

CHAPTER C3

Lifewide Learning Survey of Wellbeing

Jenny Willis

SUMMARY

This chapter presents the findings of Lifewide Education's survey of wellbeing, conducted in Spring 2013 as part of an ongoing examination of the dimensions of lifewide learning. This was a small-scale investigation (n = 25) and respondents are skewed towards age 50+ so overall results are likely to be biased towards the views of people in this age group. The analysis begins by comparing respondents' qualitative data with the concepts common to established theories of wellbeing, then triangulates this with a close examination of the statistical data arising from a series of potential contributors to wellbeing. Variations in responses are considered according to age, sex and perceptions of being creative individuals. Initial findings suggest further investigation is warranted.

BIOGRAPHY



Jenny Willis' career began as a linguist teaching in Inner London comprehensive schools during the 1970s and 80s, a period of continuous radical change for education. She was Deputy Head of a comprehensive school as the 1988 Education Reform Act brought further important changes for the curriculum and management of schools. She later taught for the Open University, pioneering distance and on-line learning pedagogy for languages. She then undertook a PhD in socio-linguistics at the University of Surrey, where she also worked part-time as an Assistant Registrar. This enabled her to pursue research into professional training, which led to her gaining a Fellowship at the Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTre). In 2009 she became an independent consultant and researcher. She continues this work as a member of the core team of the Lifewide Education Community. Jenny is a published author, editor of Lifewide Magazine and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Arts.

BACKGROUND

The Lifewide Education Community (LEC) was set up '*around the ideas and educational practices that promote and support lifewide learning and personal development*' (<http://lifewideeducation.co.uk>). Inherent in this aim is the belief that learning contributes to personal wellbeing. In order to realise our objectives, LEC conducts inquiries into the different dimensions of lifewide learning to inform thinking and support practice in facilitating lifewide learning through its Lifewide Development Award.

The need to examine the idea of wellbeing was recognised in LEC's work plan for 2013. There are several reasons for this choice of topic. Firstly, wellbeing emerged as a natural component of LEC's examination of the idea of '*Becoming the person I want or need to be*' (Lifewide Magazine Winter 2012/13). Initially, ideas of wellbeing appeared to cluster around personal needs, as typified by the work of Maslow (1943) and Rogers (1961). *Affect* (feelings) and *functioning well* were common threads, later explored by Diener et al. (1999). The pursuit of *personal growth* is evident eg in the work of Alderfer (1980) and Dodge et al (2012), and we see the negative impact resulting from an *imbalance* between our aspirations and reality. *Relationships* with others feature in many theories, eg White (2008), Seligman (1998, 2002), Deci and Ryan (2002, 2008) and fundamentally all of these dimensions are underpinned by our *personal values*.

Secondly, the idea of wellbeing has grown in political significance both in the UK and wider Europe. Because of this it is worth examining the relationship between wellbeing and lifewide learning and personal development. In 2011, the Department of Health launched its strategy '*No Health Without Mental Health: A Cross-Government Mental Health Outcomes Strategy for People of All Ages*'. Despite references to *inequality* and enabling individuals to take *personal control* of their lives, this strategy was clearly driven by *financial imperatives*: mental illness (unwellbeing) has a seriously detrimental impact on the national economy. Nevertheless, if successful, the strategy would also bring improved personal wellbeing. In contrast to this, writers such as Putnam (2000) and Amabile and Kramer (2011) explore *social capital* from the perspective of personal wellbeing.

For over a decade, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has been measuring and comparing perceptions of wellbeing using three familiar criteria: *life-evaluation* (how we *remember* our experience); *affect* (how we experience life) and *eudaimonia* (realisation of our potential). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also published its report, Child Wellbeing in Rich Countries (Innocenti Report Card 11, 2013) as we were working on this topic. UNICEF compares children's wellbeing in each country according to five dimensions: *wealth; health and safety; education; behaviour and risks, and housing and environment*.

The new economics foundation (nef) has drawn up a set of measurable indicators of wellbeing, *5 Ways to Wellbeing* (2010). The aim is to maximise wellbeing by making 'healthy' lifestyle choices, drawing from a menu of five domains of activity: *connecting* with others; *being active*; *taking notice*; keeping on *learning*; and *giving* to others. These domains have obvious links to some of the paradigms mentioned above and remind us of LEC's own principles.



As part of our drive to enhance academic thinking and in preparation for an edition of Lifewide Magazine, LEC conducted two small-scale surveys in March and April 2013 of perceptions of subjective wellbeing and personal practice formed around the central concepts to have emerged from the literature and current policy.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire was designed to be completed as a Word document, downloadable from our website and returnable by email to the researcher, who anonymised responses. In order to reach a potentially different audience from that used for previous surveys, members of the LEC core team were asked to invite members of their family/social circle to complete the questionnaire. In the event, 25 valid returns were made.

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) comprised open-ended questions which invited narrative comments on:

- Personal definition of wellbeing
- Distinctions between wellbeing and happiness
- Activities that contribute to and detract from personal wellbeing
- Strategies for enhancing wellbeing
- Relationship of learning to wellbeing
- Wellbeing and personal values

One question asked respondents to rate each of a series of 12 potential contributors to wellbeing using the scale 1 = of very little personal significance, to 10 = of very great personal significance. This question was able to confirm the validity of narrative responses, and is analysed to provide both individual profiles and profiles for subsets eg gender, age, nationality.

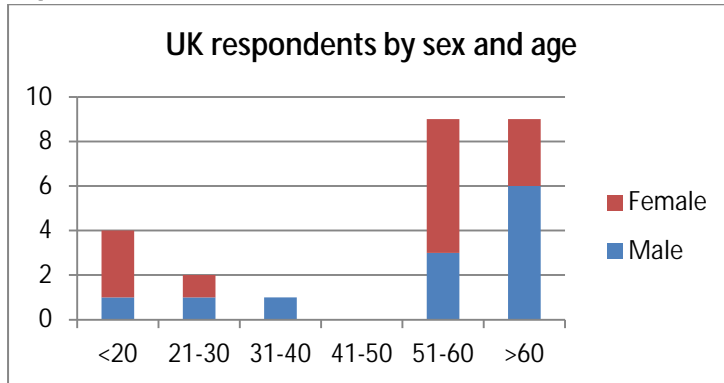
Respondents

Questionnaires were completed anonymously, with only basic biodata being requested. Since the target audience for the UK survey was friends and family of LEC's core team, it was recognised that the sample might not be representative of a controlled population. This was confirmed by the age distribution, illustrated in Figure 1 (n = 25).

Respondents ranged in age from 14 to over 80 but whilst there was a balance between male and female respondents, there was a disproportionate bias towards the older age groups (51 years plus), This was likely to impact on respondents' values and activities as older people would have greater life experience than a controlled group, and may have age-related constraints on the activities in which they could engage.

