

Competency & Emotional Intelligence Quarterly

THE JOURNAL OF PERFORMANCE THROUGH PEOPLE

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Wellbeing: a learned skill or God's will?

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Geetu Bharwaney investigates ways of improving individuals' wellbeing and the relevance of the concept of "organisational wellbeing". Drawing on the latest research from the fields of psychology, social sciences and biomedical sciences, she finds a convincing case for the role of emotional intelligence

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Wellbeing: a learned skill or God's will?

38

VOLUME 11 • NUMBER 2 • WINTER 2003/04 • COMPETENCY & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Geetu Bharwaney investigates ways of improving individuals' wellbeing and the relevance of the concept of "organisational wellbeing". Drawing on the latest research from the fields of psychology, social sciences and biomedical sciences, she finds a convincing case for the role of emotional intelligence.

I recently took part in the Royal Society's conference "The science of wellbeing – integrating neurobiology, psychology and social science"¹. This was a gathering of eminent researchers and experts on various dimensions of wellbeing. The experience of being at the conference spurred me to write this article and offer a perspective from my work in the area of emotional intelligence. The question of whether wellbeing is intrinsic or can be learned has intrigued me, hence the phrase "a learned skill or God's will?" in the title of this article. I see this as a variation on the nature versus nurture debate.

In many organisations, we have a "workaholic" culture where people are rewarded for setting and then achieving unrealistic goals. We take less and less time for leisure, with the consequence that increasing numbers of people have "empty lives".

These features of current organisations involve a complex set of variables that go beyond the wellbeing of individuals, and have no obvious or easy answers. Nevertheless, current research is helping us to understand the factors that contribute to individual wellbeing and, crucially for employing organisations, the impact that changes in wellbeing can have on individuals' productivity and the quality of their performance.

DEFINITIONS

Health is defined as "a state of being with physical, cultural, psychosocial, economic and spiritual attributes, not simply the absence of illness"². Wellbeing is defined as "a contented state of being happy

and healthy and prosperous"³; wellness is defined as "a healthy state of wellbeing free from disease"⁴.

RECENT RESEARCH

The thrust of the recent Royal Society conference was that individuals' effective or optimal functioning cannot be understood simply by studying disorder. Rather, it must be approached from a study of what determines sustained positive states, such as happiness, health, positive social behaviour, creativity and work satisfaction.

Some key findings from the conference speakers are presented below. For each topic of the Royal Society conference, I give some background about the expert speaker, their key messages and their findings in relation to "learned skill" or "God's will" and finally explore their conclusions in relation to emotional intelligence. The primary focus of the latter section will be the insights that might be offered from emotional intelligence to help an individual or a team achieve a more optimal state of wellbeing.

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Expert: Barbara Fredrickson, Director of Psychology at the University of Michigan and recipient of the Templeton Positive Psychology prize in 2000 (one of the most prestigious awards in psychology), has co-led a number of research studies based on her "broaden and build" theory of positive emotions.

Key messages:

