

**CONCEPTS OF WORK WELLBEING: A  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THEORY AND  
METHOD**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Declaration**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics Committee (where required) or a relevant safety committee if the matter referred to such a committee.

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# Table of Contents

<b>CONCEPTS OF WORK WELLBEING: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO THEORY AND METHOD</b>	<b>1</b>
Declaration	2
Acknowledgements	3
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>9</b>
Aims	10
Method	10
Findings	10
Significance of the study	11
<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>12</b>
Motivation for the study	15
The project	16
Thesis outline	17
<b>CHAPTER 1: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF WORK SETTINGS</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Values in psychology</b>	<b>21</b>
Personal values and psychologists' 'ways of working'	21
Subjectivity in experimental science	24
<b>Corporatist values and work settings</b>	<b>26</b>
Corporatist values and organisational psychology	27
Interim summary	30
<b>Subjectivity</b>	<b>31</b>
Emotions	33
<b>Interpretive methods in organisational psychology</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Developing concepts in social science</b>	<b>41</b>
Goertz' method of concept development	43
Conceptual interdisciplinarity	47
<b>Summary</b>	<b>48</b>
Subjectivity	48
Methodological diversity	48
Concepts	49

<b>CHAPTER 2: WORK AND WELLBEING (PART 1)</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>The primary constructs: Work and wellbeing</b>	<b>52</b>
Work	52
Wellbeing	55
<b>Theoretical issues</b>	<b>58</b>
Values and evaluation processes	59
Multilevel theory	62
<b>Work wellbeing: Proposal for a new concept</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Approach to the literature</b>	<b>64</b>
A review 'for' research	65
<b>Topic area 1: Work settings</b>	<b>67</b>
Physical environment and conditions	68
Climate	69
Comment	72
<b>Topic area 2: Jobs</b>	<b>72</b>
Employment and job quality	73
Evaluating jobs: What matters for wellbeing?	76
Comment	81
<b>Topic area 3: Health</b>	<b>81</b>
Healthy workplaces, wellbeing, and health	82
Reduced wellbeing and health	86
Comment	90
<b>Interim conclusions</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3: WORK AND WELLBEING (PART 2)</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>92</b>
<b>Topic area 4: Subjective wellbeing</b>	<b>93</b>
The Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis	94
Implications for work settings	97
<b>Topic area 5: Relationships</b>	<b>98</b>
Social capital	99
Groups	101
Leaders	105
Comment	114
<b>Topic area 6: Principles</b>	<b>114</b>
Corporate social responsibility	116
Security	118
Meaning	120
Comment	121
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Theoretical foundations of the project</b>	<b>123</b>

<b>CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>124</b>
<b>The research questions</b>	<b>124</b>
Project aims	124
<b>Ontological and epistemological perspective: Constructionism</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Research specialisation: Phenomenography</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>Research methods</b>	<b>129</b>
Developing the interview questionnaire	129
Developing Concepts	136
<b>Data collection</b>	<b>137</b>
Selecting work settings	137
Selecting participants	138
Preparing to interview	140
Conducting interviews	141
<b>Ethical considerations</b>	<b>144</b>
Informed consent	144
Support for participants	144
Confidentiality	145
<b>Data preparation</b>	<b>145</b>
Creating data records	145
Transcription	146
<b>Data analysis</b>	<b>146</b>
Shifting from individual to group view	148
Developing local concepts: Property and Finance	150
<b>CHAPTER 5: WORK WELLBEING IN PROPERTY</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Data context</b>	<b>152</b>
Work setting	153
Participants	153
Interviews	154
<b>Developing the concept</b>	<b>155</b>
Concept type	155
Domains	156
High and low poles	156
Interpreting the concept diagram and descriptions	157
<b>General description of the concept</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>Basic level</b>	<b>159</b>
High pole: Collaborative Productivity	160
Low pole: Self-interested Isolation	161
<b>Secondary-level dimensions</b>	<b>161</b>
Self domain	162
Relationships domain	168
Principles domain	173
<b>Indicator level</b>	<b>178</b>

<b>Subgroups</b>	<b>179</b>
Fatherhood	179
Migrant Background	179
<b>Feedback from work setting</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>CHAPTER 6: WORK WELLBEING IN FINANCE</b>	<b>182</b>
<b>Data context</b>	<b>182</b>
Work setting	182
Participants	183
Interviews	184
<b>Developing the concept</b>	<b>184</b>
Concept type	185
Domains	185
High and low poles	185
Interpreting the concept diagram and descriptions	186
<b>General description of the concept</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>Basic level</b>	<b>189</b>
High pole: Intelligent Evolution	189
Low pole: Stagnation	190
<b>Secondary-level dimensions</b>	<b>190</b>
Self domain	190
Relationships domain	199
Principles domain	205
<b>Indicator level</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Feedback from the work setting</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7: INTEGRATING THE FINDINGS</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>Relevance of subgroups</b>	<b>213</b>
Property: Fatherhood and migrant background	214
Finance: Lifers and non-lifers	215
Significance of subgroups	217
<b>Comparing the concepts</b>	<b>217</b>
Self domain: Dimensional differences and similarities	218
Relationships domain: Dimensional differences and similarities	221
Principles domain: Differentiating the concepts	225
Basic level: Comparing the concepts	229
<b>Proposal for a Class of Work Wellbeing Concepts</b>	<b>231</b>
Using indicators to develop quantitative instruments	234
Feedback from research sites	235
<b>Significance of the study</b>	<b>236</b>
<b>CHAPTER 8</b>	<b>239</b>

<b>A CLASS OF WORK WELLBEING CONCEPTS: EVALUATING THE EVIDENCE</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>Part 1: The proposals</b>	<b>241</b>
Subjectivity	241
Interpretivist methods	243
Concept development	245
<b>Part 2: Wellbeing theory revisited</b>	<b>247</b>
A generalised, undifferentiated trope	249
Duplication, overlap, and level issues	250
<b>Part 3: Work wellbeing as meaningful personal integration</b>	<b>252</b>
<b>Part 4: Practical implications</b>	<b>253</b>
Subgroups	254
People and profit	255
<b>Part 5: Quality and significance of conclusions</b>	<b>258</b>
Trustworthiness	258
Generalisability	259
<b>Part 6: Limitations and future directions</b>	<b>260</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>263</b>
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>293</b>
<b>Appendix A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES</b>	<b>293</b>
Version 1	294
Version 2	297
<b>Appendix B: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>299</b>
<b>Appendix C: PROPERTY EMAIL TO EMPLOYEES</b>	<b>307</b>
<b>Appendix D: CONSENT FORMS</b>	<b>309</b>
<b>Appendix E: INDICATORS for Property &amp; Finance</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>Appendix F: ETHICS APPROVAL from the Human Research Ethics Committee</b>	<b>319</b>



## Abstract

The focus of this thesis is on work wellbeing. The interface and tensions between organisational psychology researchers and practitioners are explored through the lens of work wellbeing. Prevailing disciplinary values favour a form of natural or experimental science over interpretivist science. (Experimental science is a general term used throughout the thesis to include experiments, quasi experiments, and quantitative surveys.) The study proposed additions to the theoretical and methodological repertoire to facilitate the applicability of research in work settings.

The proposals were to:

1. Proactively investigate employee subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings.
2. Incorporate and value interpretivist methods in the research toolkit, particularly in applied settings.
3. Ensure that tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised before embarking on quantitative measurement.

Subjectivity refers to the personal meanings *for the self* that people construct from contextualised life experiences. Affective experiences are potent factors in work settings, and consequently, subjective experience could contribute to knowledge about work wellbeing.

It is argued that research questions rather than convention need to define methodology. Interpretivist methods allow a focus on subjective experience, meaning, process, and context. As organisational psychology focuses on employees' experiences at work, interpretive science is an appropriate methodological addition.

