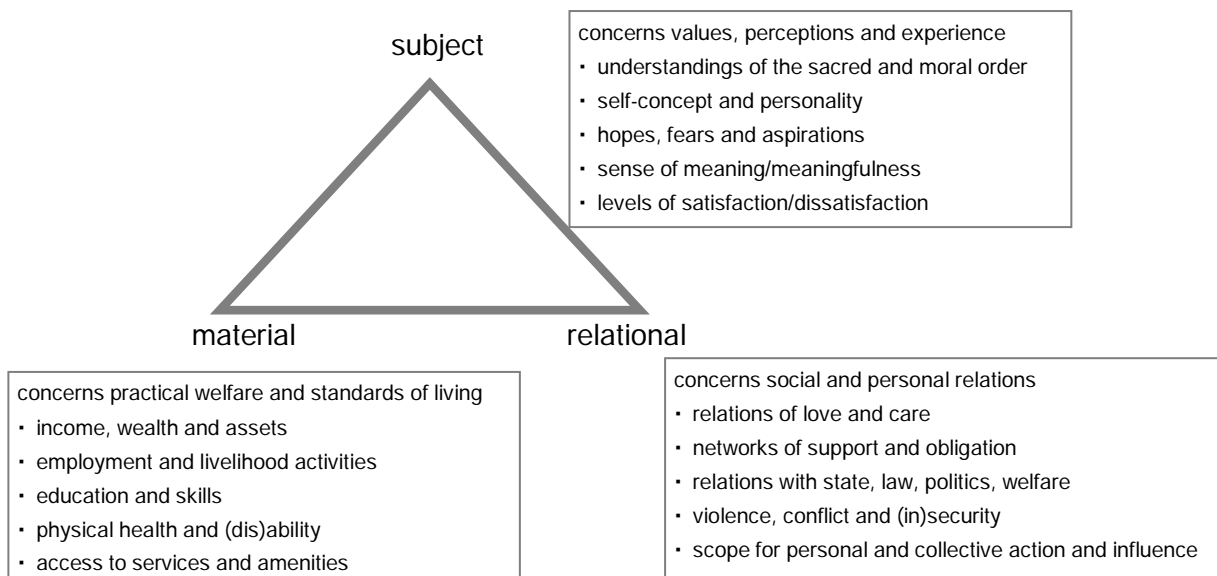
This definition has yet to be widely accepted by researchers and policy makers but according to Dodge et al (ibid) it has some advantages over descriptive definitions. Firstly it is simple yet precise. Secondly it has universal application; it can be applied to all individuals regardless of age, culture, gender or personal situations and even in difficult and constraining circumstances. Thirdly it reflects a belief that individuals are agents of their own destiny. It supports the idea of self-management: 'whatever we do to make the most of our lives by coping with our difficulties and making the most of what we have' (Martyn, 2002:4). Finally, the definition they propose can be operationalised and measured.

## DIMENSIONS

White (2008) developed an approach to the analysis of policy that integrates three dimensions: the subjective, material and relational (Figure 4). White (ibid) stresses the importance of interdependence such that none exist without the others and argues that while it is tempting to treat wellbeing as a stable state or outcome, it is more useful to consider it as an evolving process in relation to an individual's life circumstances and the society and community within which they live.

Understandings of what wellbeing is change with historical time. People's ideas of their own wellbeing - and their estimations of whether they have or will achieve(d) it - also change through the life cycle. Expectations of the future and reflections on the past also have a bearing on how people conceive their present - and how people feel about their present affects how they read their pasts and future (White 2008:10).

Figure 4 Three dimensions of wellbeing (White 2008:5&7)



# PERSPECTIVES ON WELLBEING

Research-based perspectives on wellbeing have been developed in the fields of human psychology, positive psychology, social psychology and economics. This section summarises the most important ideas emerging from these fields.

## Humanistic psychology

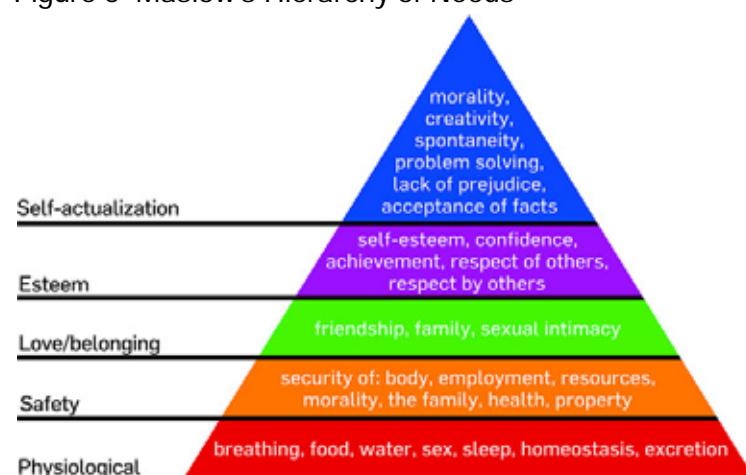
The foundations for studying wellbeing are found in the field of humanistic psychology. Leading thinkers like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers start from the assumption that every person has their own unique way of perceiving and understanding the world and that the things they do only make sense in this light. Whereas other approaches take an objective view of people, in essence asking about them, 'what is this person like?', humanistic psychologists' priority is understanding people's subjectivity, asking 'what is it like to be this person?' Humanistic psychologists explicitly endorse the idea that people have free will and are capable of choosing their own actions (although they may not always realise this). They also take the view that all people have a tendency towards growth and the fulfillment of their potential.

Maslow believed that people were driven to fulfill their potential. His view was that we have certain needs that we need to fulfill. As we take care of one set of needs, a new set becomes salient. Much of Maslow's work was concerned with identifying the different types of needs that people have, and explaining why some people make more of their potential than others.

