

Wellbeing Energy Flows

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The purpose of society is to achieve sustainable, inclusive prosperity. This paper looks at what constitutes prosperity, how it is generated and ways it can be measured.

Prosperity (also called flourishing, happiness, wellbeing and quality of life) is an objective of society. Traditional economics assesses prosperity in monetary terms, using a measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Emerging economics assesses prosperity in human terms, conceiving it as an aggregate of the wellbeing of the people who comprise society.

This paper explores what wellbeing is and how it is generated.

This paper refers to three terms. **Wellbeing** is an assessment of an individual's state of being. **Quality of life** is the state of the person's life that provides them with wellbeing. **Prosperity** is the accumulated wellbeing of members of society. It is used when referring to an assessment of the state of society's being as a single entity, in which individuals are the elements that act in combination to create society.

Defining Wellbeing

Most of us have a good feel for what wellbeing means. It includes, for example, being well fed, being healthy, being safe, and enjoying our lives. But it does not take much scratching at the surface to reveal contradictions and inconsistencies in this general feeling. Does wellbeing mean that we are safe, or that we feel safe? Do we have wellbeing if we have good health but terrible health care if we get ill? Do we have wellbeing if we have great health care but are terminally ill? And in the light of the many more contradictions that exist, how do we even begin to measure wellbeing in a way that is meaningful?

This is why we need to define wellbeing. An earlier paper, [Defining Prosperity](#), explores how wellbeing is defined and measured. It proposes that our individual wellbeing is the extent to which our needs, wants and hopes are satisfied. Example of needs include eating and safety. Examples of wants (also called desires) are a comfortable home and a secure and sufficient income.

This hides some complexity. The term "satisfy" means the extent to which we reasonably perceive our current needs and desires are satisfied. It asks the question: how well are our needs are met? Hope (also called aspiration) relates to our future needs and wants. So "satisfy" expands to include the extent (also called probability) to which we reasonably perceive our hopes will be met. The nature of wellbeing includes the term "reasonably". It stems from a dilemma relating to wellbeing that is probably irresolvable, and which is discussed later in this paper.

There are two additional points to highlight in this summary.

- There is an upper limit to individual wellbeing. Once our needs, wants and hopes are satisfied, the upper limit is reached, regardless of the level of additional resources or status at our disposal. There are only so many rich meals one enjoys eating in a day. This means that measuring the success of society in terms of wellbeing has a natural tendency towards inclusivity and social justice, because the upper limit means society is not assessed as progressing if people at the top of society continue to concentrate their share of wealth.
- The definition above focuses on human wellbeing. Human wellbeing itself is heavily influenced by ecological wellbeing. If we do not have enough natural resources to feed humanity, for example, it will lead to untold misery. We have written a separate paper dealing on [Defining Sustainability](#), which is an integral part of understanding individual wellbeing and societal prosperity.

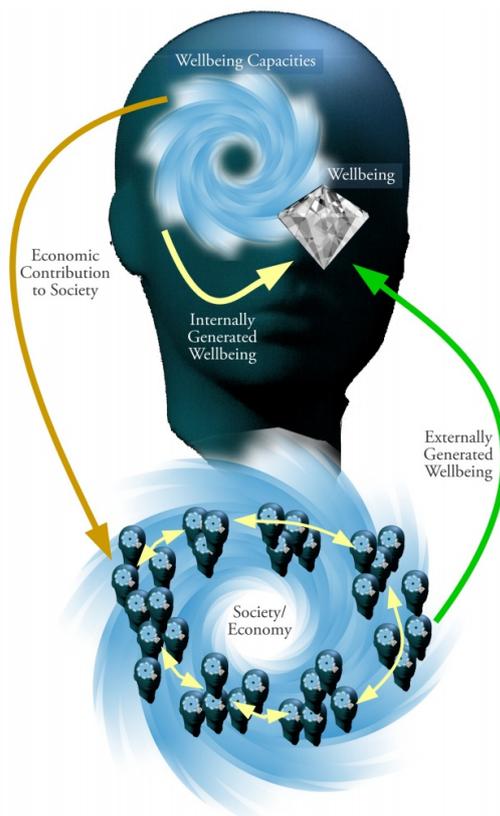
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Generating Wellbeing

We are social animals driven to seek wellbeing. It is built into our physical constitution, our instinct and the way we understand the world. Our needs, wants and hopes are what motivate us to take action. We refer to them collectively as motivators (or drivers). The outcomes of our physical actions generate the emotional perceptions of wellbeing. We describe the exercise of motivators and purposeful actions as the energy that generates wellbeing.

