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This chapter introduces the idea that both assessing wellbeing and intervening at different possible levels within both schools and organisations may be the best pathway to increasing overall and long-term wellbeing. Based on the evidence now demonstrating that work wellbeing is beneficial (e.g., with every organisational dollar invested into organisational wellbeing providing a return of approximately three to five: Rath & Harter, 2010), and that wellbeing in education is beneficial (e.g., students who use their character strengths more report more engagement with their learning and intrinsic motivation to learn: see Jarden & Jarden, 2015), the question then becomes how to cultivate and sustain wellbeing in schools and organisations.

At present, arguably, much of the emphasis and work to improve wellbeing focuses on individuals, in schools on students or teachers, or both (Norrish, 2015), and in organisations on employees (Lewis, 2011). Therefore it is timely to introduce and outline a new more expansive framework, the Me, We, Us Framework (MWUF), for guiding the implementation of wellbeing programmes and for conceptually evaluating positive education and organisational wellbeing research.

**The ‘Me, We, Us’ Framework**

When focusing specifically on organisational or educational wellbeing, wellbeing assessments and programmes can happen at three distinct levels regardless of school or organisational structure or size. These three levels include the individual level (Me), group level (We), and the organisational level (Us), as depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Me, We, and Us levels of wellbeing intervention.

Individual level wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that employees, teachers or students can do by themselves, such as learning about and utilising their strengths mindfully or undertaking a mindfulness programme (Niemiec, 2013). Although the limits to which students can undertake such programmes unassisted are unknown (i.e., down to which age can a student follow the instructions of a mindfulness or strengths programme unassisted?), such ‘Me’ initiatives largely do not require the involvement of others within the school or organisation.

Group level wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that involve the individual working on their wellbeing with at least one other person that they are directly in contact with on a regular basis. For example, for employees and teachers this would be either their manager, their direct team, or other employees and teachers with whom they are in frequent contact with in the work setting. For students this would be their teachers, other school staff, parents, or classmates. The activities at the group level are either in a one-to-one format, or have influence on a small group or are undertaken in a group format, and cannot be undertaken by individuals themselves as they require the cooperation and input from others. For example, for employees, with the employee’s manager or team members, or for students, with their teachers, other school staff (e.g., guidance counsellors), parents or classmates. Examples of ‘We’ initiatives for employees and teachers include strategies and tasks such as job crafting (Wrzesniewski, 2014) or building high quality connections (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and for students strategies and tasks such as delivering gratitude letters to favourite teachers (Norrish, 2015).

Organisational and whole school level wellbeing initiatives include strategies and tasks that aim to have an impact over the whole of the organisation or school community. Examples of ‘Us’ initiatives for organisations and schools include strategies and tasks such as creating an organisational wellbeing policy (HAPIA, 2009) or framework, directing resources towards one-off or smaller scale wellbeing initiatives, or whole of organisation wellbeing assessments or programmes such as Appreciative Inquiry summits (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005).

Additionally, these levels of Me, We, and Us can also be integrated for maximal effect. For example, in an organisational setting an employee (Me) can choose to identify and work on their strengths, a team (We) can choose to focus on team members strengths in the deployment of team projects, and the organisation (Us) can choose to invest in the cost of a strengths programme for all employees, or focus on combined organisational strengths during an Appreciative Inquiry summit. How exactly these levels are integrated, and what possibilities for integration exist, is yet to be investigated, so is largely unknown. For example, a question from a school or organisation might be “should we start at the Me level, then progress to the We level, and then progress to the Us level, or should we do it the other way around?”, or it could be “should we start at all three levels simultaneously?”. With the prospect of such integration and answers to such questions unknown, therein lies great possibility to increase organisational and educational performance and flourishing.

**Possible MWUF benefits**

On the whole, at all three levels of Me, We and Us, high wellbeing from a positive psychology perspective is about individuals (students, teachers, employees) and organisations shifting their perspective from predominately focusing on what is wrong, to building on what is going right and working, to capitalising on the good and building and seeding the enabling conditions for high wellbeing (Jarden & Jarden, 2015). Wellbeing programmes across these three levels are about helping individuals to use their strengths, enhance their relationships, and find more meaning and engagement at work or school so that both individuals and the organisation as a whole can achieve their true potential.