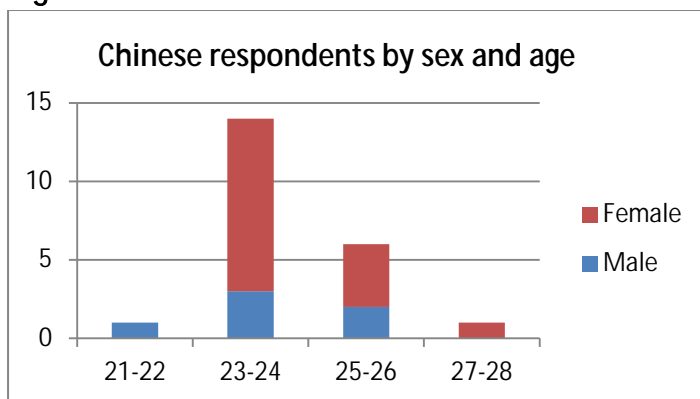
Although respondents were not asked their occupation, it was obvious from their words that they were all well-educated, articulate individuals, again making the group atypical.

Figure 1



When the opportunity arose to conduct a similar survey with a different population, we embraced it. The second group were Chinese English-speaking post-graduate students in the Education Faculty at the Normal University of Beijing. As such, they were not a 'typical' sample either, but they provided data from a younger set of people, and from a different culture. Figure 2 shows their profile by age and sex (n = 22).

Figure 2



This chapter focuses on the UK data. An additional complementary chapter will compare the findings of the Chinese survey and of a survey of multi-national adults conducted in Argentina in August 2013, in order to posit some cultural distinctions in perceptions of wellbeing and individual values.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this account.

FINDINGS

What does wellbeing mean to you?

Many of our respondents referred to a *balance*, be it between physical and mental health, certainty and risk, control and the excitement of novelty. This is consistent with Dodge et al's (2012) concept of a simple see-saw where wellbeing represents a balance between

resources available and challenge. This sanguine approach was well expressed by Fay, who defined wellbeing as:

In the event of a chronic condition, being as well as I can be and living my life as fully as is possible, in the circumstances.

This modest expectation of something less than perfect is echoed by others:

Trying to get a balance in life, so that mentally you're fine, you're not over stressed or over worked or anything like that: minimising all the effects around you that make you not feel so good. (Alison)

Jerry summarises his aspiration as to '*function optimally.*'

Other comments reflect the *eudaimonic*⁷ dimension found in the work of Seligman (2002) and Diener et al (1999). John encapsulates the sense of needing more than just personal comfort:

I am very fortunate to have more than the basics in life including a lovely home and income to support my needs, time to do things I want to do and I am reasonably healthy and fit. These things all contribute to my sense of wellbeing. But ultimately wellbeing is about understanding and fulfilling my purposes - or at least the ones that I think are most important in my life.

Tom expresses a similar need:

For me, it's not necessarily doing things you enjoy, it's not necessarily doing things that make you happy, it's doing things that you think have meaning and that in turn kind of gives you that sense of wellbeing I think.

We noted the high significance of *interpersonal relationships* in the paradigms of wellbeing. Our respondents confirmed that these are important both in their home and working lives as we see in the following comments:

Wellbeing involves several elements such as positive emotions, meaning, engagement, accomplishment and positive relationships. (Sam)

Kevin describes

The sense of self confidence that comes from having things 'under control' such as finances, relationship

while Christine refers to

Being happy with your family and your environment.

Marie, who is a student, acknowledges the wider support she receives:



The support, like the network of having teachers that are there for you and the other students. You've all got a common passion for what you are doing and I think that's quite good for your wellbeing.

Here, we are reminded of Amabile and Kramer's (2011) nourishers of wellbeing: encouragement, emotional support and affiliation.

Personal **values** are implicit within our respondents' comments, but few make this explicit. We return to Tom, for a succinct summary:

Deep down you feel it's all worth it, I think that's the key to wellbeing. You've got to believe that what you're doing is genuinely aiding that kind of goal that you have is fulfilling that wider aim, then I think you can be in a state of wellbeing even if you're unhappy as it were, because you're still kind of feeling that you're fulfilling that wider, larger overall purpose.

So far, then, respondents appear to confirm the dimensions of wellbeing found in the literature. Figure 3 presents their key themes in an easy-to-read wordle, where the larger the font, the more frequently the word was cited.

Figure 3 UK respondents' perceptions of wellbeing



Are wellbeing and happiness the same thing?

Respondents were unanimous in differentiating between wellbeing and happiness. Many suggested that happiness may contribute to wellbeing, but felt wellbeing is more than an emotional state. Again, they referred to **balance and neutrality**:

Wellbeing is more neutral, and goes beyond emotions to physical state. (Suzanne)

Wellbeing is a balance; happiness is almost entirely positives. (Mark)

A distinction was made between the **temporality** of happiness and a more enduring quality in wellbeing, as Brian proposed:

Wellbeing is correlated to happiness, but wellbeing has connotations of permanence while happiness is more transitory.

Jerry made a similar point, illustrating it with some concrete examples:

Happiness is an emotional state of mind usually produced by things happening to us that are favourable, or surprises, compliments etc, or achieving something that you strove hard for and thought you wouldn't achieve. Wellbeing is our ability to endure not only happiness but all other forms of emotions, whether they are pleasurable or painful.

Several respondents drew a distinction between the impact of **material goods and happiness**, as Ellen put it:

You might have everything to make your life good but not be happy.

Looking at it from the opposite perspective, Paul noted that wellbeing is sustainable even when we are unhappy, recalling the more permanent concept:

Happiness is a spin off from wellbeing but you can be grieving a natural human emotion and still have wellbeing.

Some respondents referred to the **subjectivity** of happiness and wellbeing, implying that we may have innate predispositions:

I think it is linked to happiness but it mainly depends on the type of person you are.
(Christine)

Colin expresses his difficulty in comprehending this ability to remain positive, observing:

They are not the same for everyone, since some people who are evidently not well somehow manage to be happy. I find this a challenge.

The conclusions to be drawn from our small sample are that:

- wellbeing is distinct from happiness
- happiness is one component of wellbeing
- wellbeing can endure even when we are unhappy
- wellbeing and happiness are subjective
- some people are predisposed to be more positive than others
- and some people find it a challenge to sustain a positive outlook

Let us end this discussion with Rose's evocative description:

Happiness deals with butterflies in the stomach.

Which aspects of you does your wellbeing involve or affect?

Our next question explored further respondents' perceptions of their wellbeing, allowing us to compare their views with some of the established paradigms.

Most people described wellbeing in terms of all aspects of their lives, including **emotional and physical health and a sense of security**. A few responses were very comprehensive. Suzanne referred to:

Emotional, physical, interpersonal relationships, financial security, safety, security, intellectual fulfilment, moral conscience.

John expanded:

...It must affect me physically. (...) It affects me psychologically and emotionally - I generally feel positive and rarely suffer from negative feelings, and sadness can usually be offset with joy. Aspects of my daily life keep my mind active so it affects me intellectually. And spiritually, I am comfortable with my understanding of who I am, why I am here and what will happen to me when I die.

The **spiritual** dimension is also mentioned by Mark, who admits:

It does affect stress levels, choices of priorities, willingness to relax, what I pray about.