- Positive emotions have the capacity to help us broaden our

Wellbeing

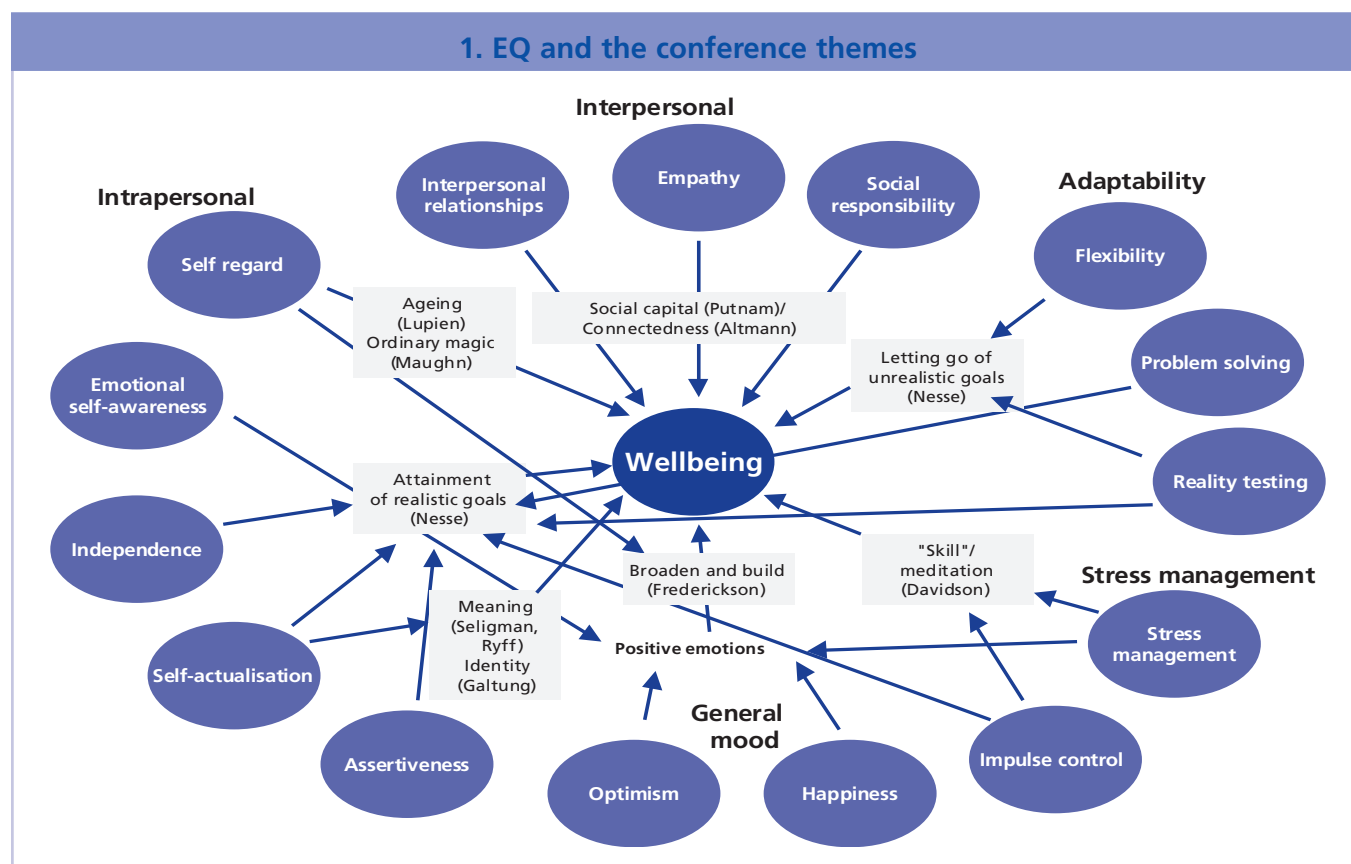
thoughts and reactions in a measurable way. Positive emotions extend our field of vision in a practical sense, but also intuitively. For example, *joy* sparks the urge to play, *interest* stimulates the urge to explore and *contentment* prompts the urge to savour. Negative emotions in contrast seem to elicit a narrower response.

■ Fredrickson's latest research with her collaborator Marcel Losada has involved studying management groups to identify the features that distinguish high-performing teams. The researchers have produced two interesting statistical findings. They have quantified a minimum ratio of positive emotion to negative emotion as 2.901. This level is required to ensure that collaboration in teams explores the full spectrum of expression and balances advocacy and inquiry. In other words, we need almost three times as much positive emotion as negative emotion to work effectively in management teams. It leads me to wonder whether their 2.901 ratio might represent the π of wellbeing.

■ They also concluded that too much "ungrounded" positive emotion (that is, greater than or equal to a ratio of 13.22) would be unproductive⁵. Another study, however, suggests that positive emotions have the capacity to undo the effects of negative emotion.

■ An earlier study of nuns over seven decades found that those who expressed the most positive emotions early in their lives lived on average 10 years longer than those who did not⁶. A recent study has also found that positive emotion is an active ingredient in the trait of "resilience".

Skill or God's will? Barbara Fredrickson's research suggests that the skill of using positive emotions can be learned. Individuals can encourage positive emotions in themselves by asking questions (rather than advocate a particular point of view) when talking to others, by ensuring that they make positive interventions when they say something in a group (rather than negative statements) and concentrating more on others than themselves.



