

GALLUP WELLBEING RESEARCH (Rath & Harter 2010)

This short document examines the Gallup research published in 2010 from over 150,000 respondents in 150+ countries. Gallup have had a leading interest in longevity, wellbeing etc since Dr George Gallup led studies on the subject from the 1960s.

Wellbeing's relevance has risen to the fore in 2011 due to the increasing focus of Nobel laureates', scientists', psychologists', economists and now politicians' focus on the field. This is not simply for altruistic reasons. As Gallup's own CEO said recently, "We use positive psychology with our staff because it works. If yelling at them was shown to work, I'd do that."

Consideration of "Wellbeing" is having an increasing impact upon Western political momentum and policy implementation. This is because it has a direct and very significant impact upon GDP, Health, Employment, Literacy and Poverty. These are *the* agenda topics for any political party. Addressing them is what will get them in power and keep them there. Economically they are the most significant impactors upon any nation's budgets, perhaps excepting Defence.

However, even the military are now overtly and publically focusing upon the wellbeing and resilience of military personnel and their families. Perhaps this is due to one of the catalysts behind wellbeing, thriving, flourishing and positive psychology is Dr Marty Seligman, whose early work involved improving the resilience of American soldiers under interrogation!

This study concluded that there are five main elements of wellbeing, and focusing on any in isolation can lead to feelings of failure: the elements are interdependent. But, we all do it.

When asked what the "best possible future would look like" (a positive psychological solutions-focused "miracle question"), respondents gave disproportionate weight to health and wealth. The five elements differentiate between a thriving life and a surviving one. Fortunately we can do something about all of them.

66% of people do well in 1+ element, but only 7% thrive in all five. Spirituality/life motivators run through all elements...and we can see that having work positively influences all five..

Humans allow short-term decisions and desires to over-ride our long-term wellbeing - cake, retail therapy, work vs family etc – especially if we're depressed. As welfare to work providers there is much here that we can learn which can positively impact upon our activities with the unemployed. For example, the research makes clear that people need to find short-term incentives with an immediate benefit that are consistent with long-term objectives. In the context of welfare to work activities, although the long-term benefits of getting a job (ie income, self-esteem, social confidence) are desirable, we need to counter the short-term negatives such as fear of failure, embarrassment, awkwardness in a new environment etc.

In the short document below, I have paraphrased and highlighted the core elements of Gallup's gargantuan piece of work, and contextualised it to our marketplace, supported by other pertinent research.

1. CAREER WELLBEING

“Do you like what you do each day?” Only 20% of respondents give a strong “yes”.

Fundamentally, to keep humans happy, we all need something to do and look forward to each day. This is why work is important to our wellbeing, and depression can set-in when out of work. The first thing people generally ask when meeting is “what do you do?”

People with high Career Wellbeing are twice as likely to be thriving overall.

The Economic Journal has published a landmark study of 130,000 people over several decades that showed that unemployment is the ONLY major life event that people do not get over within 5 years – surpassing even the death of a spouse. This is especially true for 12mths+ unemployed men.

Unemployment impacts upon self-esteem, reduces of regular social contact, lowers income, and adds to daily boredom: these massively affect wellbeing. You don’t have to earn a paycheck to counter these: there’s a difference between “work” and “employment”...but what matters most is being “engaged” in what you do. Having a say, a manager that listens, and enjoying your work.

In fact, being disengaged from a career means you are more than twice as likely to be diagnosed with depression in the next year. This means anti-depressants, additional disability benefit, less incentive to work and more isolation = more depression. It is a downward spiral.

If your manager primarily focuses on your strengths, your chances of being actively disengaged decrease to 1%. To be engaged, you have to have the opportunity to use your strengths every day (T Rath 2007, Gallup). In 1958, a study of those aged 95+ found that of the 331 men interviewed, their average retirement age was 80, and 86% reported having FUN doing their job.

If we focus on and use strengths instead of failures, people are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs and three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life. (T Rath 2007).