Mark's words imply **personal values** whilst some respondents are more explicit about their significance. Sam states:

Meaning is value, no point in taking something for granted, it must have a value to me.

Awareness of our values impacts directly on our **decisions** and actions, resulting in a loop, as described by Brian:

Wellbeing creates a virtuous cycle in that I am able to be positive about life and this results in activities that thereby enhance my wellbeing.

Tom suggests:

I think it's not being dissatisfied and it's kind of an emotional feeling of not regretting decisions you've made.

Several respondents allude to the need for **self-fulfilment** in order to have **self-esteem**:

For me 'wellbeing' is linked closely to achieving things. It affects my enthusiasm for life and ability to cope with multiple tasks and/or people. (Lisa)

Self esteem; emotional management; job satisfaction; fulfilment; desire to interact positively with others. (Colin)



For Rose, self-fulfilment is associated with *creativity*.

In addition to the subjective aspect of wellbeing, some respondents indicate their need to be reassured about the *wellbeing of loved ones*. Dick relies on:

Knowing that all those I love and care for are physically healthy and mentally well balanced.

Kevin's decisions are made in light of:

Situation awareness, organisational skills, and when events or situations are not directly controllable or manageable an understanding of possible outcomes and how they may affect you and your loved ones.

I have highlighted the themes emerging from our survey; how do they compare with those in the literature of wellbeing? There are clear consistencies. Alderfer reduced Maslow's human needs to three levels: growth, relatedness, existence. These are evidenced in respondents' need for self-fulfilment, the wellbeing of loved ones and spiritual wellbeing. The same dimensions are found in Deci and Ryan (2002, 2008), when they refer to competence, autonomy and relatedness. Similarly, White (2008) identifies three key elements: subjective values, the relational and material. The OECD's (2013) model focuses on life satisfaction, affect and eudaimonia, all of which are embraced in our respondents' comments.

This would suggest that our survey has produced reliable data, ie that is consistent with the studies cited above. We shall test its consistency when we turn to the qualitative responses given in question 10.

Contributors to and detractors from wellbeing

The next three questions in the questionnaire investigated what contributes to personal wellbeing, whether it depends on a single or multiple factors, and what undermines personal wellbeing. We shall examine these complementary issues together in this section.

Firstly, as we may infer from the wealth of activities and dimensions listed in Table 1, respondents' *wellbeing is affected by many factors*. Mark speaks for most when he says it is:

Normally a combination of many things, but one may prevail for a short period of time.

John expands further, distinguishing between aspects of his life and recognising the value of the sum of these experiences:

It comes from different things in different parts of my life - indeed having things happen and making things happen in different parts of my life enriches my sense of fulfilment and achievement.

In fact, Rose feels:



I cannot really have a feeling of wellbeing if I focus on only one thing.

Although diverse, these factors may be linked, as Ed suggests:

It doesn't just focus on one aspect of our character, but rather draws all of them together.

William, meanwhile, consciously seeks to engage in different, unrelated, activities in order to 'try to balance things out.' Consistently optimistic and down-to-earth, Alison observes:

I think not every part of your life has to be good.

Turning to the detail of what enhances and what undermines their sense of wellbeing, the table below lists all the activities and factors mentioned. These are loosely grouped into clusters, each contributor being paired with its mirror image for ease of discussion, though I recognise that the grouping is subjective and some comments might fall within more than one cluster. The order of clusters is of no significance, representing only the order in which responses were viewed.

Cluster 1. Comments relate again to *balance*, here essentially *related to work*. When well balanced, a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction arises, similar to that of cluster 7; when unbalanced, respondents feel out of control and resentful.

Cluster 2. Factors listed in this cluster are about enhancing or undermining *physical health*. They link to clusters 3 and 9. Respondents demonstrate a need for *exercise*, outdoor, fresh air and *being at one with nature*.

Cluster 3. The third cluster focuses on the need for '*down time*', time to oneself and *to reflect*. For some, this entails action planning in response to their situation.

Cluster 4. Comments in this large cluster reveal the importance of being *intellectually stimulated*, feeling *creative* and hence *self-fulfilled*. *Lack of control* and of *variety* are sources of frustration.

Cluster 5. This is another large cluster, indicative of the importance of *relationships with family and friends*. *Negative relationships* and *arguments* are sources of impaired wellbeing, as is *loss through death*.

Cluster 6. Cluster 6 is relatively small, suggesting issues are of less significance to respondents. They relate to *practical and material* needs and duties. Confirming the subjectivity of values, whilst some respondents dislike household chores, one gains pleasure from completing them - they bring her a sense of achievement. *Finance* and unexpected bills are the main detractor from wellbeing. This is likely to be related to the age of most respondents, who are either living on a pension or are still students, hence may have low incomes.

Table 1 Contributors to and detractors from wellbeing

	CONTRIBUTORS	DETRACTORS
1	Appropriate work/life balance; giving thought to being overloaded or under-loaded; a rewarding job; satisfaction from achievements at work; have fulfilling hobbies.	Lack of an appropriate work/life balance; being unfairly treated at work; email overload; feelings of not making progress or not achieving anything worthwhile; taking on too many responsibilities at once; being <u>too</u> busy.
2	Exercise; get out into my garden and do things in it; walk my dog; spend time in the countryside; walking; keep active; feel the sun on my face and be outside.	Failing to make adequate time for exercise; inactivity; sedentary lifestyle; bad weather; being inside all the time.
3	Relaxation; sleep; making the most of my evenings and weekends; having time to myself; thinking time; reflection is very important in showing you what you have done and where you can go from there; be aware of what aspects of your life you need to improve on, gives you a purpose.	Failing to make time to relax; not having enough time to myself.
4	Intellectual competence through writing and other forms of creativity; creating new things; computers, photography and Adobe Photoshop; do puzzles; spend time creating things that are admired by, or are useful to others as well as myself; try out new things; learn something; keep my mind engaged; doing something to feed my soul such as theatre, concert, art, church, etc; doing something different; with organising a national student archaeology conference.	Having no intellectual stimuli; loss of control; being bored; not being in control of one's destiny; monotonous activities.
5	Friends and family; close relationships; child-minding for family; my wife and I do lots of things with and for the family; spend quality time with my wife and extended family; spend time with my husband; surround myself with people who love me; maintain a wide range of lifelong friendships; going for a coffee with friends; get into a positive relationship in a meaningful way.	Failing to make time for friends and family; serious concerns and anxieties within the family; worrying about those that I love and care for; quarrels; 'loud and aggressive persons'; worry about friends and family; unhappiness or illness suffered by a loved one; losing loved ones; untimely loss of loved ones; breakdown in my relationship with a family member or friend; death or serious illness among family or friend; lack of communication with others; negative relationships.
6	Create clean and pleasant home environment; manage my finances well; cook; look after my cats.	Lack of money; unexpected financial demands; housework and cooking and other things that are 'never ending'; major material setbacks eg losing a job; when you're angry at materialistic things.
7	Behave with compassion; be ethical and honest; basically helping people so I feel I am valued; working with homeless people; taking the advantages I have been given; knowing that I've done my day at school, knowing that I've had a good day at school; I've done my homework, I don't have any homework that I have to dread, I'm looking forward to the next day.	Valid criticism from people I value on matters I had not spotted until then; politicians; evidence of hypocrisy, cruelty, stupidity and greed; being expected to be someone I am not; condemnation/belittlement from people you love; failure at work; regrets; guilt; government waste, corruption; vapid politicians; failure (perceived or otherwise); professional misunderstandings and failure of others to appreciate my potential; when you're not doing things, when you're not actively changing things and making a difference; when you hear about other people suffering; lack of accomplishment.
8	Play in a band; play music; dance; teach dancing; pilates; tai-chi.	
9	Eat well; look after my health; avoid stress; having a healthy diet; look after your mental wellbeing; not smoking; avoid anything that would make me less healthy (eg sunbeds); curling up on the sofa with some food; finding alternative solutions to problems that cause stress.	Having worries; being cold; being hungry; deafness; arthritis; feeling overweight and slothful; having to address conflict; becoming unwell; not being physically healthy and mentally well balanced; being in pain; severe depression; over-eating; allowing stress to take hold; rubbish food; being with people that put you under a lot of like emotional stress.
10	Go travelling; holidays.	Being unable to travel.
11	Read; read science magazines; collecting documentaries.	The news; TV in general especially 'soaps'.
12	Faith I am a Christian; pray.	

