



Connecting Health to Performance:

Defining Vital Terms | Health, Wellness and Wellbeing

Health – An individual's “state of health” – good or poor – can be defined as the absence or presence of illness. There are acute and chronic conditions and, in general, illnesses can be characterized as (1) self-limiting (e.g., common colds), (2) responsive to self-care (e.g., allergies, heartburn, minor pain) and (3) requiring medical intervention (e.g., heart disease and cancer). People are “healthy” when they are free from illness.

Wellness, as differentiated from health, is determined by: (1) levels of biometrically measured clinical risk factors likely to result in future illness if uncontrolled (e.g., blood pressure and blood glucose); (2) risky lifestyle behaviors such as sedentariness and smoking. A state of wellness is achieved chiefly through good nutrition, daily physical activity, adequate sleep, and avoidance of toxic substances like tobacco. These “markers” have been correlated repeatedly in work site studies with less functional impairment and higher productivity.

Wellbeing is the newest term in use, and essentially is “psychological fitness” characterized by the ability to perform at a high level because of intrinsic qualities, regardless of external circumstances. It includes feelings of inner satisfaction with one's life, and a sense of functioning well – even thriving or flourishing – in both work and personal life roles, rather than just “getting by” or languishing. People with a sense of wellbeing show more interest and engagement, possess more energy and confidence, and display more persistence and creativity; in short, they perform at a higher level than people who lack wellbeing and evidence psychological distress.

Measurement – Just as health professionals have accurate ways to assess health status and underlying clinical risk factors that determine wellness, psychologists have developed valid and reliable measures of wellbeing. These measures actually can assess “psychological vitality” and its impact on performance – rather than just reporting how people view different aspects of their lives, e.g., social and financial. IHPM and its Work Place Wellness Alliance now can offer an instrument – the validated 21-item *Wellbeing Questionnaire* – to provide a practical measure of wellbeing at the work place level, including its impact on productivity.



The Wellbeing Questionnaire

The Wellbeing Questionnaire fills a gap in existing measures of wellbeing by assessing a balance of both positive and negative emotional states, along with other indicators of quality of life – and uniquely includes four (4) items on workplace productivity and one item on substance abuse.

It is supported by a huge data repository of more than 1.5 million records submitted by thousands of mental health practitioners; the large sample size used in developing the questionnaire – together with the continuing research program to maintain a large and diverse normative data sample – assure that the underlying measurement construct is credible and consistent.

The 21 items are grouped within five (5) domains drawn from the literature on wellbeing and quality of life (with examples of items by domain):

- **Flourishing** – feeling good or positive about yourself, enjoying your work or other activities of daily life;
- **Mental/Physical Health** – having physical pain or other health problems, feeling unhappy or sad;
- **Quality of Life/Life Satisfaction** – feeling fulfilled in life, feeling fortunate about your social relationships;
- **Productivity** – feeling motivated to do anything, having a hard time paying attention;
- **Substance Abuse** – having problems at work or home from use of drugs or alcohol.

The items have been well-tested in both clinical samples of individuals seeking mental health services and non-clinical samples drawn from the workplace and community. Including items known to work well in clinical populations assures that the Questionnaire can be used to identify individuals likely to benefit from psychotherapy, EAP services or other forms of psychological support – and highly likely to report significant improvements in workplace productivity.



The Questionnaire uses a 5-point Likert-type scale in asking respondents to rate how often in the past two weeks they have had certain experiences, with high scores representing higher levels of wellbeing and lower levels of distress. It is a reliable ($r=.91$) and valid measure of overall wellbeing, quality of life and level of psychological distress.

Information gathered from administering the Questionnaire can be classified by office location, job type or other category desired, but nothing is collected that would identify individuals to the employer. Responses are analyzed to produce a profile of the company work force by sub-population group, and an aggregate report provided to the employer – with follow-up consultation available to help find providers of quality services to meet the needs identified by the analysis – for example, resiliency training.

Wellbeing is perhaps the least understood but most significant driver of overall work force performance. IHPM's **Wellbeing Assessment & Performance Program (WAPP)**, founded on the Wellbeing Questionnaire and supplemented by consultative services, is designed to improve wellbeing at the individual and organizational levels – leading to better employee engagement and productivity that will contribute to corporate success.

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