Links with emotional intelligence: Fredrickson's research has created a broaden-and-build model of developing positive emotions, and this has links with 11 of the 15 components of the Bar-On EQ-i (Emotional Quotient Inventory)⁷. The EQ-i represents the most valid and reliable measure of emotional intelligence in the world today (UK accreditation programmes are available through Ei World). These relationships are shown in box 1 on p.39, which also summarises the links between EQ and the topics covered at the Royal Society conference.

In particular, five EQ-i components seem particularly relevant to her model: "emotional self-awareness" (tuning into how you are feeling), "empathy" (reading other people's emotions), "reality testing" (being able to gauge a situation and detect what is happening), "assertiveness" (choosing the appropriate level of self-expression) and "impulse control" (resisting the temptation to engage mouth before brain). By helping others to develop their emotional intelligence in these areas, I believe that we will help them act in a socially responsible way and develop close interpersonal relationships. They are more likely to have self-actualisation (achieving their personal and professional goals), good problem-solving skills and a degree of optimism and happiness.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Expert: Martin Seligman, the person who coined the term "positive psychology", author of *Learned optimism* and *Authentic happiness*, former president of the American Psychological Association and Fox Leadership Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.

Key messages:

■ According to Professor Seligman, there have been two main benefits of the disease/therapy model of health. Fourteen more diseases are now treatable (of which two are curable) and we have developed a science of mental illness that has given us reliable ways of defining previously "fuzzy" concepts and provided some diagnostic methods. As a result, it has been shown that psychology can make people less miserable.

■ He has developed the theory of "positive psychology", which is the study of "positive emotion, positive character traits and positive institutions. It represents a sea change in the social sciences, a change from an exclusive concern with healing damage and repairing weakness towards a psychology of understanding and building virtue and strength."

■ Seligman distinguishes three "happy life" pleasurable states, each of which has different features and skills associated with it. The "pleasant life" concentrates on short-term gain, and involves having as many pleasures as possible. It uses the skills of "amplifying the intensity and duration of each pleasure, savouring and mindfulness". The "good life" is concerned with gratification: a state of absorption and flow, characterised by an absence of feeling and thought. It involves the skill of "identifying your highest strengths". The third state of "meaningful life" represents his ultimate goal. Its features include using an individual's "signature strengths", which include wisdom, courage, love and justice, in the service of a higher cause than their own.

Skill or God's will? Seligman and his colleagues have developed a number of interventions to assist in the development of individuals' positive emotions. I conclude from this that he advocates positive psychology as being a set of skills that can be learned. Some interventions that he highlighted during his presentation are listed in box 2 on p.41. At a national level, he advocates the measurement of a country's life satisfaction as well as its GDP (gross domestic product).

Links with emotional intelligence: Seligman's work raises a fundamental question about the nature of work – to what extent do people have "meaning" at work? Can anyone be truly satisfied if they have no "meaning" in what they are doing? The EQ-i components that I would choose to highlight as particularly relevant to Seligman's work are the 11 mentioned above for Fredrickson, with special emphasis on "reality testing", because some of his work involves a cognitive-behavioural approach to emotions. Seligman's work also has relevance to building "self-regard"; a number of his interventions are concerned with developing self-esteem and pushing the boundaries of self-confidence and experience.

POSITIVE HEALTH

Expert: Dr Carol Ryff, from the Institute on Aging at the University of Wisconsin, has been studying two approaches to the assessment of wellbeing through three very large longitudinal studies. These assessments involve both "eudaimonic" wellbeing (engagement in purposeful pursuits and the realisation of one's talents) and "hedonic" wellbeing (having positive emotions, such as happiness and contentment). Ryff has sought to identify the biology associated with "flourishing" (defined as "possessing multiple aspects of wellbeing") and "resilience" (defined as the capacity to maintain or regain wellbeing

in the face of challenge or adversity). She has used six different sets of physiological measures⁸ to identify whether or not eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing have similar or different biologies.

Key messages:

■ What is radical about Dr Ryff’s approach is that it does not rely on the use of surveys or questionnaires; by taking what are referred to as “biomarkers”, actual assessments of wellbeing are being made, rather than there being a reliance on self-reports (individuals’ subjective perceptions of their own feelings and states). This approach may pave the way for an assessment of the actual functioning of teams and individuals rather than their reported functioning.