Wellbeing in work settings has mostly been measured using surveys and correlational techniques, independent of context, without establishing the underlying conceptual structure in context. Measurement of psychological ideas such as wellbeing, however, needs to be based on prior conceptual analysis. Concept construction is a necessary methodological component in psychology. Properly conceptualised interpretivist data contributes different knowledge from experimental science.

## **Aims**

The study of wellbeing in work settings was grounded in subjectivity, interpretivism, and concept development.

The aims of the project were to:

1. Document the process of developing local concepts of wellbeing in two work settings.
2. Describe the significance of findings and critically assess their contribution to theory.
3. Evaluate how interpretive science contributes to researching concepts of wellbeing at work.

## **Method**

Phenomenography, innovative interview methods from education and marketing, and a concept building approach were used to conceptualise participants' experiences of wellbeing in two independent work settings, Property and Finance. Visual images, selected by participants, were metaphors communicating social meaning, thought, embodied experience, and emotions; other questions tapped emblematic, personal wellbeing experiences in context.

## **Findings**

Data were analysed to derive multilevel, dimensionalised concepts of work wellbeing for each work setting. In the Property work site, the local version of work wellbeing was conceptualised as Collaborative Productivity, and six constitutive dimensions included Expand Potential, Care for Health, Socio-emotional Connectedness, Recognition, High Quality Workplace, and Ethical Corporate Behaviour. In Finance, local work wellbeing was conceptualised as Intelligent Evolution, and six constitutive dimensions were Career Growth, Self-care, Decent Behaviour, Acknowledgement, Sanctuary, and Comfortable Change. Four local subgroups were defined by fatherhood and migrant background (Property), and length of tenure (lifers and non-lifers, Finance). Subgroups had differential impacts in the work settings. The potential for practical application of these concepts was reviewed.

The findings pointed to an implicit class of concepts called work wellbeing. The class has a focus on wellbeing specifically in work settings, and a structure consisting of three constant domains: Self, Relationships, and Principles. The domain structure was integral to both concepts and expressed collective values or preferences from three perspectives: 'What we want for ourselves', 'How we want to be with others', and 'How we want the organisation to behave'. While dimensions within the Self and Relationships domains shared common, albeit nuanced features, the Principles domain differentiated the work settings.

### **Significance of the study**

Findings from this study matched and reinforced various ideas from a broad spectrum of disparate disciplinary theory and research, as well as contributing foundational conceptual knowledge to organisational psychology. The study:

1. Identified a meta-concept of a *class of work wellbeing concepts* with a constant domain structure (Self, Relationships, Principles). This named and described work wellbeing, contributing information about an identifiable systemic attribute to the field.
2. Demonstrated that domains may potentially structure and organise diverse empirical and theoretical research under a single conceptual umbrella of work wellbeing concepts.
3. Confirmed the concepts were agreed upon, theoretically defensible, practice-friendly, comprehensive representations of the local experience of work wellbeing.
4. Demonstrated how to use subjective data and interpretivist, multidisciplinary, innovative methods in concept development.
5. Pointed to the value of undertaking foundational research in any work site to conceptualise situated meaning before measuring wellbeing. This ensures quantitative measures have identified local, relevant questions.

## Preface

According to Postman (1984, p 31), the goal of social science research is to “contribute to human understanding and decency... To improve social life”.

I work in private practice as an organisational psychologist. Projects involve trying to understand (diagnose) why people in a work system are behaving in particular ways, and recommending interventions to improve individual and/or collective experience and/or performance.

Diverse human problems in work settings can often be traced to experiences of ‘failure’ occurring at the intersection of multiple subjectivities. ‘Failures’ are real and/or perceived actions, thoughts, affect, or events that are hard for people to deal with, such as misunderstandings, unmet needs, bullying, perceptions of injustice, conflict, disappointment, hurt, and rejection. A ‘failure’ may result from intra-individual affective and cognitive processes, as well as from interactions with others.

Most Australian organisational psychologists work in one of three areas: professional practice, research, or as employees in corporate environments. Minimal interaction occurs between the worlds of professional practice and research. Academics drive research agendas and sustain the idea of organisational psychology as an evidence-based discipline. For example, the US-based Society for Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology currently defines I-O psychology as “the scientific study of the workplace” (SIOP website, [www.SIOP.org](http://www.SIOP.org)). Organisational psychology *practice* is not included in this definition, and nor does it fit (Silzer & Parson, 2013). In Australia, organisational psychology is defined as “the science of people at work”; what organisational psychologists *do* is “specialise in analysing organisations and their people, and devising strategies to recruit, motivate, develop, change, and inspire” (<http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/cop/>). In the Australian definition of organisational psychology, the science (research) defining the discipline is also differentiated from the activities of practice.

Two related obstacles in organisational psychology – research methods and research relevance – have constrained my work with organisations. The first obstacle, a restricted methodological repertoire, has limited the type of research to emerge from the discipline. The almost universal commitment to experimental

science is at the heart of methodological obstacles (Alise & Teddie, 2010; Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010; Briner, 2010; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Rousseau, 2007). In addition, academic organisational psychologists' career trajectories can be negatively affected by pursuing 'grey' areas of research (derived from pseudo-academic and evidence-based practitioner literature), mixed methods or purely interpretivist approaches. This may be changing, however. Bartunek and Rynes (2014, p 1) recently proposed that academics and practitioners incorporate the "differing logics, time dimensions, communication styles, rigor and relevance, and interests and incentives" in processes of research and theory development. The authors suggested appreciating the inherent "tensions, dialectics, and paradox" that characterise relations between the groups could generate new ways of doing research and alternative practice activities. Developing constructive exchange in this way could reduce the limitations imposed by methodological restriction.

The second and related obstacle is the relevance of research to a professional practice environment. The problem here is the lack of relevant organisational psychology theory to conceptualise practice-based issues. Aspects of universal human experience, including non-conscious processes, subjectivity, and the centrality of meaning and values, permeate and pervade organisations, although they are under-researched. It is virtually impossible to find causal relationships in chaotic human systems, especially among hard-to-identify variables such as subjectivity and values (Briner & Rousseau, 2011b; Johnson & Cassell, 2001). The natural extension of these two obstacles is most discipline-based psychology research is not relevant to the work of practitioners.

Smedslund (2009) drew attention to a possible underlying cause of this mismatch: a lack of collective, reflexive awareness of the basic characteristics of a human being. Smedslund suggested researchers and practitioners alike had ignored the fundamental importance of shared human characteristics, thereby contributing to a different conceptual understanding of 'being human' in research and practice. Although people in both groups subjectively experience knowing what it means to be human and to share meaning systems of language and culture, these experiences in common are not reflected in the design and conduct of research. Smedslund attributed the rejection of subjectivity as a topic for research to a *discipline-wide* and

collective lack of reflection about why the experience of shared humanity is relevant. This has led to the distinctive qualities of human experience, grounded in human subjectivity (Freud, 1930), being overlooked in organisational research. In contrast, epistemological reflexivity from different disciplinary perspectives about the nature of being human could increase the relevance of research in work settings (Drenth & Heller, 2004; Johnson & Cassell, 2001; Teo, 1999).

The over-emphasis on experimental science has had negative outcomes for organisational practice. It has contributed to widespread undervaluing of practice knowledge compared to research (Fisher, 2011; Patterson, 2010; Ryan & Ford, 2010; Rynes, Giluk, & Brown, 2007; Smedslund, 2009). Scholars' interests and values have also limited the kinds of issues that have been researched (Tiles, 1996), including investigating the types of skills needed for practice. Although researchers' skill sets are understood (Bazeley, 2010), organisational psychology practitioners' skills are not and, as a result, have not been high on the research agenda. Smedslund (2009) suggested 'practice knowledge' constituted a distinct professional knowledge domain with a related skill set. He suggested practice knowledge made a theoretical contribution to psychology in the form of knowledge about strategy: *how to* diagnose, conceptualise, and intervene in situations. Practice knowledge does not take the same form as scholarship knowledge, which is a generalised knowledge of content. Strategic knowledge about *how* to provide assistance is different from content knowledge about average situations or people. Competent practitioners have developed the ability to "discard and push into the background previous experiences and to listen to what does *not* fit into [their] pre-existing categories" (ibid, p 791). Practitioners need to understand people or situations in context, provide advice for specific situations, and avoid rigidity or over-generalisation. They must have considerable capacity for dealing with cognitively complex data, and be sufficiently versatile to hold multiple views of phenomena (Bolman & Granell, 1999; Morgan, 1986). However, this largely uncoded knowledge has attracted little scholarly interest and is rarely represented in academic journals (Briner & Rousseau, 2011a).