Maslow (1943) developed a framework (Figure 5) for analysing the motivational forces behind human behaviour and growth. His model contains five levels of need:

- § biological and physiological basic needs - air, food, drink, shelter, warmth, sex, sleep, etc.
- § safety needs - protection from elements, security, order, law, limits, stability, etc.
- § belongingness and love needs - work group, family, affection, relationships, etc.
- § esteem needs - self-esteem, achievement, mastery, independence, status, dominance, prestige, managerial responsibility, etc.
- § self-actualisation needs - realising personal potential, self-fulfillment, seeking personal growth and peak experiences.

Figure 5 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been extended by other writers to include 'levels' ('Cognitive', 'Aesthetic' and 'Transcendence' - helping others achieve self-actualisation). Others have argued that these sources of motivation are all concerned with self-development and self-fulfillment that is rooted in self-actualisation 'personal growth', which is distinctly different to the 1 to 4 level 'deficiency' motivators. Maslow's hierarchical and sequential model has been criticised because in circumstances where people have the freedom to determine their lifecourse, people tend to access and utilise different levels of motivation simultaneously rather than sequentially.

To address this criticism, Alderfer (1980) conflated Maslow's five categories into three categories in his Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG) theory (Table 1).

Table 1 Existence-Relatedness-Growth (ERG) theory (Alderfer, 1980)

Growth	An intrinsic desire for personal development. These include Maslow's intrinsic esteem category and the characteristics included under self-actualisation.
Relatedness	The desire we have for maintaining important interpersonal relationships. These social and status desires require interaction with others. They align with Maslow's social need and the external component.
Existence	Provides our basic material existence requirements. They include Maslow's physiological, safety and material needs.

In contrast to Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, the ERG theory demonstrates that: more than one need may be operative at the same time; that is, needs are not satisfied sequentially. However, if the gratification of a higher-level need is stifled, the desire to satisfy a lower-level need increases.

Carl Rogers, another influential humanistic psychologist working in the therapeutic field, believed that people are basically good, that they are driven to fulfill their potential to actualise themselves and that they have the capacity to choose their own behaviour (Sammons 2009). He also assumed that each of us perceives the world in our own unique way and that, in order to understand what someone does, you have to try and see the world as they see it. The problem is that our society can interfere with our actualising tendency. The things that society (through our parents, teachers, friends, employers), tells us are important are not necessarily the things that are actually good for our development as people. As a consequence, we continually try to fulfill conditions of worth that may be unrealistic or unhelpful as personal goals. Because we perceive that the regard of others is conditional, we only value ourselves in relation to the conditions imposed on us. A gap opens up between the ideal self and the real self, and the wider that gap becomes, the more unhappy we are. To try to deal with this incongruity, we start to distort our perceptions of the world or perhaps to deny aspects of it completely. If we are out of touch with aspects of reality, and if we don't perceive the world and our place within it accurately, how will we ever fulfill our potential - the only outcome that will actually give us a more contented life. So we continually pursue the goals that others have set for us, always believing that the next achievement, the next promotion, the next weight loss or weight pressed in the gym will be the thing that finally makes up happy. Unfortunately, it never is.

Rogers observed that when people first came to see him for treatment, they usually gave a



reason, such as issues with a wife or a husband, or an employer, or with their own uncontrollable behaviour. But invariably, these 'reasons' were not the real problem; there was in fact just one fundamental problem with all the people he saw: They were desperate to become their real selves, to be allowed to drop the false roles or masks through which they were living their lives. They were usually very concerned with what others thought of them and what they ought to be doing in given situations. His role as a therapist was to help the person to come to terms with their immediate experience of life and situations and relinquish

the rigid set of rules about who they believe they must be. Through this process they are

transformed into a person who can ask and decide easily upon the question "What does this mean to me?". They become the person they want to be, not just a reflection of the people and society around them. One aspect of this transformation is that they begin to 'own' all aspects of their selves, to allow totally contradictory feelings. Someone who fully owns all their thoughts and emotions will not always be conventional or conforming, but we can rely on them to be a real person.

Rogers didn't use the word 'happy' when describing the psychological state of healthy people, rather he used the term 'fully functioning person'. This is someone whose mental set-up is such that they are in a position to fulfill their human potential. Fully functional people are:

- Open to experience - they don't distort the world to protect themselves
- Living in the here-and-now - they don't tend to dwell on the past or worry much about the future
- Doing what's good for them - trusting and using their values to guide the choices they make
- Experientially free - they feel as if they are in control of their lives, rather than being overly constrained by the world around them
- Creative - they contribute to the actualisation of others.

Rogers believed that you cannot make a person more fully functioning by telling them how they ought to think, for then we end up imposing yet another set of conditions of worth and that's adding to the problem, not providing a solution. In his view the only change that counts comes from within the person themselves. At the heart of his thinking is the view that life is a flowing process. The fulfilled person, he believed, should come to accept themselves "as a stream of becoming, not a finished product." In other words our sense of wellbeing is always provisional as we continually try to be and become the person we want to be.

## Positive psychology

Research in the 1980s began to actively explore subjective wellbeing as an idea, using the terms happiness and subjective wellbeing relatively interchangeably. However there was early agreement that subjective wellbeing comprised more than just feeling happy at any given moment in time. Diener et al (1999), who did much of the early work aimed at conceptualising subjective wellbeing, stated that:

Subjective well-being is a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional

responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgments of life satisfaction (Diener, et al. 1999:277).