Cluster 7. The large size of this cluster shows its importance. Factors all relate to *ethical issues*, a *sense of (in)justice, fair play and integrity*. Responses target both personal activity and that of wider groups eg politicians. It is notable that the detractors outnumber the contributors to wellbeing in this cluster.

Cluster 8. This small cluster derives from only a few individuals and is associated with the importance of *music and dance*. To some extent, it links with cluster 2. The absence of any detractors from wellbeing here is likely to be because those who have no interest in such activities simply avoid them.

Cluster 9. Like clusters 2 and 3, 9 is concerned with *healthy living*. The enhancers of wellbeing tend to relate to *avoidance of harmful activities*, whereas the larger number of detractors show the harmful effects of indulging in such behaviours as eating junk food.

Cluster 10. *Travel* is important to a small number of individuals, whilst the inability to travel, due to age, is a source of serious regret.

Cluster 11. *Reading and watching television* have been listed separately from intellectual wellbeing (cluster 4), as they appear to include a more *affective* element. This is particularly apparent in the detractors where irritation is evident.

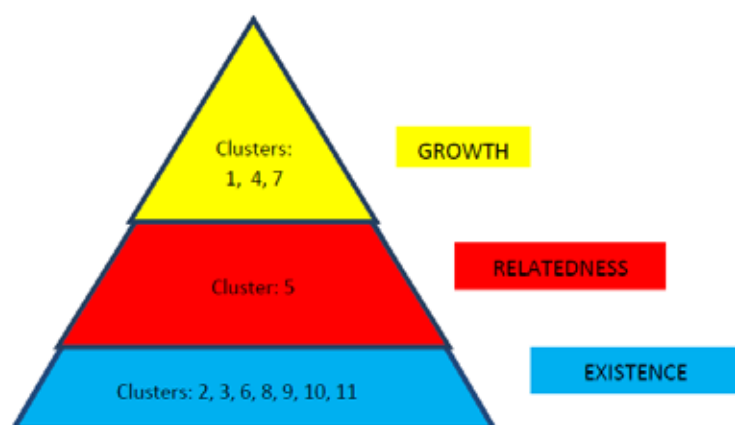
Cluster 12. Only two respondents raised the significance of having a *religious belief*, and the role of *prayer*, although one other did refer to being at peace with his mortality. Like cluster 8, the absence of detractors is likely to reflect the individuals' ability to avoid what they are not drawn to.

What, then, can we conclude from our survey of contributors to, and detractors from, wellbeing and how do our findings compare with established models?

If we align our clusters with Alderfer's refined model of Maslow's human needs, there appears to be good correspondence (Figure 4). The sample is heavily oriented towards growth, which is probably due to respondents' professional status (strong academic/education orientation), but might be surprising given their older ages when they could have been 'winding down'. We shall examine the age dimension in a later section of this chapter.

Figure 4 does not allow for a qualitative assessment of each cluster. So, although Alderfer's category 'Relatedness' aligns with only one cluster (5) (though it is arguably embedded in others), as we have seen, various types of relationships with others were highly important to our respondents. Conversely, although 'Existence' corresponds with seven of our clusters, these are not necessarily of significance to the whole sample.

Figure 4 Comparison of clusters with Alderfer's model



Other models of wellbeing also match these clusters. For example, Table 2 takes the OECD's three elements required to create a balanced lifestyle and demonstrates an alignment with the categories identified above. As before, this fails to represent the qualitative significance of each, and is open to subjective interpretation, eg when do meaning and purpose depart from affect? Should cluster 11 (reading/TV) be attributed to affect or to life satisfaction? Or both? Again, we need to look more closely at the individual level to come to a better appreciation.

Table 2 Comparison of clusters with OECD model

OECD	CLUSTERS
Life satisfaction: work, health, income	1 (work); 2 (exercise); 5 (finances); 9 (healthy lifestyle)
Affect: happiness, worry, anger	6 (relationships); 8 (music/dance); 10 (travel); 11 (reading/TV)
Eudaimonic: meaning and purpose, autonomy, competence	3 (reflection); 4 (creativity, achievement); 7 (ethics); 12 (faith)

The nef model of wellbeing (nef 2011), proposes a menu of five types of engagement which are conducive to personal wellbeing. Figure 5 illustrates their possible connections with the clusters identified in this study. This time, it is difficult to make clear-cut alignments, and the figure can do no more than offer one interpretation.

According to this analysis, it would appear that 'being active' is the most significant domain for our sample, yet, when we examined the qualitative data, it was clear that this was not important for all nor was it the most important for anyone. By contrast, 'connecting with others' seems to be of limited significance whereas comments revealed this to be the most important cluster, and for all respondents.

When we come to 'religious belief', where should this align? Does it represent an opportunity to connect with others, give to others, be active? Perhaps an element of each depending upon individual circumstances.

Figure 5. Comparison of clusters with nef model

clusters	nef
1, work	Connect with others
2, exercise	
3, reflection	Be active
4, creativity, achievement	
5, financial and practical needs	Take notice
6, relationships	
7, ethics and justice	Keep learning
8, music/dance	
9, healthy lifestyle	Give to others
10, travel	
11, reading/TV	
12, religious belief	

So we are reminded of the limitations of comparing categories: we need to drill down into individual cases if we want to understand how models apply in reality. As with all other dimensions of lifewide learning the contexts of individuals' lives is what gives meaning to abstract ideas like wellbeing. The next question in the survey gives us an opportunity to explore this. We asked what respondents do if they feel dissatisfied with their state of wellbeing and want to improve it.