■ Her key finding is that there is evidence of eudaimonic wellbeing from all the biological factors she studied, whereas hedonic wellbeing reveals only a single link.

Skill or God’s will? The emphasis within Ryff’s research on actual physiological assessments, rather than reported (and therefore subjective) wellbeing, is a very interesting development in the study of emotions. Although Ryff’s work does not attempt to answer this directly, there is an interesting “chicken-and-egg” question – which comes first: the positive biology of eudaimonic wellbeing or the facts and evidence of living a meaningful life? Her research does provide some interesting evidence of the positive health benefits of having a meaningful life.

Links with emotional intelligence: Again, this research provides compelling evidence for the value of developing higher levels of the EQ-i component of “stress tolerance”. The distinction between eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing may prove particularly useful in designing interventions to help individuals improve their emotional intelligence. It might also provide a useful language in distinguishing those who have a more superficial way of defining their success from those who are working for their longer-term wellbeing.

SUCCESS IN LIFE

Expert: Dr Robert Sternberg of the PACE (Psychology of Abilities, Competencies and Expertise) Center at Yale University defines success as: “*The ability to achieve success in life, given one’s personal standards, within one’s sociocultural context in order to adapt to, shape and select environments via recognition and capitalisation on one’s strengths and correction or compensation for one’s weaknesses.*”

Key messages:

■ Sternberg has identified three aspects of “successful intelligence”: “creative intelligence” (the ability to generate ideas), “analytical intelligence” (the ability to ascertain whether they are “good” ideas) and “practical intelligence” (the ability to make ideas work and to persuade others to implement them).

2. Examples of “positive psychology” interventions

Examples of ways that individuals’ positive emotions can be developed, based on those highlighted by Professor Martin Seligman during his conference presentation.

Gratitude visit

Think of someone who has touched you/been a positive influence for you.
Write a 300-word testimonial about them.
Call them up and ask if you can visit them.
Read the testimonial to them.
Weep.

Blessings

Every night, write down three things that went well.

Perfect day

Design a perfect day and carry it out using savouring techniques.

Surprise

Plan a perfect surprise for someone.
Carry it out.

Gift of time

Plan who you wish to give a gift of time to.
Carry it out.

Engagement at work

Use the list at www.authentic happiness.org to identify your highest strengths.
Recraft your work based on your signature strength.

Strengths family tree

Create a strengths family tree.

The future

What is your vision of a positive future? What legacy do you wish to leave?

For further information, visit www.authentic happiness.org or see Seligman, M (2002) “Authentic happiness”.

■ Intelligence needs to be assessed in its cultural context – for example, practical skills that prove to be a better predictor for health in certain contexts often go unrecognised by academic tests as well as teachers in the classroom.

■ He highlighted five fallacies in life that we run the risk of accepting: **The “unrealistic-optimism fallacy”:** “I’m so smart and powerful, it will work out”;

The “gocentrism fallacy”: “This is about me” – the use of power for self-aggrandisement;

The “omniscience fallacy”: “I know everything”;

The “omnipotence fallacy”: “I have the power to do whatever I like”; and

The “invulnerability fallacy”: “No one can get me”.

■ Sternberg has conducted many cross-cultural studies of intelligence, and he claims that it is impossible to generalise about entire age groups and populations. Each research project shows something unique and distinctive about a particular population.

Skill or God’s will? Sternberg’s work points towards wellbeing as being essentially a skill that can be learned. His work clearly indicates that if you want to increase someone’s intelligence, the intervention needs to be tailored to the individual’s context and existing strengths.

Links with emotional intelligence: What struck me about the list of Sternberg’s five fallacies is that I can see these present in many leaders that I have met, some of which are deeply entrenched ways of being. The EQ-i components that I believe Sternberg is referring to are “flexibility” (to be able to adjust to the particular situation you find yourself in), “reality testing” (being fully tuned into what is happening) and also being able to solve problems.

SOCIAL CONTEXTS

Expert: Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard University, author of *Bowling alone*, has been researching the social contexts that seem to have the most powerful effect on wellbeing. He defines “social capital” as the “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness”.