Exercising this energy provides us with two capacities - the capacity to generate our own wellbeing, and the capacity to enhance our wellbeing through social and economic interaction with others.



In the illustration, the two whirlpools represent the energy that generates internal and external wellbeing.

In the human brain, we have the capacity to generate wellbeing. The internal energy is represented by the whirlpool in the head. Wellbeing is an emotional response to the outcomes of our motivated actions within the context of our circumstances. The state of wellbeing is represented by the diamond, a repository in which wellbeing is accumulated.

Internal generation of wellbeing occurs where our actions and thought processes generate wellbeing directly. For example, active appreciation of our personal qualities is an internal action that can generate wellbeing.

External generation uses the same energy processes, but the motivated actions are directed outwards, towards other individuals or towards society in general. Society's function is to combine the energy contributions of its members in a way that amplifies the energy inputs. A successful society generates a cumulative output that exceeds its inputs. It does this by creating structures that allow improved wellbeing through specialisation and collaboration. The combined energy is represented as the whirlpool outside the head. The amplification of energy can be conceived as the speed at which the whirlpool spins. As the speed increases, so does the effectiveness in which society combines human and other resources to

satisfy its members' motivators. A slow moving or stagnant whirlpool has the capacity to suck down and destroy its input. Poor systems of education and high levels of corruption are examples of stagnating influences.

The most advanced societies today are capable of generating amplification gains of between 1,000 - 5,000 times according to some measures.

The amplified output of society is passed back to its members, for each individual to add to their diamond repository of wellbeing. Society determines how the amplified energy is shared between its members. Remembering that wellbeing has an upper limit, if the distribution of the gains is sufficiently imbalanced, there is a tipping point at which ineffective distribution of gains actually diminishes the prosperity society. So this is another example of a stagnating influence, potentially negating some of the fast flowing energies that the system has been able to generate. We see this stagnating influence in some adolescent capitalist states that allocate the amplified gains in ways that destroys a substantial proportion of the amplified output.

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Wellbeing Capacities

Wellbeing capacity can be defined as the competence to generate wellbeing. It includes the actions and attitudes that change an individual's circumstances (such as growing food), and the attitudes and understandings that influence the psychological processes that convert circumstances into wellbeing (such as eating when hungry).

Wellbeing capacities are poorly reflected in social policy. There are many aspects of wellbeing capacities that are very well researched, such as mindfulness and relationships. But there are fewer studies that put them together into a complete model of wellbeing capacities, such as Frances Stewart's [Capabilities and Human Development](#) report. This paper is intended as an introduction to the subject in the context of an [Economic Framework](#) that proposes a framework within which to study and quantify the relationship between individual behaviours, social structures and the level of prosperity in society.

The state of wellbeing is a psychological outcome. Wellbeing capacities seek to attain psychological equilibrium by satisfying our motivators.

The state of an individual's equilibrium is affected both by internal and external circumstance. Different capacities need activation depending on the circumstances of the individual. The state of an individual's wellbeing is the product of an individual's personal capacities, their individual circumstances (also called capabilities) and how effectively they apply their capacities to their given and anticipated circumstances (also called functionings).

It is important to distinguish a capacity from a state of being. A capacity is the ability to influence outcomes. A state is the outcome itself. Many of the capacities that are measured can also be states. The capacity to achieve congruence (being at one with yourself and the world), for example, is different from the state of congruence where war has demolished a sense of security. Although it is important to differentiate capacity from state, it is sometimes difficult to achieve in the realms of human consciousness

Unique combinations of wellbeing capacities are found both in individuals and groups of individuals. Groups of individuals include family/friends, communities, organisations, institutions and nations. In the higher state consciousness of [Spiral Dynamics](#), our world is seen as an integrally connected entity in its own right, with its own distinct complement of wellbeing capacities. To some, this thinking extends to the entire universe.