Positive action to improve personal wellbeing

Several people began by discussing their **strategy**, understanding what is wrong in order to change it, as exemplified by these two:

Always involves recognising what is causing the problem and doing something about it.
(John)

(Understand) what has happened and why, the options open to me to remedy the situation and then take the necessary action to address it. (Ellen)

Suzanne echoes the need to be aware of practical constraints, saying what she does 'depends on the resources available.' Jerry recognises that he may not be able to deal with things without assistance:

I am not ashamed of asking for help when I need it.

Drawing on his own experience, John reminds us that, sadly,

Some of the really big things in life.. like the loss of a partner.. are hard to do much about.

Ever the optimist, Marie points out that:

You wouldn't want things to be going great all the time, because life probably wouldn't be so interesting.

Christine takes a similar stance, saying:

You've just to keep reminding yourself that yes you may have lost out on one thing but you've still got a lot more to be thankful for. No one is completely without wellbeing.

These comments all suggest a certain pragmatism, but they do not shed light on actual activities. When we look at practical examples of how respondents go about changing their sense of wellbeing, we immediately find correlations with the nef model.

A number of people refer to consulting their spouse, a form of '*connecting with others*.' Ed says he likes to '*surround myself with laughter*', joining his loved ones.

For some respondents, it is important to have time to themselves to think or pray. Others take a walk and enjoy the pleasure of being outdoors ('*taking notice/being aware*').

Exercise is another outlet, comparable with '*keeping active*.' Other solitary activities include playing loud music (Beth).

Indicators of '*keep learning*' are also present, with one person (Sam) specifically saying he seeks to learn a new skill.

Most activities are personal, and often related to *interest*, as for Jane who will '*do some enjoyable activity*' and Lisa who tries to '*keep busy with things that interest me*.'

The importance of *balance* is both explicit and implicit in responses. William actively brings this about:

If I am doing the same thing for a long period of time, I switch over so that I can achieve a form of balance and keep stimulated.

In the case of Tessa, imbalance is implicit in her attempt to '*Cut back on doing too much, try to catch up with jobs*'.

In sum, these responses once again correspond with four of the five nef domains, but none overtly entails '*giving to others*.' Does this imply that the domain is misguided on the part of the nef, or is it that respondents either have alternative priorities or do not mention related activities that they may engage in? Or is their form of giving embraced by another cluster, eg in expression of love? These are questions to which we shall return in our examination of individual profiles. Before we do so, let us explore the qualitative data in our next question, the role of learning in wellbeing.

Is there a relationship between learning and developing, and your sense of wellbeing?

This question is important for Lifewide Education since learning and development are fundamental principles. Learning is also, as we have seen, a common element of wellbeing paradigms.

Ambivalent views on the relationship

A few respondents did not see a relationship between learning and wellbeing, but even they went on to qualify their negative responses. For instance, Fay distinguishes between academic and other forms of learning:

No relationship between academic learning and my sense of wellbeing. However, there is a relationship between trying to improve a skill (eg playing piano) or achieve a target (eg walk five miles) and my wellbeing.

Mark also makes a slight distinction, for him it depends on the stage of learning:

Not really if I take this as learning and developing completed; that would feel like being smug. But if it's the process, then if what I am learning or the way I am developing is worthwhile and feels to be so, then my wellbeing sense rises.

There is a partial link

'Learning is very useful, but not essential' suggests Colin.

A few comments express the fear that if we stop learning we risk losing the competence, as Lisa explains:

Partly because I believe implicitly that 'use it or lose it' applies to the mind as well as the body.

Marie agrees:

I think you've got to keep learning, I think that's quite important. Mental stimulation is important.

The question of **balance** is mentioned again, and the need to recognise that we all have limitations:

Learning/experience bring increased balance - this helps wellbeing I think. Knowledge that you can't do everything but can do most things well. (Ann)

Learning and wellbeing are related

Most respondents felt there is a close link between learning and wellbeing. Kevin begins by reminding us that we need to be **self-aware**:



Absolutely. The first stage of learning to achieve a sense of wellbeing is knowing yourself - warts and all.

Ed makes a similar point:

When we realise why we respond negatively we can then begin to work through it better.

Several people acknowledge their need to feel they are **achieving** something:

I feel a deep sense of emotional pleasure from knowing that I have achieved something new or to a high level. I enjoy feeling physically exhausted as a result of this effort. (Suzanne)

As long as you are progressing, I think that makes you feel good. (Alison)

When I have understood or mastered a new topic, I feel a great deal of satisfaction. (Brian)

Beth goes so far as to state '*repetition is anathema and I find it very wearing*', hence is constantly seeking new learning.

William explicitly recognises that he needs to achieve in order to feel **self-confident**:

It enriches my sense of wellbeing as it stimulates my imagination and creates self-confidence by taking up new challenges and overcoming them and learning along the way. You see yourself progress as a practitioner and that is very satisfying.

One person indicates that learning and change are prerequisites of his profession, and he has internalised this so that it has become a characteristic across his life:

In my career, I need to keep up with changes in order to function optimally. I do the same in my recreational activities. (Jerry)

Whilst most comments allude to personal benefits, John acknowledges that his learning may be driven by **altruistic** desires:

I am conscious that so much of day to day living involves learning and developing in order to accomplish something or help someone else.

Finally, Christine proposes that wellbeing is **dynamic**, caught up in a spiral with learning:

I think your sense of wellbeing grows as you grow and it changes as you learn.

Examples of learning and wellbeing

Respondents were asked to give examples of how their learning and wellbeing are linked. The following group of comments shows that, whatever the medium, the speakers are driven by the **need to achieve**, and in one case, be seen to achieve:



I have a sense of wellbeing when I can focus on art, and to me art has always meant development. (Rose)

Extending my boundaries by singing in a band and writing new songs. (Dick)

Mastering new skills or pushing out past your comfort zone and succeeding. (Paul)

Just knowing the dance or a bit of knowledge is not enough - you have to demonstrate or use that knowledge preferable to the benefit of or at least in view of others. (Lisa)

I enjoy the success of a conference presentation. (Beth)

Jane gains pleasure from '**seeing others' achievements** if you have supported them.' This is familiar to those who teach, and Kevin suggests:

Learning from others and teaching others are all part of the lifewide process of developing oneself, and developing self-confidence and wellbeing.

For Alison, **relationships** with others are as important as learning a skill:

It's more about improving your relationships or you are improving in the skill that you are learning.

As we have seen, several respondents are retired. They demonstrate a need to continue to learn in order to **maintain a sense of who they are**. This frequently entails the challenge of keeping up with new technology, for both practical and self-actualisation needs:

Through on-line searches, in devising an interview protocol (this set of questions) and using it to have structured conversations with people (beginning with family). I will also use the opportunity to develop new relationships with people. (John)

Being a critical friend to doctoral candidates means I have to learn about their specialist subject area enough to see and raise questions of worth which they haven't seen. (Mark)

I have been able to sustain a sense of wellbeing since retirement by continuing to engage in academic activities, though the lack of financial income places limits on this. (Suzanne)

These individuals may not be typical of the population at large, but provide insight into the impact of retirement on those who have been thoroughly immersed in learning during their professional lives.