Key messages:

■ Putnam and his colleagues have found that social networks have

major consequences for many human activities, both individual and collective. The concept of “social capital” is strongly linked to subjective measures of wellbeing.

■ He distinguishes between *bonding* activities, where you meet people with a shared interest and who are like you, and *bridging* activities, where you seek out and build bridges with people who are very different to you.

■ Social capital that involves living in a socially active neighbourhood where people look out for each other can benefit you “whether you go to the barbecues or not”.

Skill or God’s will? Putnam’s work suggests that wellbeing is a skill that can be learned through developing our social capital.

Links with emotional intelligence: Putnam’s work relates to all three components of the “interpersonal” dimension of the EQ-i: “empathy” (being able to read others’ emotions), “social responsibility” (being able to take actions that are in line with a broader sense of benefit to other people) and “interpersonal relationships” (being able to build close relationships).

In my work with executives on developing the EQ-i component of “interpersonal relationship”, I advocate the creation of a relationship chart to take stock of all male and female relationships and then to plot the extent to which five qualities are present in these relationships (qualities for which I use the acronym of TRUST: Truthfulness, Respect, Understanding, Support and Time)¹⁰. The EQ-i components of “self-regard” and “self-actualisation” are important here, because being able to build relationships relies on a degree of self-confidence, the ability to be yourself and for the relationships we invest time in to be located in the broader context of our life goals. This is an area where I believe more can be done in the way of personal development for executives. Low self-regard and low self-actualisation are features that we at Ei World have found in many of our own studies on people in senior roles in a range of leadership contexts.

BASIC NEEDS

Expert: Professor Johan Galtung of Transcend, a network for peace and development, defines wellbeing as a necessary component of basic needs together with survival, freedom and identity.

Key messages:

■ Galtung said that these four needs represent the “interface” between the body and the environment.

■ He preferred the concept of “we”-ness to the “social capital” view, seeing social aspects as an ever-expanding network that connects us to all life.

■ He described suffering as the negation of one of these basic needs.

Skill or God’s will? Although Galtung did not address this directly in his conference presentation, he alluded to the fact that in the “mess” that is our society and political world, we can hold ourselves accountable for both having created it and getting ourselves out of it. He mentioned that his organisation has trained 6,000 people in conflict resolution, based on addressing these four basic needs. Thus, wellbeing is something that we can learn and teach others.

Links with emotional intelligence: Thinking of the four basic needs of survival, wellbeing, freedom and identity, I consider that these are all covered by the combination of the EQ-i components of “self-actualisation”, “assertiveness” and “emotional self-awareness”. In other words, these components are concerned with achieving your personal and professional goals, being able to express yourself freely in relation to your unique contribution and being tuned into how you are feeling.

ORDINARY MAGIC

Expert: Dr Barbara Maughan from the Institute of Psychiatry at King’s College, London, has been using data from the 1958 National Child Development Study (NCDS) to explore the origins of wellbeing in individuals’ early lives. The NCDS has tracked a nationally representative sample of 17,500 individuals from birth in March 1958, charting their development and achievements.

Key messages:

■ Maughan highlighted a number of aspects relating to relationship stability and family circumstances. She found that, aged 33, marital status and early job stability had been strongly influenced by experiencing difficulties in early childhood. Early difficulties in childhood often had cumulating consequences and were linked to

self-selection into stress-prone environments unless a turning point was made in the negative experience.

■ She coined the term “ordinary magic” to describe a set of seven components that emerges from the research as providing a buffer against negative experiences. These comprise: having caring parents/relationships with adults; good relationships with other children; cognitive competence (IQ); self-regulation; positive images of oneself; being motivated to be effective; and “planful” competence.

Skill or God’s will? With the exception of “cognitive competence”, which many researchers suggest has a limited rate of change from birth to death, all the other factors in Barbara Maughan’s list involve skills that can be learned.

Links with emotional intelligence: Again, there is a strong theme of the EQ-i components of “self-regard”, combined with all three of the interpersonal dimensions, plus “emotional self-awareness”, “impulse control” and “stress tolerance”, “reality testing”, “self-actualisation” and “optimism”.

UNREALISTIC GOALS

Expert: Dr Randolph Nesse from the Department of Psychiatry and Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, offered an evolutionary perspective. He advocates a “diagonal psychology”, which accepts that positive emotions have their drawbacks, while negative emotions can provide benefits.