Individual/Internal Wellbeing Capacities

The wellbeing capacity of individuals can be divided into a number of categories. Three categories are illustrated below:

- **Intrapersonal capacities**

These capacities relate to self-awareness and the competence to regulate the internal processing of perceptions.

Innate values/capacities themselves can be understood within the three realms described by Neil and Jane Hawkes. Self-love involves the capacity for self-compassion, calmness and connectedness with others. Self-awareness, which builds on self-love, adds the capacity for clarity, curiosity and creativity. Self-esteem builds on self-love and self-awareness, adds the capacity for confidence and courage.

Resilience is the capacity to handle stressful situations in ways that are appropriate to psychological equilibrium.

Internal congruence correlates with the tendencies to experience positive emotions. It relates to the ability to carry out daily life in accordance with one's own values, and the degree to which a person's sense of self is supported by their worldview - their understanding of and the way they see the world

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- **Interpersonal capacities**

Conflict is a common stimulus in relationships. Intrapersonal capacities afford problem solving abilities that facilitate good relationships. They can be illustrated by three realms below.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is the suite of capacities that arise from understanding the emotional actions and motivators of others, which itself requires an equivalent understanding of the self.

Relational intelligence (RQ) is the suite of capacities that arise from understanding the basis of relationships and how to develop effective relationships. Relational intelligences, as described by Fuller, Hawkes and Hendry, comprise two realms: the ability to create trust and the ability to repair broken trust. Trust is created through capacities that include compassion, respect and integrity. Broken trust can be repaired through capacities that include hope and forgiveness.

Ethical intelligence (TQ) is the suite of capacities that arise from understanding how to apply EQ and RQ capacities in practical settings. These capacities equip individuals to distinguish behaviour that constitute ethical behaviour in any given set of circumstances, to inform the person's actions that establish ethical behaviour towards others, and to help protect against external pressures that suppress ethical behaviour/inappropriately negate the interests of others.

- **Circumstantial capacities**

Circumstantial capacities seek to achieve congruence between the individual and their external circumstances. External congruence refers to the state of synchronisation between an individual's worldview and the reality of the world around them. It refers to the extent to which an individual's worldview corresponds to the worldview of the many groupings of people with whom they experience life. It refers to the appropriateness of their behaviours and actions, driven by the interaction of their worldview and by the influences of others, to satisfy their motivators.

An example of a circumstantial capacity is [Harmony Control](#), as described by Morling and Fiske. It involves the capacities to avoid prejudice: through focus on similarities over differences, identifying with others and accepting others. It involves capacities to resolve conflict: through problem solving, avoiding dominating, avoiding obligating (accommodating others) and compromising.

External Wellbeing Capacities

Society generates output of circumstances that can be converted to wellbeing. The output is available to distribute to society's members. In an effective society, its generated output exceeds the sum of its members' shepherded input. Society achieves its amplified wellbeing through its physical and social structures that are organised to combined wellbeing energy with material resources to deliver wellbeing. Society becomes unsustainable when the rate of resources it extracts to deliver wellbeing is excessive, or when its use of resources becomes poisonous to humans or to the life of the planet.

Society's wellbeing capacity is its capacity to amplify wellbeing by combining human and material inputs. Society achieves capacity both through the capacities of the organisations and groups of people within society. such as communities, organisations and institutions, and through the capacities of the the higher entity of society as a whole.

- **Organisational capacities**

Organisations of people is akin to the organs within a larger body. They play a specialist part in the whole, but can not function in isolation. Capacities for organisations of people involve establishing congruence of people in an organisation with each other, between its actions and its purpose, and between the purpose of the organisation and the social needs of the society it serves.