So focusing upon a job that utilises strengths rather than money will improve people’s sustainability in employment, and long-term wellbeing and health. This has an enormous multiplier effect on reducing public budgets.

2. SOCIAL WELLBEING

Your life's most memorable events and experiences (best and most agonising) always involve someone else. Yet we often under-estimate the impact of our closest relationships/connections.

Emotions are increasingly scientifically proven to spread from one person to the next. A happy friend causes you to smile, which improves your day and you go on to improve someone else's. We synchronise moods with those around us.

Your odds of being happy, if a direct connection is happy, increase by 15%. If a friend of your connection is happy, your odds still increase 10%. Even if a friend's friend's friend is happy, you are 6% more likely to be happy (12,000 people over 30yrs Fowler, Christakis - Harvard 2008).

If 6% seems insignificant, a \$10,000 increase in salary is shown to increase happiness by 2%. Thus the health & wellbeing of people significantly affects that of their connections. If you are in an unhappy, unemployed family setting, there will be a significant affect on your wellbeing. If you improve the wellbeing of one person, then they will have a marked affect on their connections.

We can tell unemployed people that their actions will help to improve the wellbeing of their friends and family, and to try to overcome the alienation and embarrassment of going for a job. Interviewees must recognise that any mockery from family and friends is simply their own fears and embarrassment being taken out on the interviewee.

If your best friend has a healthy diet, you are 5X more likely to have a healthy diet. If your spouse becomes obese, you are 37% more likely to become obese. These connections are a stronger predictor than your parents and genetics.

Thus if we influence people's friends and get them into work, we are likely to impact upon that person. Also, getting jobs via friends is one of the best methods of getting people into work, and it reinforces/compliments the friend.

In a Swedish study in 2010, of 70 people that got work, only 1 did so through the traditional route of advertised jobs. The others were mostly through a friend/relative, going and doing work experience and taking temporary work. Employers rarely hire people not working in the last year – so replying to advertised positions are only one small option.

Relationships serve as a buffer during tough times – they assist with resilience. People with very few social ties are twice as likely to die from heart disease or catch colds – even though they have much less social contact!

To “have a thriving day” we need 6 hours of social time a day (140,000 Americans in Gallup-Healthways Wellbeing Poll 2008).

Social time at work even helps significantly: idle chit-chat has been shown to improve productivity (Economist 2009).

3. FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Despite many research articles showing that wealth doesn't make you happy, a Gallup poll across 132 countries showed that there IS a relationship between GDP and Wellbeing. BUT beyond having the wealth to purchase necessities, the greatest influences on happiness and wellbeing is *spending money on others*.

A Harvard Study in 2008 showed that when given up to \$20 to spend on oneself, a charity or others, those that spent on a charity or others received a significant boost in wellbeing, compared to no increase in those who spent it on themselves.

In fact, when depressed, it is proven that we spend much more on an item than we usually would, and a personal shopping spree adds to depression in the medium to long-term.

Solnick & Hemenway 1998 showed that around half of people would choose to earn \$50K when those around them earned \$25K, instead of earning \$100K when their peers earned \$200K. That's completely irrational...but completely in line with the human nature of comparison.

Comparison is particularly evident when one is not feeling fulfilled and do not have strong relationships...Those "have nots" tend to be more concerned with "keeping up with the Joneses", and can get into debt through spending sprees (Thaler 1999). They literally buy-into a celebrity culture for a short-term fix for their feeling of inadequacy and depression. But ultimately this feeds their problems, discontent and depression.

Humans also strive to possess "status symbols" - such as the latest TV and mobile device - to overcome feelings of loss of status or failure. However, these activities can often put us into debt, compounding problems.

Financial Wellbeing is really about a sense of financial security and lack of worry, rather than absolute measures of wealth. It is the *perception* that you have more than enough money to do what you want to do that has 3X more impact than your income alone on overall wellbeing. In fact, focusing solely on the accumulation of wealth can even reduce our wellbeing.