Key messages:

■ Nesse highlights an important feature of modern life as being the inability to let go of unattainable goals, leading to the experience of depression. The satisfaction of our desires for comfort, safety and material wellbeing do not necessarily lead to personal wellbeing.

■ Nesse’s research suggests that close attention should be paid to the realism of goals and how organisations may be setting up individuals for high stress and low wellbeing.

■ He quotes the four noble truths of Buddhism because he believes that they emphasise the value of “giving up”: life is suffering; suffering is caused by desire; relief from suffering comes from giving up desires; and follow the middle way – neither hedonism nor asceticism.

Skill or God's will? Nesse puts forward a strong case for developing the skill of realism, which in my opinion is also a strongly underestimated aspect of skill development in organisational settings.

Links with emotional intelligence: This may point the way towards the importance of "self-actualisation" being tempered by high "reality testing". In fact, if our goals are realistic, they will be consistent with our own feelings, the feelings of others and the reality of our situation. So, perhaps the three "radars" of emotional quotient may be of help – "emotional self-awareness" (internal radar), "empathy" (social radar) and "reality testing" (external or objective radar).

DIRECT OBSERVATION OF WELLBEING

Expert: Professor Jeanne Altmann of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, has been studying natural populations of non-human species, such as baboons, using non-invasive techniques to monitor their reproduction, survival and illness.

Key messages:

- She and her colleagues have found that adult males who are more socially connected have lower levels of cortisol (commonly known as the "stress hormone").
- Adult females who are more socially connected experience a higher survival rate of their infants.
- The arrival of an aggressive baboon in a community has a significant effect in raising the cortisol levels of the baboons in the community.

Skill or God's will? Although Altmann's work does not address this directly, it is potentially a mixture of both approaches. Until we start measuring the physiology of teams, we will not be able to know the extent or absence of wellbeing in the groups we are part of.

Links with emotional intelligence: This raises a very interesting question about how we assess the impact of a team's environment on the people working in it. If we rely purely on surveys and self-perception, we may not be identifying accurately the level of damage that is being done to team members' wellbeing by environmental factors.

The EQ-i component of "stress tolerance" has some clear biological conditions and we could assess these in conjunction with using subjective measures of stress.

THE NEUROLOGICAL BASIS FOR WELLBEING

Expert: Dr Richard Davidson from the Center for Mind-Body Interaction, University of Wisconsin, has been studying the neural systems that govern emotion and emotional regulation.

Key messages:

- Davidson has found that there is considerable variation in the way in which individuals experience the same challenge. He concurs with the view expressed by Meehl (1975, p.299) that "clinicians and theoreticians ought to consider seriously the possibility that not only are some persons born with more cerebral 'joy juice' than others, but also that this variable is fraught with clinical consequences."
- In a study of 100 people, each of whom had two brain scans one month apart, those individuals with greater baseline left-prefrontal activity reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing. In other words, it may be possible to make a prediction of someone's disposition to positive emotion by scanning their neural networks.
- Davidson describes wellbeing as a skill, and said that emotion regulation represents a key to achieving and maintaining wellbeing. He quoted growing evidence that cognitive behavioural treatments change brain function. A recent study of Tibetan monks who practise "compassion meditation" showed a pattern of brain waves that is very different to the standard population.

Skill or God's will? Davidson advocates explicitly that wellbeing is a skill that can be learned.

Links with emotional intelligence: Davidson's work has important implications for "stress tolerance" and "impulse control". The practice of transcendental meditation may have something to offer stressful executives who must cope with ever-increasing demands and pressures. Understanding the neural basis of our emotions may also be part of deepening our "emotional self-awareness".

SUCCESSFUL AGEING

Expert: Sonia Lupien from the Aging and Alzheimer's Disease Program at the Douglas Hospital and McGill Centre for Studies on

Aging, shared the results of recent research on what it means to age “successfully”.

Key messages:

■ Wellbeing and a positive view of ageing are major protective factors against the effects of old age. For example, some typical decreases in physiological abilities caused by ageing did not occur in the subgroup of individuals reporting high self-regard. This counterbalances the negative image of ageing that is found in some fields of science.