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- **Societal capacities**

There are many models that explore and explain capacities of society as a complete and distinct entity. In [Designs for a Better World](#), we propose a model of society in which wellbeing capacities are divided into [seven categories](#), which operate within the resources and constraints of our physical world:

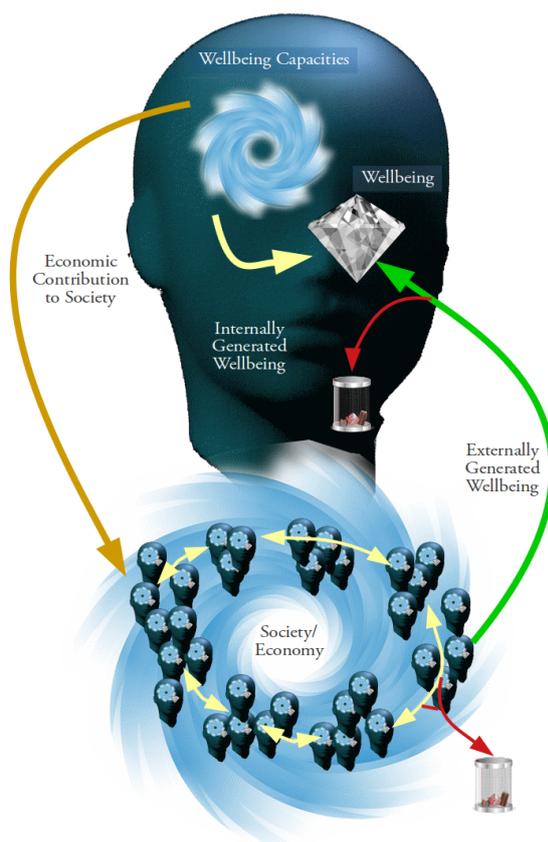
- Statehood
- Political Structures
- Social/Monetary Economic Structures
- Social Cultures
- Opportunities/Capabilities
- Resource Allocations
- Reward Structures

The above societal structures are indivisible aspects of a complete social system.

Accumulating Wellbeing

Our model of energy flows visualises wellbeing as being accumulated within a diamond at the centre of the brain.

Some of an individual's wellbeing capacity is used to generate wellbeing internally. It is added directly to their personal diamond repository. Some capacity is contributed to the wider society, for society to amplify its input energy and that a share of amplified level of wellbeing generated by society finds its way back to the individual, which they can add to their repository.



There is one further important refinement, however. Some of the wellbeing energy is lost en route. This is represented in the updated model by energy extracted from the system into trash cans. Generated energy can be lost in any of three ways.

Firstly, society's actors are capable of destroying wellbeing directly. Examples of destructive actions include inappropriately stressing the workforce, sewing social disharmony, and poisoning the environment.

Secondly, society may mishandle its distribution of amplified wellbeing amongst its members. In society's with skewed distribution of gains, deprived individuals may well contribute more to society than society pays back to the individual. Further, there is an upper limit to wellbeing. So very favoured individuals may well receive more of the wellbeing gains than they have the capacity to enjoy. In both cases, wellbeing is destroyed.

Thirdly, an individual's wellbeing capacity equips individuals to convert their circumstances into wellbeing. Individual wellbeing capacities have the ability both to amplify incoming wellbeing en route to the repository, and also to diminish it. Examples of capacities that can modulate wellbeing include managing expectations and managing perceptions of entitlement.

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Measuring Wellbeing

Since wellbeing is a direct objective of society, we need to track its progress, which means we want it measured.

Frustratingly, humans and human interactions are intensely complicated. It means wellbeing is a state which does not lend itself easily to objective measurement. The techniques we have to measure wellbeing revolve around our understanding of salient attributes of wellbeing, which individually are less problematic to measure. They are necessarily an approximation of the real thing.

The current approximations to wellbeing fall into three main categories.

- Individual components of the **state of wellbeing**. Examples include the state of someone's anxiety, and their sense of self-esteem.
- The **internal capacity** of an individual to generate their own wellbeing. Examples include an individuals' skills at developing good relationships, and their ability to adapt their way of seeing the world to the reality of their daily life.
- The **external capacity** of the system to generate wellbeing for the individual. Examples include freedom to earn a living, and the level of physical security that society provides to its members

Some attributes that are used to measure wellbeing are themselves complicated. Many attributes are actually a composite of further attributes which may have a multiple nature.

The Relationship attribute is a good example of a composite. The quality of relationships provide information about the state of wellbeing. A sense of connectedness is core to most people's sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-love.

The ability to develop good relationships provides information about an individual's internal capacity. Some people are better than others at developing good relationships, which is differentiated from the state of good relationships. For example, a highly attuned and compassionate person has a better shot at developing good relationships. But this does not convert to the reality of good relationships if they are the subject of racist, sexist or any other groupist persecution.