In this conceptualisation, wellbeing comprises two distinct constructs: affect (ie feelings, emotions and mood), and life satisfaction. Affect is broken down into positive and negative emotions, with subjective wellbeing being experienced when there is a preponderance of positive over negative emotions. The life satisfaction component of subjective wellbeing is a cognitive self-evaluation of how satisfied an individual is with their life. Research based on this conceptualisation of subjective wellbeing is termed the hedonic approach, as the focus is on considering what makes life pleasurable and makes people feel good (Kahneman et al 1999). Hedonic approaches to wellbeing depend on what the person themselves thinks would make their life 'better' rather than any objective determination of what others think ought to make their life better.

A different perspective is offered in the eudaimonistic view of wellbeing (*eu* meaning "good" and *daimōn* meaning "spirit") an important concept in Aristotelian ethics and political philosophy. Models of eudaimonia in psychology emerged out of early work on self-actualisation and the means of its accomplishment. Ryff (1989) highlighted the distinction between *eudaimonia wellbeing*, which she identified as psychological wellbeing, and *hedonic wellbeing* or pleasure. Building on Aristotelian ideals of belonging and benefiting others, flourishing, thriving and exercising excellence, she conceptualised eudaimonia as a six-factor structure: autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relations with others.

Although the roots of positive psychology extend back to the thinking of the humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers, it began to develop as a field in its own right in the 1990s and has become the main field for studying wellbeing. Positive psychology is primarily concerned with using the psychological theory, research and intervention techniques to understand the positive, adaptive, creative and emotionally fulfilling aspects of human behaviour (Seligman 1998). Seligman argues (2002) that there are three routes to happiness, namely: living the pleasant life (which enables an individual to experience high levels of positive emotion and gratification), living the good life (which enables one to experience absorption in activities, engagement and flow), and finally living the meaningful life (where one deploys one's strengths in the pursuit of something greater than oneself).

Seligman and other positive psychology researchers posit three overlapping areas of investigation namely:

1. Pleasant Life, or the 'life of enjoyment', which features how people optimally experience, forecast, and savour the positive feelings and emotions that are part of normal and healthy living (eg relationships, hobbies, interests, etc). Despite the attention it is given, Seligman says this most transient element of happiness may be the least important.
2. Engaged or Good Life covers the beneficial effects of immersion, absorption and flow, felt by individuals when optimally engaged with their primary activities. Flow is experienced when there is a positive match between a person's strength and their current task, ie when one feels confident of accomplishing a chosen or assigned task.
3. Meaningful Life, or 'life of affiliation', questions how individuals derive a positive sense of well-being, belonging, meaning, and purpose from being part of and contributing back to

something larger and more permanent than themselves (eg, nature, social groups, organisations, movements, traditions, belief systems).

Seligman's view is that genuine happiness and life satisfaction arises through the slow development of 'character' which is made up of universal virtues which are found across every culture and in the literature of every age. For him character includes wisdom and

knowledge, courage, love and humanity, justice, temperance, and spirituality - among others.

We achieve these virtues by cultivating and nurturing personal strengths, such as originality, valour, integrity, loyalty, kindness and fairness.

Seligman maintains that character traits or personal strengths are both measurable and acquirable, 'there is a difference between talents, which you are born with and which you are therefore automatically good at, and strengths, which you choose to develop.' Talents alone say something about our genes, but virtues and developed talents (making the most of personal strengths) say something about us and the way we have developed ourselves through the things we have done in our lives. In his view it's a mistake to spend your life trying to correct weaknesses. Rather the most success in life together with authentic happiness, will come from developing your strengths. Seligman recommends looking at the basic elements of wellbeing, identifying which ones matter most to you, setting goals and monitoring progress. Simply keeping track of how much time you spend daily pursuing each goal can make a difference, he says, because it's easy to see discrepancies between your goals and what you do.

In his most recent book 'Flourishing', Seligman (2011) defines five elements that make up a person's sense of wellbeing (NB: this applies only for people who are not overly constrained by their circumstances and who have the freedom and agency to choose their life course). Each of these elements can be pursued for its own sake. These are positive emotion, engagement (the feeling of being immersed in a task), relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. In other words his original category of a 'meaningful life' has now been expanded into three categories namely, Meaning and Purpose, Relationships and Accomplishments. Seligman explains the change in his thinking thus.

I used to think that the topic of positive psychology was happiness. I now think that the topic of positive psychology is well-being, that the gold standard for measuring well-being is flourishing, and that the goal of positive psychology is to increase flourishing (Seligman, 2011:13).

According to Dodge et al (2012:225 ) Seligman is conforming to the dominant tradition in which the idea of 'flourishing' has become synonymous with the positive psychology movement; 'positive psychology is the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions' (Gable and Haidt 2005:104).

While there is no doubt that Seligman's ideas are supported by a body of research, his theory of wellbeing has been criticised because it assumes that most people are able to choose how to live their lives, an assumption that is heavily constrained if you are living under a repressive

regime, or in a war or natural disaster zone, and/or when your wellbeing is more or less determined by others. In these situations wellbeing becomes a matter of surviving and trying to live the best possible life in these difficult and constraining circumstances. This criticism applies more generally to all people who are not in control of their own lives. Seligman also ignores the impact of culture - for example, the way that the media shapes people's views of themselves and their motivations - preferring instead to present individuals as largely in control of their individual lives. Critics argue that Seligman's disregard of important topics such as control, autonomy, freedom, consumerism, inequality and injustice in his theory of well-being leads to a naïve, politically conservative view of the world. For some, his world view is far too optimistic - cavalier even - in his calculations about the problems and threats facing us in modern times. Leaving aside inequality or individuals' lack of personal control or agency in changing their lives, there is no acknowledgement of the challenges facing us as human beings such as global warming, or the threats posed by over-consumption of resources or escalating food prices and the extent to which the wellbeing of many people is under threat as complex environmental factors impact on their livelihoods. Perhaps in these sorts of situations the meaningful life becomes a matter of basic needs of survival and of sustaining the important relationships in life while helping your children to have a better life than you are ever likely to know.

