



what works  
wellbeing

# workplace wellbeing questionnaire: methodology

**January 2018**

The Workplace Wellbeing Questionnaire project was originally initiated, by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, to help the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) assess the impact on employee wellbeing of a broad range of workplace factors within DWP.

It has however been created with wider cross-sector utility in mind and, in the longer term, it is intended to assist any organisation identify which drivers of wellbeing have the most influence on the wellbeing of employees in the workplace. It does not seek to measure everything, but it does seek to provide an indication of where potential problems may exist, thus permitting employers to target resources on areas where the impact on employee wellbeing is likely to be greatest.

## Aims of the workplace questionnaire

### **Diagnostic tool - to aid improvement**

Workplace wellbeing does not rest upon one aspect. Our health, relationships, environment, security and purpose in work all play a role.

In order to improve wellbeing, a workplace needs to understand where there may be problems - and to understand the situation across each of these areas, rather than only understanding one aspect.

The tool seeks to pull together in one questionnaire a number of 'best of breed' questions, using existing evidence-based surveys wherever this is possible. Unlike many existing wellbeing tools, it does not focus on single specific areas such as mental health or workplace environment, but rather it casts a wide net across what we currently understand to be the most important drivers of wellbeing in the workplace. To do this, it seeks to:

- Be holistic and comprehensive by measuring the impact of the key drivers of workplace wellbeing in a single survey (Health, Security, Environment, Relationships and Purpose)
- Enabling benchmarking: using existing survey questions where possible, to enable benchmarking for individual questions
- Allow for core and tailored options (so organisations can use the whole survey or just parts of it if space for survey questions is limited).

## Method

### **1. Building a comprehensive framework, based on existing conceptual frameworks:**

#### **Using existing, theme-specific surveys and drawing this together**

There are many existing surveys which provide good focus on particular drivers of wellbeing. These include:

- The Money Advice Service's Financial Capability Framework
- The Well Building Standard
- The MIND Workplace Wellbeing Survey (Mental Health)

- The Health and Safety Executive Stress Toolkit
- The City Mental Health Alliance Staff Survey
- World Health Organisation and British Heart Foundation Health Surveys

Many of these surveys are effective at examining particular areas, such as environment, finance or mental health - but there are few (if any) that cast a wide net across the full range of drivers of wellbeing within the workplace. This tool does not seek to replace existing detailed surveys but it does seek to fill the niche for a general diagnostic tool which employers can use to identify the key areas where wellbeing challenges may lie and where efforts should be prioritised.

Looking across existing surveys presented us with a list of the key concepts and potential questions which had been previously tested.

### **Cross-checking with holistic frameworks**

Across the field of wellbeing research, we selected a number of existing evidence-based frameworks:

- [PERMA +](#)
- [Job quality characteristics](#)
- [Line Manager relationships](#)
- [Functioning and flourishing](#) (Updated model underpinning the European Social Survey Wellbeing Module)
- [Engagement](#)
- [Flourishing](#)

We used these to cross-check that our list of the constituent concepts from existing survey questions covered all the important aspects.

We found a number of gaps, including under engagement and aspects of flourishing.

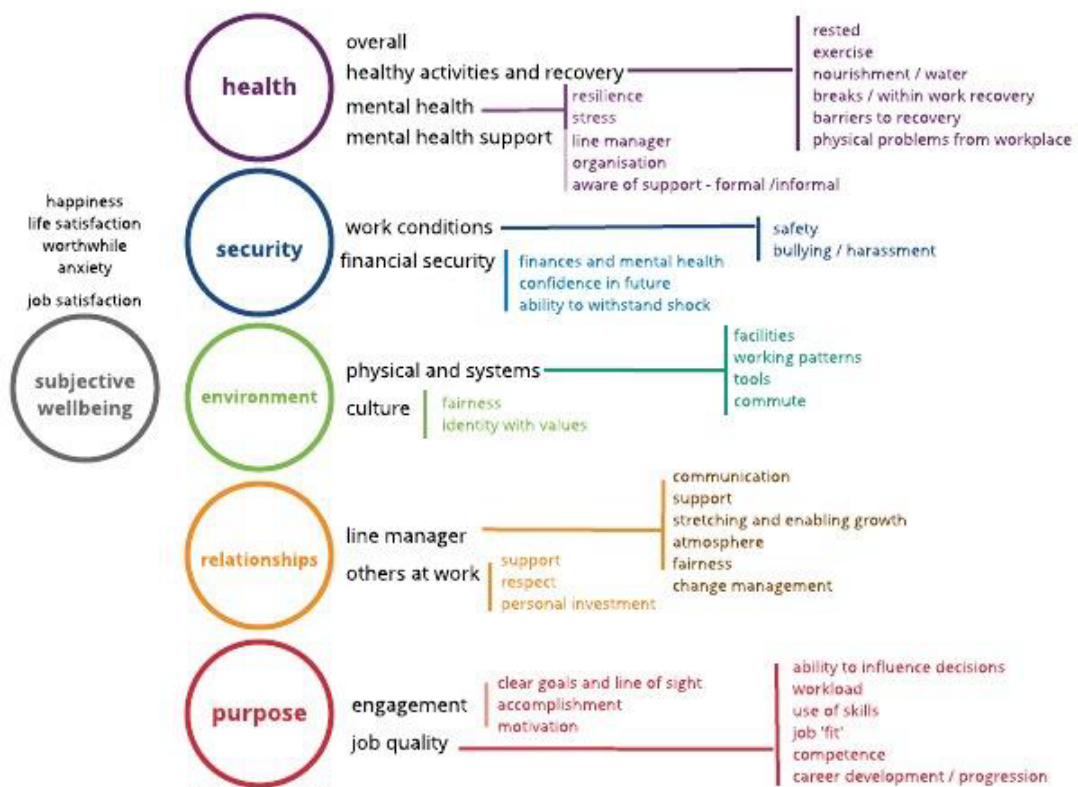
We filled these gaps through finding existing questions which addressed these, in European and national surveys (see section 2 below).