My own professional experience also suggests complementary but incomplete disciplinary knowledge is created through the two streams of research

and practice. If Postman's quote at the beginning of this Preface is to be taken seriously, this situation is a significant 'failure' at the interface of disciplinary research and practice. The failure potentially contributes to the contraction of the discipline, due to the irrelevance of much experimental science knowledge in time-pressured, relational workplaces. To overcome the problem of how to conceptualise subjective experience in human systems, I have turned to interpretivist science research from the broad humanities (including 'interior' sciences, sociology, and anthropology). These data have helped, for example, to make sense of 'failures' when subjectivities collide at work. Their value is rooted in rich, naturalistic data and analysis that mirrors the complexity of human experience at work.

### **Motivation for the study**

When managers requested help to support employees to feel or work 'better', I was curious about which, or whose, subjective version of the meaning of 'better' would prevail. Did 'better' include a combination of opinions e.g., from the individual/s, managers, colleagues, outsiders, economic rationalists, or me? Or did 'better' refer only to a manager's or an employee's view? The idea of 'being better' was embedded in the term 'wellbeing', as were myriad diverse preferences for what 'better' meant and how these were represented and negotiated in a work setting. Ultimately I formed the view that, within limits, 'being better' or 'wellbeing' should be decided by the one/s for whom assistance was sought. Management's view provided a necessary and important boundary defining the limits of possibility for wellbeing within the business or operating context. However, within the boundary, the specific resolution of wellbeing could be defined by employees who were directly affected, simply because it is a subjective experience that no one can decide for another (Gert, Culver, & Clouser, 1997; Seedhouse, 2004).

Several questions intrigued me. What constituted a meaningful concept of wellbeing at work? How would contextually meaningful methods and data be used to develop a concept? Is wellbeing uniquely configured in each organisation? Can collective or systemic wellbeing experiences be used to develop appropriate interventions? These questions converged to a focus on wellbeing at work, as well as

associated theory and methods. Put differently, how could a concept of wellbeing be developed in a work setting?

The motivators for this study were professional, practical, and personal. Promoting wellbeing, performance, integration, and humanity in workplaces are fundamental drivers for me, and from a professional perspective, I want to do it well. So I decided to expose my ways of thinking about professional practice to external evaluation by undertaking a formal academic project. The research focus was a true life, practice-related question about the meaning of 'wellbeing' at work. My aim was to *radically* (from the Latin 'roots of things') investigate the components of wellbeing at work, to critically assess the value of alternative theories, methods, and approaches to concept development for organisational psychology. I decided to use methods I would naturally gravitate towards as a practitioner, as these would realistically reflect how I practice. In this way I hoped to contribute to existing knowledge by demonstrating the value of a considered expansion of theories and methods in organisational psychology.

## **The project**

The research project investigates the nature of wellbeing experience in work settings using interpretivist science methods. Its three main theoretical propositions are:

1. Since subjectivity and values are central to work wellbeing, research methods need to adapt to, and reflect, these central concerns.
2. Work wellbeing is contextualised to specific work settings. Practice experience has consistently shown no two organisations are exactly alike.
3. Quantitative methods should not be used to assess work wellbeing before a foundational understanding of the concept has been developed.

Therefore, this thesis addresses questions such as:

- What theory is 'missing' from organisational psychology's view of wellbeing in work settings? In what ways does this affect the way wellbeing is understood?
- Is wellbeing a local systemic construct? How can a systemic construct be researched and validated?



- Do interpretive methods yield trustworthy, generalisable results in applied settings?
- In what ways does the process of concept development help organisational psychologists to understand work wellbeing?
- Are interpretive methods potentially useful to research other under-theorised, multifaceted, subjectively determined constructs in the discipline?

The thesis is *not* attempting to assess whether any work setting (including a research site) has specific attributes of wellbeing, or to specify what attributes must be present for an organisation to claim wellbeing. The research methods used here were not developed in order to sell the approach. They were developed for a different and specific purpose – to undertake a research-based higher degree. However, their relevance and utility have been shown to be highly practical in diverse settings (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012; Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2006; Zaltman & Coulter, 1995). It is, therefore, expected that ongoing research to commercialise the approach will occur, thus contributing to wider understanding of wellbeing in work settings.

### **Thesis outline**

The term ‘employee’ is used to refer to everyone at every level working in an organisation. This generic term was chosen to emphasise the focus on collective or systemic meanings of wellbeing in a work setting, rather than on points of view that reflect individual differences.

The thesis is organised as follows:

**Chapter 1** builds on the premises in this Preface. It documents the basis for the view that some areas of psychology do not fit the experimental science paradigm. As a result, alternative theory and methods are required. These include relevant, multidisciplinary theories such as subjectivity (humanistic and depth psychology), values (philosophy), and concept development (sociology, education, political philosophy, linguistics); and interpretivist science methods.

Chapter 1 provides the theoretical and methodological rationale for the research project, which is developing a scholarly concept of work wellbeing relevant

to, and potentially useful in a practice-oriented environment. This project comprises the majority of the thesis. With the final discussion in Chapter 8, Chapter 1 frames or 'book-ends' the project-related literature reviews (Chapters 2 and 3), methodology (Chapter 4), findings (Chapters 5 and 6), and integration of findings (Chapter 7).

**Chapter 2** is the first of two literature review chapters about work and wellbeing. It begins by justifying the choice of a selective literature review *for* research (rather than *of* research). The chapter then outlines the scope of the terms 'work' and 'wellbeing' and introduces multilevel theory. The rest of the chapter examines relevant multidisciplinary literature under the major headings of *work settings, jobs, and health*. Interim conclusions are presented.

**Chapter 3** is the second literature review chapter covering a further three major topic areas: *subjective wellbeing, relationships, and principles* relevant to work and wellbeing. The chapter draws conclusions from the two review chapters and presents the theoretical foundations for the wellbeing concept development project in two work settings.

**Chapter 4** describes the methodology. It begins by stating the research questions and project aims. Phenomenography, and the approach to interviewing and concept development, are outlined. This is followed by a description of how data were collected, prepared for analysis, and reduced to create two local concepts of work wellbeing. Ethical considerations are discussed.

**Chapter 5** outlines findings from Property, the first research site. It briefly describes the data context and participant characteristics. The local concept is presented, accompanied by a detailed description of all concept elements. The chapter concludes with feedback about the local concept from the work setting.

**Chapter 6** follows the same format as Chapter 5, providing findings for Finance, the second research site.

**Chapter 7** integrates findings from Property and Finance. The two local concepts are compared and contrasted. The chapter concludes with specific, novel conclusions drawn from the study, as well as the practical implications for organisational psychology. The conclusions add knowledge about wellbeing at work to existing theory and research. Significance of the findings is evaluated.

**Chapter 8** concludes the thesis by circling back to Chapter 1 to evaluate how effectively the theoretical and methodological propositions met the challenge of developing relevant knowledge for organisational psychology theory and practice.

From the foregoing outline, it is apparent that Chapters 2 to 7 are the concretisation of the proposals for expanding practice-relevant research in psychology. The example presented in this thesis is not the only way, or necessarily the best way, but nevertheless it will demonstrate:

1. Questions from practice are worthy of research.
2. This is an academic project that draws exclusively on subjective experience. Existing multidisciplinary research methods are available to support practice-relevant research and concept building in organisational psychology.
3. Well-executed interpretivist methods can deliver findings consistent with, and in addition to, experimental science results. Interpretivist approaches can extend disciplinary knowledge due to the type of data collected, and the ways in which they are analysed and interpreted.