In spite of these fundamental concerns, if due consideration can be given to the real worlds of real people and the constraining factors in their lives, Seligman does then offer some tools for thinking about and explaining individuals' perceptions of their wellbeing in countries where people have the freedoms we expect in a modern democratic society.

Before concluding this section we might also mention Csikszentmihalyi, another proponent of positive psychology, who developed his Flow Theory after studying many creative people. His notion of flow is similar to what Seligman terms engagement. 'Flow' is characterised by absorption in an activity to the exclusion of anything else. It represents an optimal state of intrinsic motivation where a person is functioning at their fullest capacity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is the notion that the individual is functioning optimally that reveals that this is an eudaimonic perspective on wellbeing. The fact that creative activities can induce flow, and that flow is a manifestation of wellbeing is of particular interest as this supports claims made by creative people that there is a link between their involvement in being creative and their sense of personal wellbeing.

## Self Determination Theory (SDT)

Self Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (Deci, 1975; Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2008a, 2002). provides another important theoretical underpinning for individuals' wellbeing. At the heart of SDT lies the ontological belief that 'all individuals have natural, innate, and constructive tendencies to develop an ever more elaborated and unified sense of self' (Ryan and Deci, 2002:5). SDT was originally developed to explain motivation but because it is concerned with the development of self with a focus on self-actualisation, it has been conceptualised more recently as a theory of psychological wellbeing (Deci and Ryan, 2008a; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

The developmental process underlying SDT is based on the notion that humans have innate psychological needs. Deci and Ryan postulate that there are three universal psychological

needs:

- competence ('feeling effective in one's on-going interactions with the social environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities')
- autonomy ('being the perceived origin or source of one's own behaviour')
- relatedness ('feeling connected to others, to caring for and being cared for by those others, to having a sense of belongingness both with other individuals and with one's community') (Ryan and Deci, 2002:7-8)

Healthy development, and the experience of intrinsic motivation, ie experiencing eudaimonic wellbeing, depends on the fulfilment of these needs, and humans have the capacity or 'will' to choose how to do this (Deci, 1980). Self-determination is 'the process of utilising one's will' (Deci, 1980:26), ie choosing how to act to satisfy one's needs.

## Social wellbeing

As Seligman demonstrates, relationships are fundamentally important to most people's sense of wellbeing. This is examined more thoroughly through the lens of social wellbeing. Keyes (1998) suggested that there are five dimensions of social wellbeing: social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualisation and social acceptance. These clearly indicate different facets of belonging or affiliation, participation in situations that are meaningful and are valued, the perceptions of significant others and the extent to which socially relevant goals and purposes are realised.

Social wellbeing is strongly related to the concept of 'social capital', particularly the model developed by Putnam (2000), where the social networks that an individual possesses are valuable not only to that individual but also to the community and wider society to which that individual belongs..

social networks have value. They have value to the people in the networks: 'networking' is demonstrably a good career strategy, for example. But they also have 'externalities', that is, effects on bystanders. Dense social networks in a neighbourhood – barbecues or neighbourhood associations, etc – can deter crime, for example, even benefiting neighbours who do not go to the barbecues or belong to the associations. Social capital can be embodied in bonds among family, friends and neighbours, in the workplace, at church, in civic associations, perhaps even in Internet-based 'virtual communities'. Although we do not, strictly speaking, include social trust within the core definition of social capital, norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness are a nearly universal concomitant of dense social networks. For that reason, social trust – that is, the belief that others around you can be trusted – is itself a strong empirical index of social capital at the aggregate level. High levels of social trust in settings of dense social networks often provide the crucial mechanism through which social capital affects aggregate outcomes. Indeed, so central is this relationship that some researchers include social trust within their definition of social capital (Helliwell and Putnam 2004 1436).

The impact of social capital on an individual's wellbeing is most clearly demonstrated in terms of the levels of trust, reciprocity and honesty found in any community. The communities we inhabit affect our social wellbeing. People who have partners, close friends and confidants, friendly neighbours and supportive co-workers are less likely to experience sadness, loneliness, low self-esteem and problems with eating and sleeping. Indeed, a common finding

from research on the correlates of life satisfaction is that subjective well-being is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections. In fact, people themselves report that good relationships with family members, friends or romantic partners – far more than money or fame – are prerequisites for their happiness. Moreover, the 'happiness effects'

of social capital in these various forms seem to be quite large, compared with the effects of material affluence (Helliwell and Putnam 2004: 1437)

For many adults work constitutes one of their most important social environments. Sociologists and psychologists have theorised the nature of work (activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a result) which people do in social settings, and which is relevant to understanding wellbeing. White (2011) distinguishes between autonomous work where an individual engages in work (paid or not) because they have personally chosen to do so for self-fulfilment, and 'heteronomous' work in which we engage because we have to. Most jobs and formal educational settings require people to spend their time engaged in heteronomous work (White, 2011: 69-72), which leaves people few opportunities to also engage in work of their choosing which would provide greater fulfilment and, therefore, wellbeing.

Amabile and Kramer's (2011) study of the significant events people encountered in over 12,000 days of work, found that work was important and personal to most people. They want to succeed and they want to make a contribution to something. They recognise that everyone has an "Inner Work Life": the constant stream of emotions, perceptions and motivations that people experience as they participate in work. Throughout the day, people react to events that happen and try to make sense out of them. These emotional reactions and perceptions affect their motivation for the work - all of which have a powerful influence on their performance and wellbeing. When people have a positive inner work life, they are more creative, productive, committed to the work, and collegial toward their coworkers. And when they have poor inner work lives, the opposite is true - they are less creative, productive, committed and collegial. The single most important factor in creating good and bad inner work life is simply making progress on meaningful work, which they called the "progress principle." For the progress principle to take effect, the work must be meaningful in some way to the person.