■ To age successfully, Lupien said that an individual requires three things – avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of cognitive function and engagement in life.

Skill or God’s will? Lupien’s work suggests that a combination of skill and God’s will is necessary. Certain predetermined genetic factors may make it harder to avoid disease and disability, but the maintenance of cognitive function and engagement in life are aspects that can be learned.

Links with emotional intelligence: We already know that EQ increases throughout life, and with the specific focus on the EQ-i components of “self-regard” and “self-actualisation” we may be able to help an individual age successfully.

DISCUSSION

When I set out to write this article, I was bearing in mind some of the questions that I am often asked that are prompted by my work in emotional intelligence. Now, following my review of the current state of play in relevant scientific research, I would like to see how they might be answered.

■ “Should organisations aspire to develop the ‘whole person’: someone at their peak of personal, spiritual and physical fitness?” “What would be the benefits to organisations that set and meet this aspiration?”

Marcus Buckingham’s work at the Gallup organisation on “whole-heartedness at work” shows that a high percentage of people (83%) are not fully engaged at work. Many individuals may not fully realise their lack of engagement. In my experience, the more that their self-awareness is developed through training and other interventions, the greater their resignation rate becomes. Therefore, the

commitment to develop the “whole self” within an organisation has to be made at all levels and not just at the most senior levels of an organisation. The benefits of doing this have not been quantified so far, partly because there are few examples of fit and healthy organisations.

■ “Do we assume that people who come to work are ‘well’?” “Does evidence show this to be true?”

I believe that this assumption is made in a variety of contexts. I hear many executives say to me that “we are pretty resilient here”, but often these statements are said within a very macho culture. Being vulnerable or lacking personal resilience would be considered to be counter-productive. Frequently, those who are not able to cope have left the organisation, or are just about to do so.

■ “Is wellbeing ‘trainable’?” “Can you teach someone how to be well?”

In my view, research suggests a resounding “Yes”, but it is essential to ensure that the correct set of competencies is developed. In my opinion, the extensive lists of capabilities in most organisations’ competency frameworks do not yet address factors relating to individual wellbeing. Given wellbeing’s importance to organisational performance and the rising levels of stress-related absence in many developed economies, there is a good case that these frameworks should be overhauled.

■ “Why is personal wellness often missing in statements of competencies of organisations?”

This is a curious fact. A glance at this journal’s recently published annual benchmarking study of competencies reveals relatively few references to health or wellbeing. In fact, of 912 competencies listed, only 11 speak about wellbeing. These include references to “confidence”, “resilience”, “self-management focus” and “self-awareness”. It is unsurprising to find that “wellbeing” does not appear in the list of the 10 most popular competencies¹¹.

■ “What are the optimal ways of assessing employee health?”

Organisations need to address two important questions here: how do they measure “optimal health” in a work context?; and if someone

is not experiencing optimal health, can they really expect them to perform at their best?

In my view, there are strong links between wellbeing and the set of abilities known as “emotional intelligence”. I believe that the EQ-i components of “self-regard” and “self-actualisation”, those that are concerned with the three “radars” of “emotional self-awareness”, plus “empathy” and “reality testing” and the development of specific skills (involving between two and seven EQ-i components) are what lead to wellbeing – a healthy state that is reflected in interpersonal relationships.

The concept of emotional intelligence directly or indirectly addresses many drivers of wellbeing, as the above review of leading research in various disciplines demonstrates. It follows that EQ-related work can inform interventions that seek to improve individual wellbeing. EQ practitioners, in turn, can learn from these dimensions of wellbeing to develop interventions that have the potential to enhance EQ.

The concept of “organisational wellbeing” can benefit from parallels with individual wellbeing with regards to definitions, measures and predictors. The EQ-i dimensions – slightly reinterpreted – may prove

useful for looking at both individual and organisational wellbeing. It may be possible that a measure of “organisational EQ” can be developed that will help build organisations that maximise the potential for the wellbeing of the individuals working in them. At a minimum, organisations should take individual wellbeing more seriously and use known measures to assess it and known methods to seek to improve it. Ultimately, wellbeing should be a key measure of an organisation’s performance, just as a nation’s subjective wellbeing should matter as much as GDP, provided that everyone’s basic needs have been met.