A few examples indicate learning initially for a practical reason, but then finding **intrinsic pleasure**, as when Ellen learns about economics and Jerry studies the latest models of equipment. When Beth says '*I learn in my garden all the time,*' she gives no indication of any need for achievement.

In his mid-sixties, Sam has decided to tackle some personal problems and now enjoys 'learning about myself through attending sessions with a counsellor.'

Novelty and **risk-taking** are fundamental for some respondents: William needs to be 'challenged constantly to take risks and do new things' while Tom explains:

By the time I started getting bored and when I felt I stopped learning things and I thought I'd stopped making a difference, that was when I had enough and it was time to move on.

As anticipated, respondents' words are more informative than the use of labels such as those of the clusters. Now, we have evidence of their being engaged in activities commensurate with all five of the nef Ways to Wellbeing (connect with others; be active; take notice; keep learning; give to others).

Comparative data

One question in the survey asked respondents to rate each of twelve potential contributors to wellbeing, on the scale 1 = of very little, to 10 = of very great, personal importance. Table 3 lists the questions as a point of reference for this discussion. They range from interpersonal relations, through learning and physical activity, achievement to giving to others, so reflect theories such as the nef's 5 Ways to Wellbeing, the OECD's life-satisfaction/affect/eudaimonic model and Alderfer's model of growth/relatedness/existence.

Table 3. Question 10, possible contributors to wellbeing

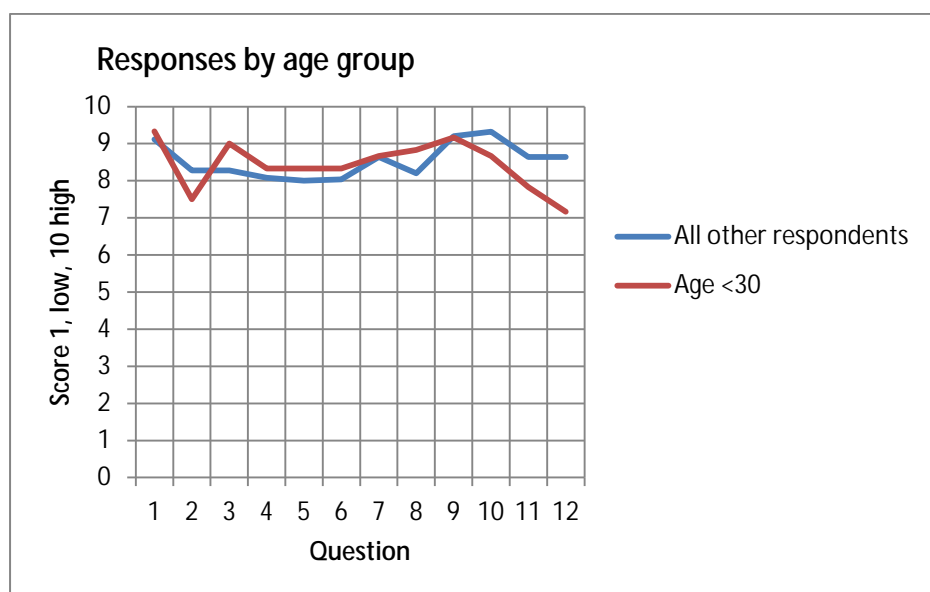
Q1	Connecting with/having good relationships with people I come into contact with everyday
Q2	Being healthy and fit , physically active - walking, sport, dancing etc
Q3	Being involved in the world - being curious and aware of the world around me - looking and finding new opportunities
Q4	Feeling creative - doing things that give me a chance to be creative, inventive or resourceful
Q5	Continually learning and developing myself
Q6	Doing new things that interest me
Q7	Making progress in the things I am doing
Q8	Doing things with and for other people
Q9	Having a close relationship with someone I trust and can discuss anything with
Q10	Feeling that I am valued by the people that matter to me
Q11	Being able to do the things I want or need to do
Q12	Achieving something I think worthwhile

Differences according to age

The age of UK respondents was from 14 to 80+ years, but only 6 of the 25 were under 30, and the remainder were over 50. Figure 6 shows the mean score for these respondents by question and for (a) those aged 50+ and (b) those under 30.

The first point of note is the *very high scores awarded by all* respondents, irrespective of age, the lowest mean score being 7.17 (under 30s, Q12, achieving something worthwhile), and the highest being 9.33 (under 30s, Q1, relationships). We would need a larger sample to examine whether this is a typical profile. The results of this survey suggest that the 12 possible factors listed are an accurate representation of contributors to wellbeing. It also indicates that the younger group were more variable in their scores than the older group.

Figure 6. UK respondents' mean scores by question and age group



In addition to Q12 (achieving), Q2 (being physically fit) was less important to the young group. We may attribute this to their just starting out in a career or still studying, making them less achievement-oriented, and probably having less health problems due to their youthfulness.

Figure 6 shows clearly the points of greatest difference between the two groups. *Achievement* (Q12) is the most significant, followed by *health* (Q2), *being involved* (Q3) and *doing things with and for others* (Q8). We might hypothesise that as we grow older and our life expectancy diminishes, we value our days more, and, when retired, have the time to devote to others, as well as perhaps a greater understanding of the needs of others.

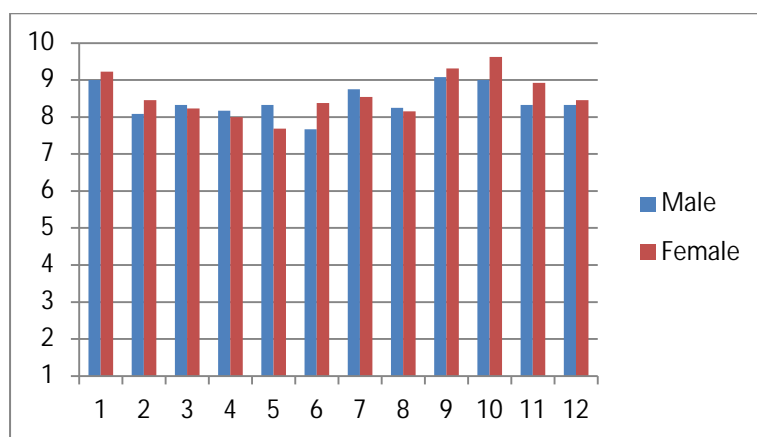
If this small sample is typical, we can confirm that there are some significant differences in our perceptions of wellbeing, depending on our age.

Differences according to sex

The next test was to look at the mean scores according to sex. The group was well balanced in this respect, comprising 13 women and 12 men. Figure 7 provides a comparison of mean scores for each question.

The issues on which the sexes were *most divided* were Q5 (*continually learning*), Q6 (*doing new things*), Q10 (*feeling valued*) and Q11 (*being able to do what I want to do*). In only one of these areas did men score more highly than women: 'continually learning', where the difference was 0.64 points. Women score 'doing new things' 0.71 points more than men, which indicates that novelty may not be equated with learning. They score 'feeling valued' 0.62 points more than men, and 'being able to do what I want' 0.59 points more. These differences may reflect a lack of security and a greater need for control on the part of these women.