Their study identified four categories of nourishers that fostered wellbeing, productivity and creativity in the work environment (Amabile and Kramer 2011: 131- 33) namely:

- 1 Respect - managerial actions determine whether people feel respected or disrespected; recognition is the most important of these actions.
- 2 Encouragement - for example, when managers or colleagues are enthusiastic about an individual's work and when managers express confidence in the capabilities of people doing the work, this increases their sense of self-efficacy. Simply by sharing a belief that someone can do something challenging and trusting them to get on with it greatly increases the self-belief of the people who are engaging with the challenge.
- 3 Emotional support - people feel more connected to others at work when their emotions are validated. This goes for events at work, like frustrations when things are not going smoothly and little progress is being made, and for significant events in someone's personal life. Recognition of emotion, and empathy with it can do much to alleviate negative and amplify positive feelings with beneficial results for all concerned.

- 4 Affiliation - people want to feel connected to their colleagues, so actions that develop bonds of mutual trust, appreciation and affection are essential in nourishing the spirit of participation.

We might speculate that these nourishing factors are likely to nourish a person's sense of wellbeing in social situations other than work.

## Capability theory

The field of economics provides another conceptual lens for thinking about wellbeing. As mentioned above, one of the main criticisms of theory developed within the humanistic and positive fields of psychology is that they make assumptions about the freedoms people have for determining their own lives. Capability is the power or ability to do something or to perform a certain role. It is an important concept in education and human development; it refers to what Sen (1992:40) calls 'the various combinations of functionings (beings and doings) that [a] person can achieve'. It also reflects a 'person's freedom to lead one type of life or another ... to choose from possible livings' (ibid 40). Our capability represents 'the real opportunity that we have to accomplish what we value' (ibid 31). Sen draws attention to the inter-relationship between the functionings and beings that enable people to accomplish something and the opportunity they have (available to them) for utilising these functionings to achieve something that they and/or others value. The difference between a capability and functioning is the same as between an opportunity to achieve something and the actual fulfilment of that thing. The notion of capability is 'essentially one of freedom - the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead' (Dreze and Sen 1995:11). These authors emphasise the importance of choosing a life one has reason to value, where choices have been determined through considered thought and reflected upon.

Nussbaum (2000) a philosopher who worked closely with Sen created a list of ten capabilities, ie real opportunities based on personal and social circumstance namely:

1. Life. Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Bodily Health. Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
3. Bodily Integrity. Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought. Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
5. Emotions. Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to

- grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
6. Practical Reason. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
  7. Affiliation.
    - Being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
    - Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species.
  8. Other Species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
  9. Play. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
  10. Control over one's Environment.
    - Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.
    - Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

Although Nussbaum does not claim that her list is definitive and unchanging, she strongly advocates the need for a list of central human capabilities. This contrasts with Sen who believes that lists of capabilities run counter to the underlying value of a capabilities approach which attempts to redirect development theory away from a reductive focus on a minimally decent life towards a more holistic account of human well being for all people.

The capabilities approach has been highly influential in development policy where it has shaped the evolution of the human development index (HDI), has been much discussed in philosophy, and is increasingly influential in a range of social sciences.

## MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING

The OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being (OECD 2013) adopt a broad definition of subjective well-being.

Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective reactions of people to their experiences. (OECD 2013:29)



This definition is intended to be inclusive in nature, encompassing the full range of different aspects of subjective well-being. In particular, the reference to good mental functioning should be considered as including concepts such as interest, engagement and meaning, as well as satisfaction and affective states.

The OECD conceptual framework for subjective well-being has three dimensions:

- 1) Life evaluations, which involve a cognitive evaluation of the respondent's life (or aspects of it) as a whole.
- 2) Measures of affect, which capture the feelings experienced by the respondent at a particular point in time, and
- 3) The eudaimonic aspect reflecting a person's sense of purpose and engagement.

## Self evaluation of life

Life evaluations capture a reflective assessment on a person's life or some specific aspect of it. This can be an assessment of "life as a whole" or something more focused. Such assessments are the result of a judgement by the individual rather than the description of an emotional state. Pavot and Diener et al (1991) describe the process of making an evaluation of this sort as involving the individual constructing a "standard" that they perceive as appropriate for themselves, and then comparing the circumstances of their life to that standard. This provides a useful way to understand the concept of life evaluation, although in practice it is not clear whether the process of comparison is a conscious one if respondents more commonly use a heuristic to reach a decision. Life evaluations are based on how people remember their experiences (Kahneman et al, 1999) and can differ significantly from how they actually experienced things at the time. In particular, the so-called "peak-end rule" states that a person's evaluation of an event is based largely on the most intense (peak) emotion experienced during the event and by the last (end) emotion experienced, rather than the average or integral of emotional experiences over time. It is for this reason that life evaluations are sometimes characterised as measures of "decision utility" in contrast to "experienced utility" (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006).

The most commonly used measures of life evaluation refer to "life as a whole" or some similar over-arching construct. However, in addition to global judgements of life as a whole, it is also possible for people to provide evaluations of particular aspects of their lives such as their health or their job. In fact, there is good evidence that a strong relationship exists between overall life evaluations and evaluations of particular aspects of life. One of the most well

documented measures of life evaluation - the Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins 1996). The adult PWI scale contains eight items of satisfaction, each one corresponding to a quality of life domain as: standard of living, health, life achievement, personal relationships, personal safety, community-connectedness, future security and spirituality-religion. Individual item scores on a scale of 0-100 are summed using equal weights to calculate an overall index.