## Chapter 1: The psychology of work settings

Work organisations use people, materials, technology, systems, financial, and other resources and processes to achieve corporate objectives. Professional organisational psychologists are social scientists with specialist knowledge about work settings (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Their primary focus and interest is enabling employees to be psychologically at ease in their workplace: to feel motivated, change where necessary, develop their potential, and be inspired, as noted in the Preface. The scientist-practitioner model is used worldwide in the design of training programs for professional practice as organisational psychologists (Carless & Taylor, 2006; Rogelberg, 2007). This model prefers experimental science (as defined in the Abstract, experimental science is a general term used throughout the thesis to include experiments, quasi experiments, and quantitative surveys). Conversely, the model almost completely rejects interpretivist science. Measurement is valued above fundamental conceptual analysis, and researching the nature of subjectivity at work has been avoided until recently (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011).

The discipline wide preference for experimental science is not necessarily useful in applied contexts such as work settings. Consequently, scientific approaches to studying people in work settings are debated issues in organisational psychology (Cacioppo, Semin, & Berntson, 2004; Fineman, 2005; Johnson, Buehring, Cassell, & Symon, 2006; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Maracek, 2011). The choice of theories and methods are grounded in prevailing values located in the discipline itself, as well as in work settings. However, these dominant values are under-acknowledged contributors to current debates about how to study employees in work settings. Outcomes following from particular values choices are explored in depth in this chapter.

Values are simply personal preferences or prejudices informing how people think, decide, and behave (Seedhouse, 2005). When a decision is made, it is rooted first in how a person *feels* about an issue, not in logic, evidence, or ethics (Haidt, 2001). A person's emotional experience in relation to an issue is more influential than thoughts, at least initially. Values underlie all areas of human life, including

psychologists' personal decisions about the form of science they pursue. Values are also fundamental to decision-making in work settings. How personal and corporate values influence theory and research in psychology, and its sub discipline of organisational psychology, is reviewed.

This chapter proposes including alternative theory and methods in organisational psychology. The three proposals are:

1. Proactively investigate employee subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings.
2. Incorporate interpretivist methods in the research toolkit, particularly for applied settings.
3. Ensure tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised *before* researchers embark on quantitative measurement (Goertz, 2006; Saylor, 2013).

These proposals link directly to the work wellbeing study, an exemplar of applied interpretivist research.

Core values influence both psychology and work settings. The results of these intersecting values are addressed next.

### **Values in psychology**

Although experimental science is considered in psychology to be best practice, how it gained pre-eminence is perplexing and worth considering. Teo (1999) proposed that psychologists' methodological choices are based in *personal preferences or values*, rather than scientific truth. Material experimental scientists have long recognised that subjectivity, or personal, values-laden influences, cannot be eradicated from science (Jahn & Dunne, 1997). These views have implications for theory development in psychology.

### **Personal values and psychologists' 'ways of working'**

The nature of psychological knowledge can be classified into three distinct subsystems – Scientia, Cultura, and Critica – each serving a different function (Teo, 1999). The Scientia subsystem is associated with experimental and quantitative methods that value progressing knowledge about the human mind. The Cultura subsystem is associated with qualitative methods that value the process of meaning

making to foster improvements in context. The Critica subsystem is associated with producing critical knowledge about psychology or topics within psychology. Critica knowledge values formal critique to change theory, method, and practice for the better. Teo assessed the three subsystems as contributing different forms of equally valuable knowledge.

The three subsystems clarify the contribution of different knowledge perspectives to psychology. Teo also considered how researchers choose a subsystem from which to work, arguing that personal values, ideology, and choices (rather than any inherent epistemological superiority) govern their choice. That is, psychologists' underlying values or personal preferences for particular ways of thinking and doing attract them to a subsystem, rather than objective, exclusive, fundamental truths. Teo concluded any psychologist's focus, methodology, and form of practice in psychology was ultimately "embedded in certain non-rational moments... there is no logical or empirically justifiable preference for one knowledge function over the other..." (1999, p 6).

This analysis leads to the conclusion that psychologists choose experimental methods, and value progressing knowledge about the human mind, because the Scientia function personally *suits* them. Perhaps, as the dominant approach, it is the principal source of career-related opportunities. Alternatively, they may believe experimental methods are optimal for investigating personal experience, even in applied settings. In contrast, other psychologists may value qualitative methods for their ability to facilitate meaning making from subjective experience, and to create improvements in a work context. They may believe "it is personal experience that serves as the ultimate touchstone of the human condition" (Rass, 2011, p 1). Regardless of the reasons, choices are fundamentally and initially non-rational, based first in feelings and personal inclination, and rationalised afterwards.

This has implications beyond the choices made by individual psychologists. At a discipline level, the dominant preference for experimental science has contributed to psychology being separated and disconnected from its roots in philosophy and the wider humanities (Griffiths & Scarantino, 2009; Griffiths & Schabracq, 2003; Rathunde, 2001). Originally, psychology was characterised by a breadth of theory and its definition as the *science that studied experience*. As a discipline prizing

human experience, it rejected atomistic accounts in favour of context based meanings and connections in the field of awareness (Ashworth, 2008; James 1958/1902).

Organisational psychology is essentially a 'natural' science, albeit unlike physics, biology, or some topics (e.g., cognition) in psychology. As a 'natural' science, it studies *contextualised* human experience (i.e., located in a particular setting). In the case of wellbeing, for example, relevant data is derived from human minds and behaviour in a specific workplace, implying that organisational psychology straddles arts and science disciplines (Wierzbicka, 2011). Affective and behavioural variables, the 'bread-and-butter' of practice, are different from variables in experimental science. Unlike experimental settings, work settings involve a complex interplay of factors that cannot be directly observed or disaggregated. Most human attributes (e.g., aspects of personality, thoughts, attitudes, feelings, insights, and desires) cannot be meaningfully investigated using objective science methods, since efforts to quantify these attributes neglect their essential context-dependence (Maxwell, 2004).

It is reasonable to assume research and practice decisions are grounded in personal values (George, 1997; Lefkowitz, 2012; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999). Consequently, there is a need to explore multiple viewpoints, or "bilingual and bicultural" perspectives (Cacioppo, Semin, & Berntson, 2004, p 222). For example, is advocacy for any form of social justice in work settings a defensible value in organisational psychology (Lefkowitz, 2013b)? Some consider it is not, and if this is accepted, research and practice values could legitimately be merged with the prevailing values (and goals) of an organisation. Alternatively, if some forms of social justice advocacy could be defensible, research would be needed to identify those areas where advocacy was directly relevant. In this case, research would provide a specific and bounded arena for social justice activities. Finally, some may consider advocating for dignity and justice in human experience at work is defensible for its own sake, as an ethical position consistent with transformative values adopted by psychologists and others (Mertens, 2007; Seedhouse, 2002). If this is accepted, social justice advocacy could inform many aspects of research and practice, and in some situations could legitimately challenge organisational values. This could include

creating safe, fair, healthy, stimulating, humane, and fulfilling, as well as financially successful, workplaces when these characteristics are lacking or absent (Lefkowitz, 2012, 2013a).

In summary, personal values play a role in defining the ways psychologists work. A disciplinary decision to choose experimental science has contributed to severing psychology from its interdisciplinary roots. Consilience of the sciences and humanities leads to larger questions of meaning, purpose, and values within all realms of human activity, including scientific progress, although this view is largely lost (Rass, 2011). One outcome of the loss for organisational psychology is varied local experience at work is usually represented in quantified and objectified terms. Alise and Teddie (2010), for example, noted the dominance of quantitative methods (based on actual counts rather than opinion) in an examination of researchers' choice to use mixed methods. Arguably, this is inappropriate for an applied discipline where subjective experience is fundamental.