Figure 7. Mean scores by question and sex.

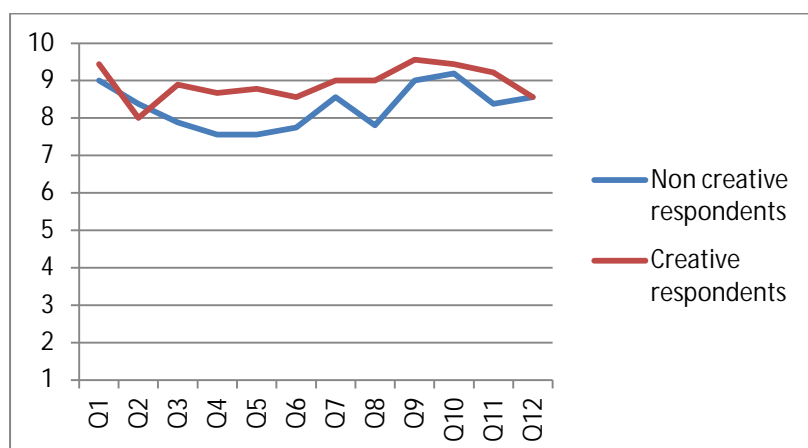


The issues on which men and women were *most in agreement* were Q3 (*being involved/curious*, difference 0.10 points), Q4 (*being creative*, difference 0.17 points), Q8 (*doing things with/for others*, difference 0.10 points) and Q12 (*achieving*, difference 0.13 points). In each of these except 'achieving', the male mean was higher than the female. It arguably belies a stereotype, with the men being found to be more creative, the theme to which we turn next.

Differences by self-declared creativity

Nine respondents described themselves as creative in responding to this and previous questions. Their scores for all 12 dimensions in this question appeared to be high, therefore they were tested as a sub-set and compared with the remaining 16. The mean score for each question was calculated by sub-set, resulting in the findings shown in Figure 8. We must note that individual perceptions of being creative are purely subjective and have not been otherwise validated.

Figure 8. Comparison of mean scores per question by perceived creativity



Assuming perceptions to be accurate, the profiles of the *creative and non-creative sub-groups are quite distinct*. The mean scores remain high for both (lowest score, 7.56 points, for Q4, creativity, and Q5, continually learning, both the non-creative set), but it appears that *learning and creativity are of joint least importance to the non-creative set*.

The one dimension on which the *creative set scores less* than the other was Q2, *being healthy and fit*, with a mean of 0.38 points less than the non-creatives.

There was one dimension where the sub-sets *scored identically*. Q12, *achieving something* perceived to be worthwhile, which received a mean score of 8.56.

The *greatest differences* were found for Q8, *doing things with and for others* (1.19 point difference); Q4, *feeling creative* (1.11 point difference); Q3, *being involved/aware* (1.01 point difference); Q5, *continually learning* (0.86 point difference) and Q11, *being able to do the things I want to* (0.84 point difference). These dimensions suggest that the creative individuals derive greater pleasure for developing themselves, interacting with others and having the ability to engage in areas of their choice. In sum, if these respondents are typical, it appears that creative people enjoy life more, and are more socially engaged.

Differences according to culture

The UK sample reflects a particular cultural perspective on wellbeing. A further study is underway to consider other cultural perspectives (China and Argentina). The results of this work will be reported in a future chapter of the e-book.

Most and least positive respondents

I have argued throughout that it is at the individual level that we are best able to see the efficacy of models such as the nef's 5 Ways to Wellbeing. Let us therefore consider one final comparison: whether our most positive and most negative respondents' values correspond with the nef model of wellbeing.

The five nef dimensions equate to eight of our survey questions as follows:

- **Connect:** Q1 Connecting with/having good relationships with people I come into contact with every day, and Q9, having a close relationship with someone I trust and can discuss anything with.
- **Be active:** Q2, Being healthy and fit, physically active - walking, sport, dancing etc.
- **Take notice:** Q3, Being involved in the world - being curious and aware of the world around me - looking and finding new opportunities.
- **Keep learning:** Q4, Feeling creative - doing things that give me a chance to be creative, inventive or resourceful, Q5, continually learning and developing myself and Q6, doing new things that interest me.
- **Give to others:** Q8, doing things with and for other people.

By identifying the highest and lowest scorers and then examining their responses to these eight questions, we can examine the degree to which these respondents engage in each of the five nef domains.

Mean scores for all 12 questions

The means scores for each respondent were calculated and found to range from 10 points to 6.25 points for the UK group. This was used as an indicator of the overall positivity of each individual. The top three respondents were then identified and their scores for the eight relevant questions were analysed.

Highest mean scorers

As might have been anticipated from the comments discussed above, the most positive respondents were William (UK24), Suzanne (UK3) and Lisa (UK9), whose mean scores for all 12 questions were 10, 9.75 and 9.67 respectively. These appear to indicate a similar degree of positivity. So what does the analysis of the eight specific questions show?

Figure 9 Comparison with nef domains, high scorers

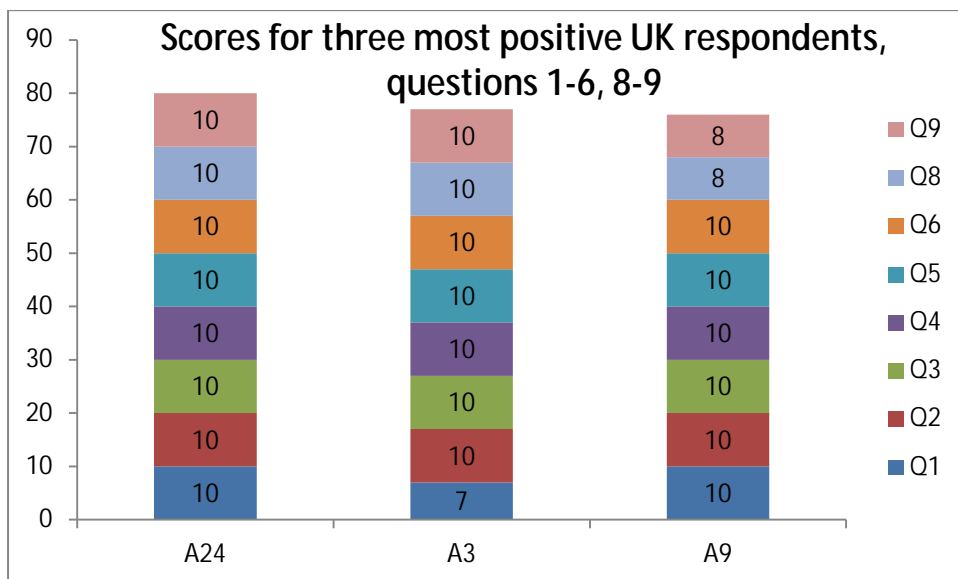
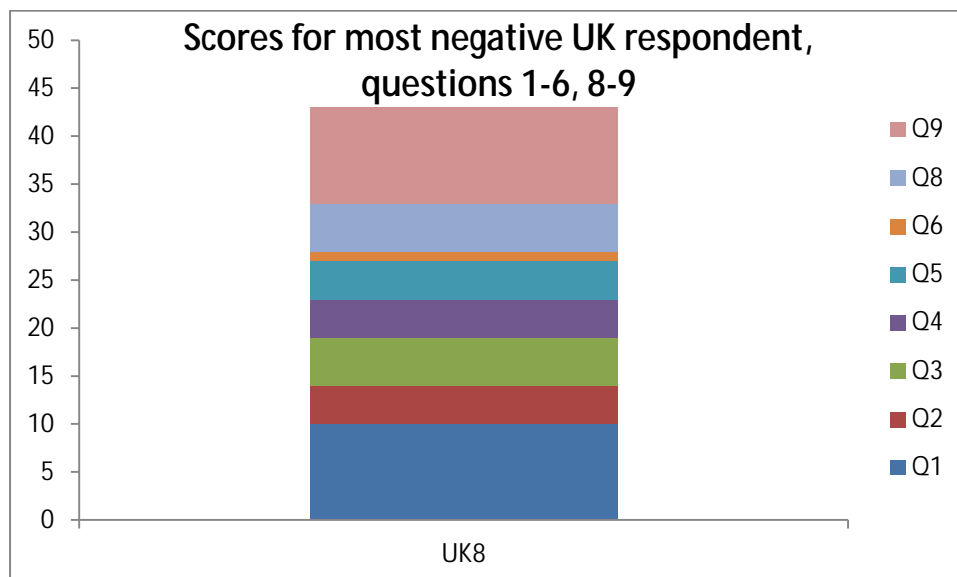