The environment surrounding relationships also provides information about the external capacity. Personal and productive relationships are influenced by the social environment set by society. The laws, politics and cultures of society, for example, all contribute to setting the environment which constrain or support development of individual relationships. The nature of productive relationships influences the quality and quantity of externally generated goodwill available for distribution to members of society. Similarly, society influences the circumstances in which individuals are capable of developing relations, which in turn influences the quality of personal relationships. So when we try to evaluate the measure of wellbeing through the attribute of "relationships", the result can be quite confusing.

It is clear that we will develop more useful methods of measurement as our understanding of wellbeing matures.

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Measuring Prosperity

This model proposes an unmeasurable equation of society's prosperity, being the sum of its members' wellbeing.

It proposes that prosperity is a function of: internally generated wellbeing; allocated externally generated wellbeing multiplied by society's amplification rate (net of its destructive actions); and individuals' rate of modulation.

This can be represented by the formula:

$$P = \sum (i.w + (e.w * \text{amplification} * \text{share})) * \text{mod})$$

Where:

P = Prosperity

w - wellbeing (% satisfaction of needs, wants and hopes)

i.w = Internally generated energy that is consumed directly

e.w = Internally generated energy that is contributed to society

amplification = Society's amplification of contributed energy

share = share of wellbeing allocated to the individual

mod = the individual's modulating factor, being the individual's: consumed wellbeing / available wellbeing

Commentary on Wellbeing Measures

We contend that wellbeing is a state. It is the extent to which an individual's needs, wants and hopes are satisfied. It probably goes without saying that measuring wellbeing is fraught with difficulties.

As described above, wellbeing is a function of perception, which creates some significant challenges. Human evolution has equipped us with marvellous techniques to simplify and model the world around us. It allows us to respond instantly to life-threatening situations. Our spectacular modelling capacities have evolved in tandem with an ability to learn understandings/behaviours which our brains can make semi-permanent within our sub-conscious, a sort of learned instinct. But evolution did not equip us as well to develop mathematical calculations which accommodate components we are unable to measure, in order to guide our actions. Measuring perceptions is profoundly problematic. To illustrate, we can change our perceptions of our quality of life with as little as a changed question. Self-assessed sense of safety, for example, may differ for the majority of people when asked about knife crime or terrorism, compared with when asked about personal life/death experiences in the last five years. This makes it difficult to rely on self-reported aspects of wellbeing. The conundrum is that whilst perceptions make self-reporting unreliable, it is not possible to measure wellbeing without taking perceptions into account. If policy makers fail to understand the impact of perception on policy outcomes, their policies are doomed to failure. Conversely, if policies focus too heavily on self-assessed perceptions, effective strategies may be scrapped where perceptions are not grounded in reality. There is no easy answer to this deeply significant challenge. Our proposal is to combine an element of self-assessment within the parameters of a sense of reasonableness from the perspective of someone outside the individual's personal circumstance - the proverbial "man/woman on the Clapham Omnibus", assuming one could still be found.

Most wellbeing indices currently measure components of the state of wellbeing, or conditions likely to empower individuals to accumulate wellbeing. Bokyo, Cooper and Cooper have analysed over 2,000 indices to provide enormous insight into the current thinking around wellbeing assessments. The current measures have one huge advantage. Obtaining measurements is relatively straight forward. They also have two huge shortcomings. One is that some measures are disconnected from the individual, through measuring attributes that relate to society as a whole. Another is that many measures employ the technique of self-reported happiness, which as illustrated earlier, has its own considerable limitations. Shortcomings undermine the reliability of the measures which guide

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policy, and against which nations measure their effectiveness. Misguided measures risk misguiding policy and misinforming us about our reality.

Thompson and Gil advance the argument that wellbeing is a state of mind relating to circumstance. They seek to provide the means to measure the state of wellbeing by assessing the appropriateness of awareness about experiences; and by evaluating interactions with oneself, with others and with the world around us. Their work is not widely available and their concepts have yet to be evaluated by the academic community. Yet the direction of their thinking adds considerably to methodology that drives most of the major indices used today.