### **Splitting into themes**

As expected, each of these frameworks have overlapping constituent parts. For example, aspects of job quality relate to relationships with line managers, or our environment - and health relates to the environment as well as our own activities. For ease of navigating the questions, we have split these questions into the overarching themes of health, security, relationships, environment and purpose. Under each theme, we proposed sub-themes and key 'concepts', based on the concepts covered in existing surveys and the evidence base.

There are many ways in which these concepts can be split. The overarching themes (the five drivers of workplace wellbeing) are based on a model developed by the Centre through working with business. While other models existed it was felt that this structure was simple and provided a good starter framework under which the sub-themes and concepts could be logically nested.

### **Figure 1: Themes and constituent concepts**



## 2. Drawing from national and European surveys, to enable benchmarking

Given the list of constituent 'sub-themes', we were keen to enable benchmarking of these questions. Given the answer to a particular question, a workplace would be able to see how their employees answered in comparison to e.g. the answers of employees in the UK overall, or the Civil Service.

To check which questions were possible for benchmarking, we searched through a number of relevant national and European surveys:

- Understanding Society
- Skills and Employment Survey
- Public Health Outcomes Framework
- European Social Survey
- Workplace Employment Relations Survey
- European Working Conditions Survey

## 3. Selecting the questions

Our first step was to take the concepts from these surveys and to remove duplicates. Where there were a number of questions looking at the same concept, the question was chosen by judging:

- Fit of question to sub-theme
- Ability to benchmark
- Ease of understanding

- In a few cases where information existed, factor analysis was used to choose the option between two Qs which was most closely correlated with wellbeing

#### 4. Selecting the overarching question

Each of the themes is split into many detailed questions for each constituent part, for the questionnaire to work as a diagnostic tool.

Some workplaces may prefer to ask questions at an overarching level - i.e. not delving into the detail for each of the themes. For all of the (sub)themes, it was possible to identify an 'overarching question' - i.e. a question which was comprehensive and could substitute for the larger number of detailed questions where relevant. For example, an overall self-assessment of general health, rather than asking about the individual aspects which contribute to health.

For the sub-theme of line management, evidence suggests that each of the constituent parts are closely correlated together. This suggests that one question could be chosen to represent the remaining aspects of a good line manager relationship. Factor analysis would help us to identify which the most appropriate Q would be.

#### 5. Selecting the scale for each question

A scale which is consistent with a national survey enables benchmarking.

However, different scales across different questions can make this cumbersome to complete.

We reached a compromise - i.e. which scales we could use across a number of questions, which involved least questions being changed.

Type of Question	Consistent scales used throughout
ONS4	0-10
Health and mental health	Very bad / Bad / Fair / Good / Very Good Some questions also use: Yes / No
Behaviours	Never/Seldom/Sometimes/Often/Always (some Y/N - to discuss)
Attitudes	Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neither agree nor disagree / Agree / Strongly agree
Financial Security Questions	* Use different scales
Job satisfaction	Completely dissatisfied / Very dissatisfied / Fairly dissatisfied / Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / Fairly satisfied / Very Satisfied

*Table 1: Consistent scales used across questions*

With the full list of questions, we assessed whether the combined set:

- Covered the concepts in the conceptual frameworks with at least one question. Annex A demonstrates how each of these concepts is covered by a question in our survey.
- Covered the important issues for a range of workplaces. This will be tested for different workplaces once the DWP survey has been agreed.

## Using the questionnaire

As emphasised above, the workplace questionnaire is a **diagnostic tool**. The aim is to understand which factors may be contributing to higher or lower wellbeing at work in a particular context - and aid improvement.

The aim is not to present one overarching 'score' based on aggregation of questions.

There is no one 'key' to our wellbeing at work. Workplace wellbeing is influenced by a number of factors which, in turn, influence each other. Our health, relationships, environment, security and purpose in work all play an important role. The relative importance of these and the ability for an employer to impact on them will depend on the nature of the work, the context in which it is undertaken and the characteristics of individual employees. Applying diagnostics allows an employer to formulate a picture of the current position and to identify strengths and weaknesses.

The workplace questionnaire is designed to provide management information which is actionable.

### **Analysing and presenting the results**

- **Headline:** We recommend therefore that the 5 drivers and overarching wellbeing and job satisfaction questions are used as the headline. For ease of communication, this would be presented as those answering positively (as well as those answering very negatively).
- **Digging Deeper:** In order to understand some of the underlying reasons or subtleties in different teams, the full set of questions should be analysed, again presented as the % answering positively or negatively.

### **Priorities for action will depend on:**

- Identifying problems, through, for example, a certain number answering negatively, or a lower proportion answering positively. Pay particular attention to negative scores.
- The relative importance of the drivers for wellbeing
- The relative ease of influencing change (and cost effectiveness of action)

Analysis of the drivers should focus on both positive and negative responses and the range of responses, rather than just looking at averages. A negative response can have a more important (downward) pull on wellbeing than the positive influence of positive factors.

For some aspects, it may be important to highlight if individuals report below a certain level – i.e. to know if **over a certain % are very dissatisfied** with the level of safety.

Or, there may be a trigger to be in touch (anonymously) with an employee who answers very negatively on particular questions - to provide the offer of support.

Comparing across the drivers can help to inform action: if, for example, a team is doing well in 'health', and less well in 'relationships', you can identify where some of these differences may have come from, to learn what can be done better in other drivers.

The Centre intends to release the basic range of questions, together with any available bench marking data, once the DWP survey is complete.