## Affect

Affect is the term psychologists use to describe a person's feelings. Measures of affect can be

thought of as measures of particular feelings or emotional states, typically with reference to a particular point in time. Such measures capture how people experience life rather than how they remember it (Kahneman and Krueger, 2006). While an overall affective evaluation of life can be captured in a single measure, affect has at least two distinct hedonic dimensions: positive affect and negative affect. Positive affect captures positive emotions such as the experience of happiness, joy and contentment. Negative affect, on the other hand, comprises the experience of unpleasant emotional states such as sadness, anger, fear and anxiety. While positive affect is thought to be largely uni-dimensional (in that positive emotions are strongly correlated with each other and therefore can be represented on a single axis of measurement), negative affect may be more multi-dimensional. For example, it is possible to imagine at one given moment feeling anger but not fear or sadness.

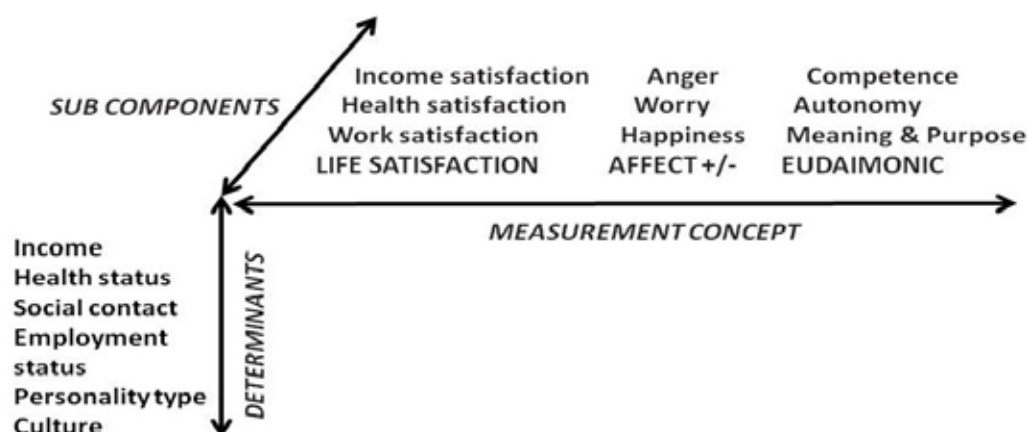
## Eudaimonia

In addition to life evaluations and affect, which focus on a person's experiences (current or recalled), there is a substantial literature focused on the concept of good psychological functioning, sometimes also referred to as "flourishing" or "eudaimonic" well-being (eg Huppert et al 2009). Eudaimonic well-being goes beyond the respondent's reflective evaluation and emotional states to focus on functioning and the realisation of the person's potential. In developing the questionnaire on psychological well-being for the European Social Survey, for example, Huppert et al (2009) characterised the "functioning" element of well-being as comprising autonomy, competence, interest in learning, goal orientation, sense of purpose, resilience, social engagement, caring and altruism. Eudaimonic conceptions of subjective well-being thus differ significantly from the evaluative and affective components in that they are concerned as much with capabilities as with final outcomes and thus have a more instrumental focus. Because evaluating eudaimonia draws on both psychological and humanist literature, which identifies key universal "needs" or "goals", the approach represents a useful response to the criticism that the measurement of subjective well-being is "happiology", or built purely on hedonistic philosophy, and also aligns itself with many people's perceptions of what is important to value in life.

## Relationship between life evaluation, affect and eudaimonia

Life evaluation, positive and negative affect and eudaimonic well-being are all conceptually distinct. But it is helpful to have a conceptual model of how they might relate to each other. Figure 6 provides a simple model of the different elements of a measurement framework for subjective well-being. The model emphasises three dimensions involved in the measurement of subjective well-being. These are: 1) the measurement concept; 2) the sub-components of well-being; and 3) determinants. It should be noted that the list of determinants and sub-components in Figure 6 is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Its purpose is to serve as an organising framework for thinking about the scope of the topics covered in a survey of subjective wellbeing and reflects the topics most likely to be of relevance for official statistics and policy-making, but other topics might be included that reflect the purpose and focus of the survey.

Figure 6 A simple model of subjective well-being OECD (2013:33)



## ACTION FOR IMPROVING WELLBEING

The UK Government's *Foresight* programme uses evidence from across a wide range of disciplines to analyse and develop policy options to address key issues that will impact on UK society over the next 10-20 years. Within this programme the 2008 Mental Capital and Wellbeing Project analysed the most important drivers of mental capital and well-being to develop a long-term vision for maximising mental capital and wellbeing in the UK for the benefits of society and the individual. From the evidence that was collated a number of challenge areas have been identified (Learning through Life, Mental Health, Well-being and Work, Learning Difficulties, and Mental Capital through Life). The centre for wellbeing at nef (the new economics foundation) was commissioned to develop a set of evidence-based actions to improve personal well-being that had wide-ranging appeal.

The aim of developing such a set of actions is to communicate behaviour changes at the *individual* level. They have been formulated to be as accessible as possible to all individuals in

the UK population, in trying to overcome both available resources and favourable external conditions (like work, home life and physical health). What the model does not explain is the role of enablers (infrastructure and motivators) at the societal level, which have the capacity to encourage and sustain individual behaviour change.

From a broad evidence base, a long list of actions emerged which was reduced to a set of five key messages on the evidence around social relationships, physical activity, awareness, learning and giving. These messages have been organised into five key actions (Table 2) each offering examples of more specific behaviours that enhance well-being (nef 2011:8).