### **Subjectivity in experimental science**

Perhaps surprisingly, material experimentalists acknowledge that *subjectivity and personal values are implicit and unavoidable in science*, and have always influenced its outcomes. For example, two scientists at the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) laboratory at Princeton University demonstrated their awareness of the ineradicable presence of subjectivity in pure science:

Over the greater portion of its long scholarly history, the particular form of human observation, reasoning, and technical deployment we properly term "science" has relied at least as much on subjective experience and inspiration as it has on objective experiments and theories. Only over the past few centuries has subjectivity been progressively excluded from the practice of science, leaving an essentially secular analytical paradigm (Jahn & Dunne, 1997, p 201).

The process of observing any systemic variables or properties requires an observer, i.e., a *scientist-who-investigates*. The scientist-observer is not simply an uninvolved spectator (Michell, 2011), although the sentient researcher as a separate data point is a factor for which most experimental science does not account.



Another way of stating this is the presence of consciousness in science is not addressed in an even-handed way (Baruss, 2001).

Nevertheless, since 1987, the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE), a global professional organisation of experimental scientists and scholars, has published a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal studying unusual and unexplained phenomena such as the effects of consciousness on quantum- and bio-physics and in psychology (<http://www.scientificexploration.org/journal/>). Many SSE articles confirm *certainty in science is illusory*, regardless of methodology. In one compelling example, Jahn (2001) reported on experiments, conducted at the PEAR laboratory, which explored scientific anomalies such as the impact of conscious and unconscious processes. The experiments investigated the remote (i.e., non co-located) perception of interactions occurring between mind (consciousness) and matter (physical processes). Results revealed conscious and unconscious mental processes related in an “information dialogue” with *non co-located* “tangible and intangible physical processes” (Jahn, 2001, p 443). In other words, material experimental science demonstrated unconscious mental activity and subtle energies influenced, and were influenced by, material processes occurring at distant locations. This led to the conclusion, “unconscious mind and intangible physical mechanisms are invoked to achieve anomalous acquisition of mental information about, or anomalous mental influence upon, otherwise inaccessible material processes” (Jahn, 2001, p 443). These results raised questions about the nature of consciousness, subjectivity, and *the transfer of objective information by subjective means*. Science has not yet explained these processes.

In a separate set of studies, a *bidirectional influence* occurred between *consciousness and tangible matter*, and also between *unconsciousness and intangible matter* (Jahn & Dunne, 2001). Evidence for the two-way influence of unconscious thought on non-physical matter, as well as conscious thought on physical matter, was demonstrated. Again, results raised more questions than can be answered with the present state of knowledge.

Detailed conclusions from these studies are beyond the scope of this chapter. The examples are two among many documented cases. They are provided to show that material experimental science has irrefutable evidence for the unexpected

influence of subjective mental phenomena on physical/material processes and vice versa. Despite the difficulties associated with incorporating human consciousness into a rigorous experimental science frame, it was concluded that doing so was completely necessary:

Is the challenge of consciousness worth all of this trouble, or should we continue to exclude it from the tidy workshop of objective science? Although it commits us to an extremely difficult agenda, it is our position that the admission of consciousness into systematic science is possible, desirable, and indeed essential to the ultimate relevance of science to the human condition, and thereby to the survival and evolution of the species (Jahn, 2001, p 456).

If material experimentalists have demonstrated objectivity is unachievable in the rigorously controlled environment of an engineering laboratory, it is reasonable to conclude a work setting provides far greater obstacles to successfully implementing experimental science methods. Logical conclusions from Jahn's (2001) research are psychology could usefully expand its theoretical and methodological range.

The influence of prevailing values, in particular the societal value of corporatism, is considered next. The social context is an enduring, powerful influence on all human activity (Marquis & Battilana, 2009). Societal values are deep-seated preferences and prejudices that influence attitudes and behaviour in largely unacknowledged ways. Corporatist values affect work settings (including universities) and the activities of research and professional practice.

### **Corporatist values and work settings**

Capitalism is a profoundly pervasive global values orientation infusing private sector and, increasingly, public sector work settings. Under capitalism, organisations are driven by economic and financial criteria, known as the *corporatist values bias* (Gammelsaeter, 2002; Korten, 1998; Rees, 1995b).

The corporatist bias contributes to generating destructive cultural features in work settings, as demonstrated in case studies of Enron and Long-Term Capital Management (Long, 2008). Long described prevailing corporate governance

processes in these case studies as reflecting the existence of perverse organisational behaviour. 'Perverse' refers to behaviours and attitudes with characteristics such as: unreasonable, obdurate, obstructive, recalcitrant, unorthodox, uncontrollable, and immoral. In a corporate culture, five indicators of a perverse state of mind (and associated behaviours) are:

(1) [it] reflects attainment of individual goals or pleasures at the expense of others' rights; (2) acknowledges reality, but at times denies it to facilitate 'not seeing'; (3) engages others as accomplices in the perversion; (4) turns a blind eye; and (5) breeds corruption (Long, 2008, p 15).

The presence of perverse behavioural characteristics in public and private sector organisations has been associated with first world, neo-Liberal policies of 'trickle-down theory' (Hoggett, 2010). At the macro societal level, policies that support creating greater wealth for the super-rich are presented as encouraging a 'virtuous' phenomenon. By increasing wealth for an elite minority, the theory proposes the less well-off majority would be expected to ultimately benefit when the wealthy elite spend money. This perversion masquerades destructive attitudes and behaviour as socially facilitating. Hoggett explained it as a "process of inversion and distortion, whereby selfishness becomes generosity, enslavement to credit and consumption becomes freedom, public accountability becomes totalitarianism" (ibid, p 58).

These values pervade, to a greater or lesser extent, all commercial and public sector work settings. However, the morality of capitalist and corporatist values is not the primary focus; the issue here is the impact of corporatist values in psychology, and organisational psychology in particular. Values issues are the 'elephant in the room'. Most disciplinary discourse does not acknowledge, discuss, or evaluate their impact.

### **Corporatist values and organisational psychology**

Corporatist values emphasise economic objectives at the expense of psychologists' interest in humanist values (e.g., individualism, humanism, interpersonal relations, subjectivity) (Lefkowitz, 2013b). The discipline of psychology,

as well as psychologists in universities and the wider public sector, in for-profit organisations or self-employment are affected by corporatist values. For example, corporatist values are likely to influence psychologists' perspectives on the types of goals, research, interventions, and outcomes perceived as relevant and valuable. Put another way, psychologists may unwittingly participate in a complicit values bias that effectively subordinates humanist disciplinary values to corporatist outcomes (Katzell & Austin, 1992).

Psychology's principal focus is on people, while the goal of organisations is to achieve economic goals and increase shareholder/stakeholder value. Organisational psychology aims to maximise the financial success of organisations through the work of employees. When the values inherent in organisations and psychology differ markedly, the predominance of corporatist goals can subvert the range and scope, and shift the moral compass, of psychology's research and practice. Wellbeing is an example. As a relevant topic in work settings, wellbeing is subordinate to other, mostly financial issues of greater concern to management. These include scientifically 'proven' systems of people management contributing directly to financial goals e.g., talent management, recruitment and retention, and cognitive assessment (Zickar & Gibby, 2007). Therefore, wellbeing has been under-researched in organisational psychology in comparison with other social science disciplines, including the wider discipline of psychology. When organisational psychologists do not research wellbeing in work settings, it could be concluded that wellbeing at work is unimportant, and corporatism and disciplinary values are closely aligned.