Generally, current measures of wellbeing focus on a fixed point in time. They fail to address the impact on wellbeing of unrequited hope, by failing to reflect the impact of expectations of future satisfaction of future needs and desires. There is a partial solution to this problem. Better reflection of capacities will provide some insight into possible future outcomes - in other words, satisfaction of hopes. In principle, as internal and external wellbeing capacities in society are strengthened, future wellbeing might be expected to rise. Of course, it is necessary to include all aspects of capacity in the evaluation. If internal capacities strengthen at the same time as opportunities (also called capabilities) are withdrawn, it becomes much more challenging to predict the net outcome.

Many existing measures of wellbeing struggle to reflect individual wellbeing capacities. It means:

- the capacities of the individual to deliver the energy that generates internal and external wellbeing are poorly understood in respect of policy guidance or personal development, and
- the measures fail to reflect appropriately the extent to which individuals modulate the level of generated wellbeing generated into the level of consumed wellbeing.

Measures of wellbeing will become more reliable when they reflect the implications of individual capacities to generate consumed wellbeing, and when the implications of hope, of the expectations of future wellbeing, are incorporated in the results.

As outlined above, components of the measures of wellbeing are mainly proxies. They are an indivisible mix of both the state of wellbeing and the capacity to generate it. In many cases, aspects of a condition relate to wellbeing and capacity at the same time. To avoid confusion, it may be helpful to distinguish the nature of the proxy, since it has a significant impact for policy makers. The appendices at the end of this paper offers some examples of clarifying the constituent parts of measures of wellbeing.

Conclusion

The work on wellbeing has offered us the opportunity to take huge steps forward in understanding the reality of our experiences of the world we live. There is further work ahead if we want to refine the measures to provide ever more useful guidance into creating a sustainable, inclusive prosperity.

For those grappling with the challenge of creating a single meaningful measure of wellbeing from the diverse classifications and challenges, that is the point. It is hoped that this paper will help raise the bar of wellbeing understandings and measures.

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Appendices : Wellbeing Classifications

The appendices illustrate how attributes of wellbeing might be classified to clarify the scope of its various components.

Appendix I : The Economics of Arrival

The book [The Economics of Arrival](#) by Katherine Trebeck and Jeremy Williams has a chapter which pulls together various conceptions of Wellbeing. The following tables classifies some of the component parts it identifies:

	State of Wellbeing	Internal Capacity	External Capacity
Meaningful existence	x		
Kindness to others		x	
Co-operating with others			x
Healthy environment	x		x
Personal freedoms	x	x	x
Relationships	x	x	x

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Appendix II : Scaling the Heights of Positive Psychology

The report [Scaling the Heights of Positive Psychology](#) by Courtney Ackerman, Meg Warren and Stewart Donaldson summarises the most frequently used attributes within 2,000 reports they reviewed that measure Wellbeing from a positive psychology perspective. The following table classifies the main attributes:

	Prevalence of Citations	State of Wellbeing	Internal Capacity	External Capacity
Constructs				
General Wellbeing/Happiness	11.5%	x		
Emotions and moods	6.3%	x		
Personality	5.6%		x	
Depression	4.7%	x	x	
Self-esteem/self-efficacy	4.1%	x	x	
Spirituality/Religion/Higher Connection	3.8%	?	?	?
Physical Health	3.7%	x	x	
Anxiety	3.4%	x	x	
Stress	3.1%	x	x	
Affect	3.0%	x	x	
Post-Traumatic Stress	3.0%	x	x	
Meaning/Purpose	2.9%	x		
Strengths	2.9%		x	x
Relationships	2.8%	x	x	x
Coping	2.6%		x	
Social Support	2.4%	x	x	x
Identity/Identification	2.1%	x	x	x
Values	1.8%		x	
Resilience	1.7%		x	
Measurement Scales				
Satisfaction with Life	27.6%	x		
Affect	19.7%	x	x	
Life-Orientation	9.1%	x	x	
Self-Esteem Scale	6.7%	x		
Psychological Wellbeing Scale	6.6%	x		
Hope Scale	6.0%	x	x	
Values in Action Inventory of Strengths	5.9%		x	
Gratitude	5.5%	x	x	
Subjective Happiness	5.1%	x		
Meaning in Life	4.2%	x		