The nef report explains the reasons underlying the choice of action and the evidence on which the action is based. It is known that each action theme (connect, be active, take notice, keep learning, give) positively enhances personal wellbeing. The intervention model predicts that following the advice of these interventions will enhance personal well-being by making a person feel good and by bolstering his/her mental capital. The actions mainly influence well-being and mental capital by interacting at the level of 'functioning'. They may not be sufficient

to denote 'good functioning' in its entirety but, according to the evidence base to date, they play an essential role in satisfying needs for positive relationships, autonomy, competency and security (Akad et al 2008:13)

**Table 2** Short-listed actions to enhance personal wellbeing (Akad et al 2008, nef 2011:8)

*Connect* With the people around you. With family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. At home, work, school or in your local community. Think of these as the cornerstones of your life and invest time in developing them. Building these connections will support and enrich you every day.

*Be active* Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Garden. Dance. Exercising makes you feel good. Most importantly, discover a physical activity you enjoy; one that suits your level of mobility and fitness

*Take notice* Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Remark on the unusual. Notice the changing seasons. Savour the moment, whether you are on a train, eating lunch or talking to friends. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling. Reflecting on your experiences will help you appreciate what matters to you

*Keep Learning* Try something new. Rediscover an old interest. Sign up for that course. Take on a different responsibility at work. Fix a bike. Learn to play an instrument or how to cook your favourite food. Set a challenge you will enjoy achieving. Learning new things will make you more confident, as well as being fun to do.

*Give* Do something nice for a friend, or a stranger. Thank someone. Smile. Volunteer your time. Join a community group. Look out, as well as in. Seeing yourself, and your happiness, linked to the wider community can be incredibly rewarding and will create connections with the people around you.

The nef approach assumes that an individual participating in an action that is consistent with one of the six action themes will promote their own positive feedback loops so they reinforce similar and more frequent wellbeing-promoting behaviours (Akad et al 2008:14). For example, 'giving' by doing something nice for someone is likely to provoke a thank you, which increases a feeling of satisfaction and the likelihood of doing something nice for someone again.

Alternatively, learning something new (like how to cook your favourite food) may lead to a sense of achievement and, as a result, a greater sense of competence and autonomy, which, in turn, leads to feelings of contentment and self-worth. This is reflected in research findings showing that simply having positive emotions changes how people think and behave and enhances psychological resources like optimism and resilience (Huppert 2008: 3).

The feedback loop between wellbeing and mental capital operates in both directions and represents a multitude of possible relationships between the two. For example, it makes sense

that feeling happy can lead to greater resilience or that higher self-esteem leads to greater feelings of satisfaction (Frederick and Joiner 2002). As Huppert (2008:3) summarises,

'positive emotions can lead to positive cognitions which in turn contribute to further positive emotions'.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFEWIDE EDUCATION

This synthesis of perspectives on wellbeing was undertaken in order to examine possible relationships between wellbeing and individual's lifewide learning and development, and how these relationships might be incorporated into strategies for lifewide education.

The concept of wellbeing comprises two main elements: feeling good and functioning well. Feelings of happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity, engagement and fulfillment are characteristic of someone who has a positive experience of their life. Equally important for wellbeing is our functioning in the world and the opportunities we have to be ourselves and become the people we want to become. Experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose and experiencing achievement relating to these purposes, are all important attributes of individual's subjective wellbeing (Huppert 2008). These are important concerns for lifewide education which seeks to encourage individuals to view their life positively as a resource and opportunity for developing themselves, to be who they want to be and become the person they would like to become.

The emphasis in lifewide education is on raising individual's self-awareness of the way they are living their life and engaging with everyday situations within it in order to achieve the things that they value and find meaningful and significant. The approach also emphasises the functionings they need to develop in order to achieve the things they value. All these things are likely to be important to individual's sense of wellbeing. Viewed from this perspective a lifewide educational approach is concerned with nurturing and improving an individual's sense of wellbeing.

There is however another context for wellbeing, a context where people are struggling to cope with their circumstances, where their choices are constrained or their freedom to live the life they would like to live is suppressed. The primary reason for lifewide education for people in these situations is to encourage self-awareness of actions that will enable people to cope with or even escape the situations and circumstances they don't want to inhabit. Viewed from this perspective a lifewide educational approach is also improving individual's sense of wellbeing.

Lifewide learning considers people as whole persons who sense, experience and feel as well as think rationally and creatively about their world which they view subjectively as well as objectively. In this respect the discourse of holism (p3) with concerns for people located in an ecology - physical, biological, social - is entirely consistent with lifewide learning. The Aristotelian view of wellbeing as a person's idealised journey to 'actualise' all their potential (p3) is also relevant and reflected in the concepts of humanistic psychology and positive psychology.

While most people would relate their wellbeing to how they feel about their life and their achievement of what they value in life, the definition provided by Dodge et al (2012:229-30)

featuring the balance point between an individual's resource pool and the challenges faced, provides a means of inquiry into those aspects of a person's life where their resources and agency do not match the challenges or opportunities they are facing or choosing to face. People often challenge themselves by putting themselves into unfamiliar contexts or situations to deal with problems they have not encountered before and these contexts are particularly effective for personal development. Alternatively, people may be forced into such situations by other people who have control over their lives. Dodge et al (ibid) provide tools to help people examine their resources for dealing with their contexts and situations that might be adapted to the lifewide learning context.

The conceptual framework developed by White 2008 (Figure 4) enables us to appreciate both the interdependence of the subjective, material and relational conditions of our life and to view these in their historical and evolving context. It reinforces the view that we can do something about our own wellbeing. It could be used as an aid to thinking by lifewide learners to reflect on their particular circumstances and perhaps the contexts in particular aspects of their lives perhaps where they are not so happy with their situations.