The corporatist organisation of science (e.g., by governments, universities, and the publishing industry) has favoured experimental science while actively restricting minority views in science disciplines, e.g., when journals favour research with significant (not null) results and privilege experimental methods (not interpretivist). Distortions such as these contravene the vision of science at its best. In 1989, the United States National Academy of Sciences' Committee on the Conduct of Science outlined the basic principles of practice as a scientist. The Committee argued against the exclusive use of a single scientific (i.e., experimental) method, noting an appropriate "body of methods particular to [the] work" could evolve over time and vary among disciplines (ibid, p 9060). It also recognised researchers' values

influenced science: “even if perfectly applied, methods cannot guarantee the accuracy of... results... they can be *influenced by human values [that] cannot be eliminated from science*” (ibid, 9062; italics added). More recently, Michell (2011) emphasised choice of methods is ideally based in the nature of phenomena being investigated rather than preferences for one form of science over another.

Corporatist values have, arguably, influenced and to some extent determined (through self-interest or tacit agreement) science and practice in organisational psychology. This has limited the focus on “a multiple stakeholder ethical perspective” (Lefkowitz, 2013b, p 52) by privileging one type of methodology, seeking research on human performance for financial ends, restricting the range of research questions, and discouraging ethical discussion. Through its emphasis on performance metrics and management, and career progression, corporatism has also contributed to an increase in scientific fraud in psychology.

### ***Misdemeanours in psychology***

Fraud is currently a major concern in organisational psychology and the wider discipline (Kepes & McDaniel, 2013). Methodological constraints, corporatist, and implicit disciplinary values have contributed to compromised trustworthiness in the scientific literature (Koch, 1992; Lambdin, 2012; Maracek, 2011; Michell, 2011). Documented types of fraud include selectively publishing data and withholding disadvantageous results, altering data, and fabricating results (Fanellia & Ioannidis, 2013; Silver, 2012); failure to acknowledge credit and plagiarism; and “pathological science” (Langmuir & Hall, 1989, cited in Wilson, 1997). The latter referred to effects unrelated to claimed causes, effect sizes of low statistical significance, exaggerated accuracy claims, rare theoretical explanations out of line with experience, excuses, and low numbers of supporters of a piece of research compared to the number of its critics. Retracted publications are mostly the result of misconduct (Fang, Steen, & Casadevall, 2012), and males commit around two-thirds of misconduct incidents (Fang, Bennett, & Casadevall, 2013).

In a recent review of fraud in the profession, Barrett (2013) noted ethical dilemmas involving organisational psychology researchers have resulted in deceptive behaviour from a noticeable number of members, to the extent that regulation by

external agencies is required. Societal and neoliberal values promoting self-enhancement have contributed to misdemeanours in research activities (Pulfrey & Butera, 2013). Put differently, the pressure of corporatist values appears to have led psychologists to contribute to the “ills of contemporary science – commercialization, fraud, untrustworthy public information” (Bauer, 2004, p 652). This can occur via the emphasis on performance management to control outcomes (‘publish or perish’) in research activities (Cottrell, 2013). Without measurable outputs, research is threatened. This creates conditions ripe for negotiable scientific integrity and the rise of perverse behaviours and attitudes in organisational cultures (Barrett, 2013; Fanelli & Ioannidis, 2013; Long, 2008).

Professional practitioners are also negatively affected by corporatist values. They have been critiqued for rarely reading research literature; and increasingly relying on marketable surveys, the use of ‘benchmarking’, HR think tanks, and commercial consulting products rather than on applied theory or academic research (Colquitt, 2013). Upholding humanist values can be difficult when, for example, management seeks interventions (e.g., downsizing) that evidence indicates are counterproductive to financial success (Stein, 1997).

### **Interim summary**

The foregoing argued that science and psychology are non-neutral, competitive endeavours. The impact of corporatism in work settings is substantial, as the analysis of Enron and Long-Term Capital Management demonstrated (Long, 2008). Corporatist bias restricts the application of humanist values in work settings. Through different pathways such as publishing and cultural shifts in universities, it also exerts pressure on indices of career success in psychology. These effects can be deduced from examples of intentional deception, rather than mere errors. Although the effects on scientists, science, and society are wide-ranging and deleterious, corporatist values are rarely subject to critique in mainstream psychological literature.

Previously it was argued that personal values had a primary influence on psychologists’ career decisions about ways of working. Choices are grounded in feelings rather than the inherent superiority of one method over another. Despite

this, psychology as a broadly humanist as well as science-based discipline has mostly foregone its interdisciplinary foundations, resulting in significant methodological and theoretical restriction. Corporatist values reinforce the preference for experimental science over other methods.

These powerful contextual forces shaping work settings and the discipline of psychology remain unanalysed within organisational psychology. The remainder of this chapter offers proposals for addressing three issues that could be linked to the prevalence of corporatist values. It advocates increasing the theoretical and methodological repertoires in organisational psychology by:

1. Proactively investigating employee subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings.
2. Incorporating and valuing interpretivist methods in the research toolkit, particularly in applied settings.
3. Ensuring tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised before embarking on quantitative measurement.

There is a groundswell of support for these propositions to include a psychology of feeling (Cromby, 2007) in “a subjective science [that can be achieved] without violating the rules of scientific method” (Baruss, 2001, p 66). There is also a need to value local or indigenous meaning to ensure practice is evidence based (Teo, 1999; Weiss & Rupp, 2011). Since workplaces comprise integrated sets of relationships (Raelin, 2004), meaning is an integral component (Baumeister, Masicampo, & Vohs, 2011; de Grandpre, 2000). Appropriate theory and methods are needed to study relational connectedness in organisations.

### **Subjectivity**

Proposal 1 recommends using subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings. Subjectivity refers to the meaning of experiences for the self. It describes the nature of personal meanings people construct from their life experiences. Subjective views reflect a ‘for me’ perspective that is not reducible to objective analysis (Neisser, 2006). This way of seeing the world is fundamental to human existence. No human being is exempt from the primary influence of subjectivity.

Personal experience is valid situated data. “Issues of emotion, wellbeing, and work have cultural overlays that should be understood directly from participants rather than imposed by researchers” (Marsella, 1994, p 168). Studying human experience within a work setting, therefore, ought to begin with employees’ subjective experience rather than researchers’ assumptions. Subjectivity describes and accounts for experience through the idiosyncratic lenses of personal attitudes, intentions, beliefs, feelings, desires, values, and behaviour. As a result, it is based in the ever-present, ineradicable bias of an individual’s interpretation. Personal experience is communicated by referring to objects in the environment that tend to create the experience, or by describing related feelings, perhaps through art and metaphor (Gilbert, 2006). The complicated richness of subjective experience arises from the disunity or lack of integration at the centre of every person (Ewing, 1992), since human beings are:

[v]ery often as divided within themselves as they are from one another. Their subjectivity is composed of a complex web of complementary and conflicting as well as coherent and inconsistent meanings, purposes and identities, all of which generate as much tension as stability (Knights, 1992, p 529).

Subjective experience has its origin in social processes (Avdi & Georgaca, 2009), and as a result, subjective perspectives are socially constituted by the interaction of more than one mind (Eigen, 1999; Mitchell, 1988). The capacity for engaging and relating with others is present from birth. Selby and Bradley (2003) revealed interpersonal empathy and sociality could be observed in the dynamics of groups of infants less than one year of age, with no adult involvement or presence. A separate study by Powell and Spelke (2013) found preverbal infants expected members of their social groups to act alike, in contrast to their expectations of non-member infants in different social groups. Put another way, preverbal infants expected social affiliates would share behaviours, and this occurred before language developed and prior to extensive experience with different social groups. The human mind is primed for social interaction from birth.



Mental experiences created between two or more interacting individuals are described as 'intersubjective'. The term refers to a shared world, co-created uniquely in each mind at the same time (Bradley, 2005). Intersubjectivity, therefore, refers to a 'field' or system where two or more personal worlds of experience emerge, are maintained, and transformed (Orange, 2009). It emphasises the contextualised nature of subjective experience, as emergent qualities are "constituted by the interplay between the differently organised experiential worlds" of the persons involved (ibid, p 237). Interactional processes, culture, tradition, and social forces influence intersubjective experience everywhere: in work settings, dyads, or nations (Bradley, 2005).