CONCLUSION

Many writers¹² suggest that health has become a key concept, “a dominant cultural motif” in the construction of identity in societies. It has been suggested that “health has become the key organising symbol for the good, moral, responsible self”¹³, inseparable from individuals’ perception of the “good life”¹⁴. So, health has become associated with a moral virtue such that “the pursuit of health is actually the pursuit of moral personhood”¹⁵.

Recent studies of the importance and function of positive emotion can point us in the right direction. They show that desirable virtues, such as compassion, gratitude and appreciation, are measurable and have a value that goes beyond their status as desirable virtues that individuals should develop. The studies show that positive emotions contribute to the health and performance of organisations and, as such, need to be honoured and encouraged.

The progress that research is making in a whole range of fields of enquiry can only help us enhance wellbeing through a mutually beneficial relationship with EQ-related work. For the future, more collaboration to integrate the exciting findings in the fields of psychology, social sciences and biomedical sciences is needed to develop meaningful interventions that have the maximum impact.

I believe that wellbeing should become a key competence that organisations should seek to develop in their employees and stakeholders, as well as that in the organisation itself. On the latter, there is much exciting uncharted territory to explore with regards to definition, measures, predictors and the relationship to other aspects, such as performance and sustainability. Fundamentally, though, we need to remember that well employees are unlikely to

New consultation group

Ei World is inviting interested parties to join an informal consultation group, which will meet in April 2004 for the first time. Its aims are to:

- help refine the definition of “organisational wellbeing” beyond the current limited perspective;
- further develop the concept of “organisational physiology Indicators”;
- investigate the notion of “organisational EQ”;
- deepen the understanding of the linkages between various disciplines’ approach to understanding wellbeing to develop more holistic and effective interventions;
- research how to tailor potential wellbeing and/or EQ interventions to the needs of individuals and organisations; and
- investigate piloting some of these ideas with committed organisations.

Please email Geetu Bharwaney (geetu@eiworld.org) if you are interested in participating in the group.

We are also planning to incorporate themes of the “healthy organisation” into a two-day conference at Ashridge Management College, Herts, UK, scheduled to take place on 11–12 August 2004. Visit www.eiuk.com for details.

be found in unwell organisations. If employers wish to improve wellbeing, sickness absence rates and overall performance, they must first become “well” themselves.

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Notes

¹ Royal Society Scientific Discussion Meeting, organised by Dr Felicia Huppert, Dr Nick Baylis and Professor Barry Keverne, Royal Society, London, 19–20 November 2003.

² Marks, Murray, Evans and Willig (2000).

³ Hyperdictionary definition from www.hyperdictionary.com/dictionary/wellbeing.

⁴ From www.thefreedictionary.com.

⁵ Fredrickson and Losada (in press).

⁶ Barbara Fredrickson et al (2000, 2002, 2003) at www.positiveemotions.org.

⁷ The names and descriptions of the main components of the EQ-i have appeared in several recent issues of this journal; for example, see Bharwaney, G and Paddock, C (2003), “Emotionally intelligent helping”, *Competency & Emotional Intelligence*, vol.11 no.1, p.31.

⁸ The measures are euroendocrine, immune function, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, sleep quality, and neural circuitry.

⁹ From Putnam, R, *Bowling alone*, www.bowlingalone.com.

¹⁰ See Orme, G (2001), *Emotionally intelligent living*, for further information.

¹¹ These were team orientation/teamworking, communication skills, people management, customer focus, results orientation, problem-solving, planning and organising – Rankin, N (2003), *Competency & Emotional Intelligence Benchmarking*, 2003/04, p.28.

¹² Bordo (1993), Crawford (1994), Radley (1994), Leichter (1997), Woodward (1997), Williams (1998).

¹³ Crawford (1994).

¹⁴ Radley (1994), p.190.

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Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the following people for their contributions: Professor Martin Seligman, Dr Robert Sternberg, Professor Robert Putnam for checking the accuracy of my reporting. Stefan Wisbauer for the invitation to the Royal Society conference, for the title of this article and for commenting on my early drafts. Cathy Paddock, Kate Cannon and William Ross for providing comments on my final draft. Kate Davies and Kate Sullivan for research assistance.

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