The conceptual ideas of Maslow (Figure 5) and Alderfer (Table 1) provide lifewide learners with a framework for explaining why they choose to do the things they do to satisfy their different needs and interests. Perhaps the significance of the spectrum of needs identified by these authors is that it can apply to any context or set of personal circumstances. Furthermore, because life is so unpredictable and contrary, the balance of needs and interests driving learning activity in an individual's life will change through time. When examining or reflecting upon any set of lifewide learning activities, a learner might use these as tools to aid their thinking about the motives for their own need or interest-driven learning.

Rogers' ideas on becoming a person are also relevant to lifewide learning since the goal of any lifewide learner is to become more of the person they are and they are trying to become. His characteristics for a 'fully functioning person' whose mental functioning is such that they are in a position to fulfill their potential are the sort of characteristics we might expect of an effective lifewide learner namely: open to experience; living in the here-and-now [and making the most of the opportunities they have in their lives] ; doing what's good for themselves but also contributing to the [wellbeing and] actualisation of others, and being experientially free - being in control of their lives and developing themselves so they can have more control.

Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory (SDT) adds to the idea that will is central to the choices we make in life, choices that impact on our own wellbeing and choices that lead to activities and experiences through which we develop as a person. Self-determination is 'the process of utilising one's will' (Deci, 1980:26), ie choosing how to act to satisfy one's needs. Ryan and Deci's three universal psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2002:7-8), provide learners with a tool to enable them to think about and interpret their own decisions and actions.

Positive psychology also has much relevance to the concept and practice of lifewide learning which is fundamentally optimistic in its outlook and its concern to help people develop

themselves into the people they want to become. The challenge for lifewide learning is to recognise that people, even in the developed democratic society in which these ideas are being developed, do not have access to the same opportunities in life; that some people are severely constrained in what they are able to do. The notion of capability as 'essentially one

of freedom - the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead', a life one has reason to value, where choices have been determined through considered thought and reflected upon (Dreze and Sen 1995:11), must be the fundamental tenet on which lifewide learning and education are founded. The list of capabilities developed by Nussbaum (2000) - the real opportunities people have regardless of personal and social circumstance - would seem to be fundamental capabilities and related functionings on which a universal understanding of lifewide learning can be based.

Figure 7 Five elements of wellbeing (Seligman 2011)



Wellbeing is an abstract idea that is difficult to grasp. Seligman's categories of purposes that underlie our actions that both give us pleasure (together with the full range of emotions in life) and fulfilment, in the sense of achieving or realising things we value in life, provide another useful aid to thinking about and understanding our own wellbeing. Even something as simple as the picture on the left can provide us with a tool to help us think about our own wellbeing.

Relationships are fundamental to most people's wellbeing and to their lifewide learning and personal development: our own wellbeing survey (Willis in press) demonstrates just how important they are. The relationships an individual has with people and groups of people are capable of both nourishing and damaging their sense of wellbeing. Seligman's ideas

represented in the picture, emphasise relationships in terms of caring and giving to others, but relationships can and often are important to all other dimensions of his framework. An important part of the process of lifewide learning is to develop greater awareness of the learner's relationships in supporting and enabling them to learn and develop - to fulfill their own potentialities, and in doing so contribute to their sense of wellbeing. The four categories of nourishers that are known to foster wellbeing, productivity and creativity in the work environment - respect, encouragement, emotional support and affiliation (Amabile and Kramer 2011) - could be also used as prompts to encourage reflection on individuals' relationships in the day to day situations and social environments they inhabit.

A whole of life approach to individual's learning and development, which considers our everyday life as the most valuable resource we have for learning and emphasises awareness of purposes, functionings and opportunity for self-improvement and growth, must be directly concerned with improving individual's wellbeing. Lifewide education encourages individuals to create personal development plans (PDP) that address their purposes, functionings and opportunities for self-improvement thus contributing directly to an individual's evolving sense of wellbeing. One of the ways in which the PDP process might be more closely linked to an

individual's subjective wellbeing is to design a structured process that raises their own awareness of their subjective wellbeing through for example a questionnaire or conversation with a mentor informed by a set of prompts aimed at drawing out an individual's perceptions of their own wellbeing.

The PDP process could also be enhanced by the use of tools to aid thinking and reflection which could be derived from some of the perspectives offered in this synthesis. For example, Seligman's five elements of wellbeing, or nef's six actions for improving personal wellbeing.

## CONCLUSION

The primary reason for examining the idea of wellbeing was to enhance understanding of how it relates to lifewide learning and personal development. The perspectives brought together in this chapter indicates that it is an important idea for lifewide learning.

Practice in supporting lifewide learning and personal development is being formed around ideas of raising awareness of the learner of their own goals in life, or their own circumstances and the ways and means that they might achieve their goals (eg see Guidance for Lifewide Development Award<sup>1</sup>). The lifewide learning process encourages and enables individuals to see and appreciate themselves as a whole person encouraging and helping them become more of the person they want to become. Because of these fundamental goals, there should be a causal link between an individual's active participation in lifewide learning and personal development and their evolving appreciation of their own sense of wellbeing. This is an assertion that seems to be born out in a recent survey of individual's wellbeing (Willis in press).

Attempts to promote individuals' lifewide learning and personal development should be mindful that in doing so they are also engaging with the motivations, activities and experiences that also engender a person's sense of wellbeing. When people pursue purposes that result in experiences that are more than fleetingly pleasurable, ie that are personally fulfilling and provide a sense of achievement, they are satisfying needs, interests and purposes that are fundamentally important to them as a person. Designs to support lifewide learning can honour such endeavours and encourage learners to be more aware of this important relationship. The use of simple reflective tools, questionnaires, conversations with mentors or significant others, and reflective conversations with themselves can all help learners develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their own wellbeing and how they maintain and develop this aspect of themselves.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.lifewideaward.com/guidance--tools.html>