Because wellbeing assessments and programmes have focused largely at the individual (Me) level to date, wellbeing activities at the group (We) level (e.g., soft relationship skills for managers, communication skills for students and teams) are a prime target for wellbeing programmes, and wellbeing assessment metrics at the relational ‘We’ level are almost non-existent. Whilst there is no measure, scale or tool which holistically accounts adequately for all three levels of the MWUF at present (in a sense a Wellbeing Audit covering the three levels), it is our contention that further consideration of the ‘We’ and ‘Us’ levels is both needed and would be beneficial – both in practice, and from a research intervention and assessment perspective. This recommendation is based on 1) the realisation that the vast majority of organisational wellbeing research to date has been on the various types of individual level benefits (e.g., employee wellbeing linking to health, employee wellbeing linking to productivity, etc.), and on 2) informal feedback from organisational consultants already successfully using principles of the MWUF in practice. Nonetheless, research on the MWUF *per se*, and the integration between the levels, is now needed.

**A role for levels of evaluation**

One way forward towards considering the impact and utility that the MWUF may have is to begin with assessments and evaluations of wellbeing at, and between, these three levels in schools and organisations. If organisations and schools do not assess wellbeing rigorously at these levels, it is difficult for organisations and schools to then determine the need, appropriate type, scale (i.e., at which levels), and effectiveness over time of their wellbeing activities. One currently available online wellbeing assessment tool is now briefly reviewed which captures a combination of outcome (e.g., flourishing) and driver level (e.g., strengths use) wellbeing indicators[[1]](#footnote-1), and provides functionality to easily extend assessments to all three MWUF levels.

**Work on Wellbeing[[2]](#footnote-2)**

Work on Wellbeing (www.workonwellbeing.com) is an online assessment tool specifically developed to assess and track employee wellbeing over time in organisations. The assessment comprises 50 questions and takes on average nine minutes to complete. Consisting of a collection of validated psychometric measures from the psychology literature, the assessment has four main modules: an assessment of Global Wellbeing (e.g., life satisfaction); an assessment of Domain Wellbeing (e.g., satisfaction with intimate relationships); an assessment of Workplace Wellbeing (e.g., autonomy at work); and an assessment of Component Wellbeing factors underpinning wellbeing that are related to a workplace context (e.g., physical health indicators, resilience). In addition, organisations can add their own specific questions to the assessment (e.g., on We or Us aspects), and select to add further construct measures from a list of 40+ additional validated measures (such as work engagement, burnout, stress, hope, meaning, mindfulness). At the end of the assessment, employees are presented with real-time, benchmarked and contextualised wellbeing reports. Both organisational account holders and employees are provided with aggregate, anonymous organisational level wellbeing reports (i.e., Us level reports) at the end of the organisations assessment period. These reports can also be tailored for sub-group level reporting (i.e., teams at the We level).

**A way forward**

The MWUF provides organisations and schools with a rationale and reminder that multiple levels of assessment and intervention may be needed to maximise performance, academics, and wellbeing across an organisation or school. The key point is that a focus on an individual level may not be sufficient for maximum capitalisation, whereas current tools, measures and approaches to increasing wellbeing are largely still at the individual level in practice. Importantly the MWUF provides a practically useful framework when obtaining commitment for wellbeing programmes and implementing them within educational and organisational settings; the language and idea is easily understandable and communicable to both business leaders and employees.

It is only a matter of time before knowledge of the benefits of high levels of both work and school community wellbeing become widespread, and wellbeing programmes become common. Now is the opportunity to think more conceptually about possible levels of wellbeing intervention and how best to assess and capitalise on these and their interrelationships. It is a good time to establish firmer guidelines and recommendations regarding what assessments and programmes should include, what they should accomplish, and how they should happen if they are to be the basis for change.

It is our hope that high quality psychological wellbeing information can be used to create positive school environments and workplaces where employees and students are able to do meaningful and enjoyable work that taps into their greatest strengths and their most important goals. With such information organisations and schools can capitalise on the unique intellectual and personal strengths of each student and employee. It is possible to focus less on getting students and employees to do their work or study, but rather on how to enable them to do good work and study. Organisations and schools can go beyond fixing problems and into promoting excellence. Advances such as these are underway, and we contend a boarder focus on the levels of Me, We and Us is a fundamental element in the way forward.

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1. Note that one of the chapter authors (AJ) is a senior scientist for Work on Wellbeing Ltd and the other (RJ) is the director for Work on Wellbeing Ltd. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. An equivalent version of this tool is available for schools: www.aweschools.com [↑](#footnote-ref-2)