Human minds in organisations continuously co-create (through interactive processes) subjective experiences in members. An intersubjective perspective sees other employees as human beings with their own subjectivities, as authentically different individuals rather than as 'objects' without their own unique personal experience (Aron, 1999; Grey, 2005). The need for human recognition as equal subjects is ubiquitous and essential, including at work (Benjamin, 1999).

The concept of intersubjectivity has considerable explanatory power and potential for deconstructing organisational experience at individual and group levels. It is conceptually inclusive of science and the humanities, and facilitates the study of meaning, emotions, and behaviour in work settings.

The dynamism of human subjectivity means organisational knowledge is "precarious" rather than fixed (Knights, 1992, p 520), based in processes that are evolving or 'becoming'. Fluctuating human emotions are at the root of organisational experience, and knowledge is neither static nor concrete.

## **Emotions**

Social constructionism views emotions as relational: "experiences of involvement" in dynamic social matrices (Barbalet, 2011, p 36; Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Orange, 2009; Waldron, 2000). Employees are contained within a social matrix that "determines *which emotions are likely to be expressed when and where, on what grounds and for what reasons, by what modes of expression, by whom*" (Kemper, 2004, p 46; italics in original).

Unsurprisingly, emotions play a central role in workplace relations (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Hochschild, 1983), covering a broad spectrum of experience:

Large-scale qualitative studies of workplace events and narratives reveal the widest range of sentiment provoked within organizations, with positive experiences of pride, belongingness, fulfilment, relief, excitement, optimism, affection, nostalgia, empowerment, and joy, and negative experiences of disappointment, fatigue, strain, bitterness, resentment, anger, indignation, rage, embarrassment, pain, disgust, surprise, shock, regret, guilt, sorrow, fear, desperation, uncertainty, rejection, worry, and frustration (Elfenbein, 2007 p 325).

In the context of the present study, the meaning of emotions in the workplace is significant. Employees interpret subjective meaning from experiences and interactions with others, and personal meaning is always grounded in emotions (Haidt, 2001; White, 2004).

Organisational psychology researchers have begun to use attributes of direct emotional experience as the basis for understanding workplaces (Basch & Fisher, 2000). Early emotions research in work organisations concentrated on within-person processes and proxies were often used, e.g., attitudinal states such as job satisfaction and organisational commitment were substituted for emotions experiences (Weiss, 2002; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). The denial of real emotion content reflected the “longstanding emphasis on rationality and more deliberate modes of performance in organisations” (Domagalski, 1999, p 833), even though the interpenetration of emotions and rationality in organisational processes is recognised (ibid; Fineman, 2000). Two aspects of emotion experience have significant implications for organisational psychology: it can be visible or invisible to others, and it is always situated, local, or contextualised.

### ***Explicit and implicit emotion***

Mental phenomena (e.g., emotions) can be visible or invisible to other people. These phenomenal states are referred to as explicit and implicit respectively, and both deserve attention (Baumeister, Masicampo, & Vohs, 2011).

Visible or explicit components are the mental contents and processes occurring *within conscious awareness*. They have been extensively researched at all levels including within-person, dyadic, team, leadership, and whole organisation (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Elfenbein, 2007; Forgas, 2008; George, 2011; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Experimental approaches have dominated this research. However, quantified emotion bears little relation to subjective experience as the original intensity and complexity is removed (Fineman, 2005; cf., Diener, 2000).

Explicit or conscious mental components are only a portion of emotion experience, however. *Implicit* mental content and processes are invisible, automatic, and not available to introspection. Implicit experience provides a view that is relatively independent of explicit processes. According to Freud, a great deal of mental functioning occurs outside of conscious awareness, or implicitly.

Knowledge about implicit phenomena was initially gained from clinical and therapeutic environments, where the focus was on within-person, psychodynamic perspectives, and later was extended to unconscious processes occurring in groups (Bion, 1961; Hoggett, 1998; Kets de Vries, 1987, 1999; Miller, 1993). Subsequently it was investigated in work relationships (Brown & Starkey, 2000; Czander & Eisold, 2003; de Board, 1978; de Geus, 1998; Hirschhorn, 1990; Long, Newton, & Chapman, 2006; Seel, 2001).

In work settings, studying implicit emotions and moods has challenged scholars to the extent that disciplinary research in this area has only recently commenced in earnest (Barsade, Ramarajan, & Westen, 2009). Effective research needs alternative methods such as projective techniques. In the area of human resource management, projective techniques have promise as they can be readily applied and construct validity is high (Carter, Daniels, & Zickar, 2013). Recent advances in measuring implicit mental phenomena have shown the powerful influence of emotions, attitudes, and values in work settings (Bowling & Johnson, 2013). Wellbeing, for instance, comprises explicit and implicit phenomena, although implicit content arguably provides a more comprehensive description of emotion components, as well as employees' experiences of work relationships, jobs, and prevailing organisational dynamics. As Leavitt, Fong, and Greenwald state, "including

implicit attitudes helps organisational researchers to better capture employees' appraisals of organizational life" (2011, p 682).

When combined, explicit and implicit phenomena provide a comprehensive understanding of the emotional *meaning* of aspects of the work context (e.g., interpersonal relations, careers) and the influence of the workplace on local emotion experience (Fineman, 2005). This indicates that the inclusion of implicit emotional experience in disciplinary research, although a difficult and challenging undertaking, is potentially valuable.

### ***Emotions as situated experience***

Emotions are not just produced within, and owned by, individual employees in response to environmental stimuli. Evidence indicates emotions are transactions constituted within a social context, "not so much 'in' the mind (nor just in the body or brain) so much as they are out there in social and interpersonal space... most of our emotions... [occur] with and in reaction to other people" (Solomon, 2007, p22). The situated perspective views emotions as dynamic processes of action, thought, and feeling produced interactively, located in social relations and interpersonal activity in the social context (Griffiths, 2003, 2010; White, 2004). Processes of emotional contagion provide robust evidence for the social constitution of emotions (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994).

The situated perspective on emotions draws attention to the reciprocal influence of emotion *on* the social context (Griffiths, 2010). Griffiths and Scarantino (2009) describe four ways emotions influence the internal environment of a work setting:

1. An act of emotional expression signals a reconfiguration of a relationship. If an employee becomes visibly angry and aggressively thumps a desk, the recipient of anger will usually recognise their relationship has been (temporarily) reconfigured from collaborative colleagues to antagonists. Signalling the relational shift draws attention to emotions functioning as social communication. Many expressions of emotion do not make sense unless they can be related directly to specific situated interactions.

2. Emotions can be seen as modes of engaging skilfully in the social environment. The skill is enacted as emotion (e.g., laughter, sadness), a form of non-conceptual action, where conscious thought is not required to initiate action.
3. The social environment scaffolds the expression of emotions synchronically and diachronically. It happens synchronically as an emotional performance unfolds, and diachronically, as a person gradually acquires an expanded emotional repertoire. Healthy adults learn from the social environment how to have (and express) appropriate emotions at the right time (e.g., empathy or deference) (Griffiths, 2010).
4. A dynamic coupling exists between an unfolding emotion and the environment. Both elements influence, and are influenced by, each other in a form of reciprocal feedback during an interaction.

The idea of emotions as contextualised is a useful contribution to understanding how meaning is expressed in dynamic relationships. It also alters how emotion experience may be interpreted in work settings, focusing attention on the purpose and function of emotions to communicate socially embedded, strategic, context-dependent, relevant information.

Another implication can also be discerned. Arguably, emotions are the constituents of organisational experience, not simply a source of organisational 'disturbance' or unnecessary noise disturbing the smooth flow of 'real' work (Armstrong, 2000). Armstrong proposed that emotion expression is a source of 'intelligence' or local knowledge, albeit with two conditions attached. First, emotion data is contextualised 'intelligence' relevant to a specific work setting and not generalisable to other settings. Second, data provides insight into the meaning of explicit and implicit processes influencing the emotional life of the system in its wider context. Emotion experience illuminates the nature of interactions between the work setting and its external context.