The fundamental tenets of Financial Wellbeing are:

- being satisfied with your standard of living
- expenditure on *experiences* rather than material goods
- fiscal prudence – automatic direct debits ("default systems") of savings (to provide for the future) and bills – lessening worry
- give to others

4. PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Every bite and drink we take has a *net positive* or *net negative* impact on our health. There are hundreds of moments each week where we make these seemingly insignificant decisions. Having some fries actually seems to have no immediate net negative effect...but it all builds up. A single meal high in saturated fats actually does have the short term impact of reducing blood flow to our bodies and brains, producing a “high-fat hangover”.

Our Omega 6 (found in meat & vegetable oils): Omega 3 (found in fatty fish, nuts and seeds) ratio has gone up from 2:1 to 10:1. This has significant brain function and body repair implications.

People with high physical wellbeing also “set defaults” – they shop well so there aren’t temptations in the house and they usually make their own lunches for work.

Average sleep in western society is reducing each year: now 6.7 hours, below the 7-8 hours needed to “reset” the brain and body (above 9 hours sleep is also detrimental to mental activity). New research shows the brain finds solutions whilst we sleep. Meditation is being scientifically shown to have a similar impact upon neural pathways to aid decision-making, problem-solving and health.

20 minutes of exercise is proven to improve our mood for up to 12 hours.

In terms of economics, 62% of US personal bankruptcies had a medical cause. Healthcare accounts for 16% of GDP in the US, and it is growing each year (a family’s health insurance cost rose from \$5,700 in 1999 to \$13,000 in 2009).

75% of these costs are due to preventable conditions (stress, tobacco use, lack of physical activity, poor food choices).

People with thriving physical wellbeing exercise regularly and are in a better mood all day. They make net positive food choices and have higher energy and sharper thinking each day. They sleep well to process what they learned the day before and get a good start to the new day. They look better, feel better and live longer.

5. COMMUNITY WELLBEING

This one element can be the differentiator between a good life and a great one. It starts with a basic sense of security where you live – in terms of crime and environmental contaminants. Research showed that people like somewhere aesthetically and socially pleasing – parks, trails, playgrounds, social locations & nightlife.

The key influencer, though, is community involvement: belonging to groups that help others and the environment. This is known as “WELL-DOING”.

When people with thriving wellbeing are asked about their greatest contribution they’d made in life, invariably they mentioned the impact they’d had on another person or group of people.

No gift is as valuable as our time. When we do things for others, we see how we make a difference. This gives us CONFIDENCE in our own ability to create change. This could have a significant impact on someone’s employability.

Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer and Snyder (1998) showed that adolescents involved in volunteering have higher future aspirations, higher self-esteem and increased motivation towards schoolwork. It is reasonable to extrapolate that the impact upon adults will be at least equal to these outcomes.

Altruistic behaviour is shown to increase longevity. In fact, as Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam described, “if you belong to no groups but decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying in the next year *by half*.” Thus your groups and community involvement could simply focus upon your existing interests - sport, art, craft, dancing etc – to have a positive impact upon your Community Wellbeing.

People often do not volunteer or “opt in”, however. For example in Europe, where citizens have to Opt In to organ donation, the rates are 4.3-27.5%. In European nations where you have to opt out, the rates are 89.5-99.9%.

The biggest influence on a person’s actions is peer pressure. Most people didn’t quit smoking because of the long-term health issues, they did it because friends stopped, and restaurants, pubs and employers literally left them out in the cold.

Your success rates with weight loss, alcoholism etc are all greatly improved if you undertake the challenge with others (Wing & Jeffery 1999: if you join a weight-loss programme with 3 friends/colleagues, your odds of maintaining weight loss improve by 66%).

These principles can be applied to welfare to work activities: trying to get a job whilst those around you (family, friends, group members) have the same aim will certainly improve your chances of gaining and retaining employment.