Figure 9 shows each of the most positive three respondents' scores out of a maximum 10 for the eight questions. One respondent rated each domain equally, at 10 points. For one respondent (Suzanne) 'connecting with others' was less important than the other domains, whilst for Lisa 'having a close relationship' and "doing things with and for others' were of lower significance. What, if any, conclusions can we draw from these findings? Firstly, there were only a few scores less than 10, and those did not fall below 7. This suggests that these respondents had a fair balance of activities and interests across the nef domains. We know that in the case of Lisa, her lack of involvement with others was due more to her personal circumstances than to her choice of being alone. Overall, though, respondents are engaged in all the nef indicators of wellbeing, which may account for their positivity.

Lowest mean scorers

At the other end of the spectrum, the UK respondent who scored the lowest mean for all 12 questions was Ann (UK8, mean score 6.25). She shows as noticeably less positive than the rest of the group. Figure 10 gives her scores for the eight selected questions.

Figure 10. Comparison with nef domains, lowest scorers



Ann is very positive about questions 1 and 9, both indicative of the importance of interpersonal relationships to her. However, she has virtually no interest in doing new things, and the other domains are of only modest importance. She therefore emerges as someone whose activities are imbalanced which, in terms of the nef domains, may indicate a need for a wider range of interest and involvement in life more generally.

We might conclude that the nef's model of needing to have a healthy balance of activities appears to be valid. Without a balance, individuals may display a rather negative outlook on life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has examined some theoretical models of wellbeing and sought to compare the views of 25 respondents to a survey of their wellbeing with common themes. It should be clear from the discussion that there are, indeed, parallels and that wellbeing seems to flourish best when individuals are engaged in a wide range of activities. Individuals' subjective wellbeing relates to physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions, but interpersonal relationships are also essential to balance, and the most fulfilled respondents enjoy giving to others in a way that they find meaningful.

The small scale study sought to investigate whether wellbeing appears to differ according to age, sex, and perceptions of being creative. Whilst acknowledging that the small size of the sample makes generalisation difficult, there are indicators which suggest that there are differences according to age and perceptions of creativity, but no significant gender difference has been found. The possibility of cultural distinctions will be discussed in a future chapter of this e-book.

The greatest insights into personal wellbeing derive from examining cases at the individual level and appreciating the contexts in which views are formed and shared. Qualitative data has enabled us to do this, and our statistical comparisons supports the impressions we have drawn from respondents' own words.

The lifewide learning process promoted by the Lifewide Education Development Award encourages and enables individuals to see and appreciate themselves as a whole person and encouraging and helping them become more of the person they want to become. Because of these fundamental goals embedded in the lifewide educational process, there should be a causal link between an individual's active participation in their own lifewide activities through which they learn and develop and their evolving appreciation of their own sense of wellbeing. A proposition that seems to be borne out in this study, though respondents do not necessarily show awareness of this link. Furthermore, the focus on 'purposes' and the ways in which people are trying to develop themselves to achieve their purposes in the Lifewide Development Award draws attention to this important dimension of wellbeing. It would seem valuable to encourage lifewide learners to consider their own wellbeing as part of their self-directed learning process, and encourage greater consciousness of wellbeing using tools like the questionnaire used in the survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This has been a fascinating study, and I would like to thank all who took part and raised interesting questions regarding their subjective wellbeing. I hope to be able to continue this research and develop a larger body of evidence in order to build upon these initial findings.

END NOTE

¹ Eudaimonic, relates to a state of contentedness, involving health, happiness and prosperity.

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APPENDIX LEWISWIDE EDUCATION WELLBEING SURVEY

ARE YOU MALE / FEMALE? WHICH OF THESE AGE RANGES APPLY? <20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 60+

- 1 What does 'wellbeing' mean to you?
- 2 Is wellbeing linked to happiness? Are they the same thing?
- 3 Which aspects of you does your wellbeing involve or affect?
- 4 What sorts of things do you do that enable you to cultivate a sense of wellbeing?
- 5 Is your sense of wellbeing something that comes from doing one thing or many things?
- 6 What sort of things erode your sense of wellbeing? *Please give examples*
- 7 If you are unhappy about your state of wellbeing how do you change it? *Can you give an example to illustrate?*
- 8 Is there a relationship between learning and developing and your sense of well being? *Can you give an example to illustrate*
- 9 Is there a relationship between wellbeing and achieving things that matter to you? *If yes can you give an example?*
- 10 On a scale of 1-10 where 1 is least and 10 is most important.. How important are these things in creating your sense of wellbeing. Please tick the relevant box. √

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Connecting with and having good relationships with people I come into contact with everyday										
2 Being healthy and fit....physically active - walking, sport, dancing etc										
3 Being involved in the world - being curious and aware of the world around me - looking and finding new opportunities										
4 Feeling creative - doing things that give me a chance to be creative, inventive or resourceful										
5 Continually learning and developing myself										
6 Doing new things that interest me										
7 Making progress in the things I am doing										
8 Doing things with and for other people										
9 Having a close relationship with someone I trust and can discuss anything with										
10 Feeling that I am valued by the people that matter to me										
11 Being able to do the things I want or need to do										
12 Achieving something that I think is worthwhile										

11 Why are the things that you rate most highly very important to your wellbeing?

12 Is there anything that is important to you missing from the list?