In summary, emotion experiences are data, a resource for probing and/or understanding local internal and external dynamics. Any emotion expression represents aspects of the emotional life *of* an organisation as an *entity* in its own right. This leads to the recognition that the organisational entity or 'object' elicits

different emotional responses from employees (Caper, 1999; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). As an object of employees' attention, the organisation elicits responses about its defining characteristics: *ecology* (relations between the organisation and the wider context); *identity* (the object as an enterprise); *task* (the work processes characterising its operation), and *management* (human structure and conditions defining its operation) (Armstrong, 2000). Employees' responses to these aspects can be read in many ways: as more or less explicit, and more or less in accordance with reality. The emotion expressions provide data about an organisation's areas of functioning, e.g., role clarity, habits of relating, and employee capability (internal functioning), and the viability, risks, and costs of survival in the wider operational context (external functioning). Thus, emotions are a resource for understanding not only employees' lived experience but the organisation as well.

### **Interpretive methods in organisational psychology**

The second proposal is to incorporate interpretivist methods in the research toolkit, particularly in applied settings like workplaces. This is not well understood in organisational psychology, as demonstrated in a recent article on how to produce good theory in organisational psychology. Shalley (2012) advocated two steps to theory development: acquire thorough knowledge of the relevant domain of literature, and use meta-analyses to provide causal explanations for observed results. In relation to the latter, the author noted that meta-analyses:

[c]an play a unique role in explaining the relationship between theoretical constructs and empirical evidence that can then be used to build theory... [By providing] compelling ... causal explanations for why and how things happen the way they do (ibid, p 4).

Similarly, Schaubroeck (2012) stated that good concepts in organisational psychology provide causal *explanations* of observed phenomena rather than causal *description*.

However, at the beginning stage of developing a foundational concept using inductive analysis, meta-analysis is not appropriate. The focus is on discovering meaning rather than explaining relationships among dimensions. This difference in

perspective highlights a core distinction between experimental and interpretivist science and is described with reference to similar debates in education.

A preference for experimental science has prevailed in the discipline of education. House (1991) noted the standard view of experimental educational research included:

- Explanation relying on data and facts
- Specifying hypotheses to be tested
- Strict dependence on operationally defined observations
- An a-theoretical stance that searched for predictability
- Causal explanations framed by natural covering laws to account for results.

House argued these approaches were inappropriate and inadequate for research in applied settings such as schools, and in so doing, challenged the vision of the most appropriate 'ways of knowing' in education.

The challenge has relevance for organisational psychology. The question at issue is the epistemological foundation of 'true science', or how to generate 'true knowledge'. It asks whether epistemology is exclusively associated with a set of natural science methods, or if other ways of acquiring knowledge could potentially be more useful and relevant to some research questions (Howe, 2004; Maxwell, 2004, 2012). By extension, it also flags that multiple ways of gaining knowledge might be best.

Possible ways of knowing are differentiated by the researcher's viewpoint, which is grounded either "in the *outsider's perspective* [or] the *insider's perspective*" (Howe, 2004, p 53; italics in original). Interpretivist methods engage insiders or stakeholders in a participatory process using principles of inclusion and dialogue to understand participants in their own settings, on their own terms, in a democratic research process.

Shalley's (2012) and Schaubroeck's (2012) calls to provide causal explanations are possible using interpretivist approaches. Realist explanation draws on "the actual processes that resulted in a specific outcome in a particular context" (Maxwell, 2012a, p 656; Maxwell, 2004). Realist accounts are embedded in *local* processes and contexts, are not dependent on quantitative measurement, and

extend to “beliefs, values, intentions, and meanings, not just to physical objects and events” (Maxwell, 2012a, p 657). Moreover, realist explanation is applicable to individuals and groups.

Finally, an ontology admitting causation is compatible with constructivist epistemology, which views understanding as personal creation rather than objective reality. It acknowledges the limitations of causal explanations within scientific realism, but does not view this as a failure of knowledge. Instead, social constructionism recognises the co-existence of multiple accounts of reality and phenomena; all accounts can be revised even at the macro level where the focus is on forces (such as race, class, or gender) occurring within society (Anderson & Scott, 2012).

Disciplinary debates about research methods in education are longstanding and not fully resolved. However, there is acceptance that the choice of methods depends on the research question: “Although method is key to science, method does not uniquely define science and choices of method are often highly nuanced” (Feuer, Towne, & Shavelson, 2002, p 8). Interpretivist or experimental, and analytic or systemic research tools are compatible when they are *correctly and appropriately applied* (ibid; Firestone, 1993; Salomon, 1991). Research data from different perspectives are often more compelling when additively combined rather than used in isolation.

These questions resonate with concerns in organisational psychology, where difficulties in practice are associated with methodological and theoretical restrictions. Studying human experience and meaning in organisations involves thinking about multiple perspectives beyond psychology, including philosophy, sociology, politics, ethics, and spirit (Grey, 2005). Scientific rationality limited by experimental methods is inadequate to explore subjective experience in work settings. This view is borne out in professional practice and recent critiques (Ashkanasy, 2011; Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010; Briner, 2010; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Rousseau, 2007). Experimental science is but one option in a range of potentially useful methods.

In summary, this proposal recommends evaluating interpretivist epistemology, theoretical perspectives, and methods for inclusion in the discipline’s



methodological repertoire, since they do “justice to the nature(s) of subjectivity” (Fineman, 2005, p 14). Features of mental life and personal experience, including feelings and non-conscious cognitive processes such as intuition, can then be considered in more depth as part of evidence-based practice and in recognition of the part feelings play in influencing how decisions are made (Bradley, 2005; Briner & Rousseau, 2011b; Teo, 1999). At a systemic level, the interpretivist focus on meaning elucidates shared knowledge grounded in an experiential understanding of work life (Beal & Ghandour, 2011; Drenth & Heller, 2004; Driver-Linn, 2003).

### **Developing concepts in social science**

The third proposal is to ensure tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised before researchers embark on quantitative measurement. Little attention has been paid to developing concepts in organisational psychology. Goertz (2006) critiqued psychology’s focus on factor analytic approaches to construct development as well as the lack of investigation into substantive phenomena. The emphasis has been on developing quantitative measures (e.g., scales or questionnaires) relying on operationalised rather than theorised concepts.

This proposal takes up Goertz’ suggestion that concept development should relate to the actual phenomenon being studied. The work wellbeing study rests on the conviction that before a variable can be measured it needs to be conceptualised.

A concept involves a theoretical and empirical analysis of the object or phenomenon referred to by the word. A good concept draws distinctions that are important in the behaviour of the object. The central attributes that a definition refers to are those that prove relevant for hypotheses, explanations, and causal mechanisms... I propose a causal, ontological, and realist view of concepts. It is an ontological view because it focuses on what constitutes a phenomenon. It is causal because it identifies ontological attributes that play a key role in causal hypotheses, explanations, and mechanisms. It is realist because it involves an empirical analysis of the phenomenon...Concept analysis involves ascertaining the constitutive characteristics of a phenomenon that have central causal powers... A purely semantic analysis of concepts, words, and their definitions is never adequate by itself (Goertz, 2006, p 4-5).

In organisational psychology the process of definition and measurement is usually inverted, with most variables operationalised for measurement before being conceptualised. Common sense or everyday terms (such as personality or wellbeing) are, therefore, used as if they were technical terms and a pre-existing definition or concept is assumed. However, this is rarely the case. Personality psychology, for example, is an established field of inquiry although it “lacks a coherent and integrative conception of personality” (Nilsson, 2014, p 18). Nilsson argued a non-reductive view of personality, including traits and world-views, would add greater rigour to the field by addressing the meaning-making component of human behaviour. Similarly, there is no precise account of wellbeing in organisational psychology. Psychological wellbeing has been conceptualised (Bradburn, 1969; Ryff, 1989), although wellbeing in work settings has no analytical clarity beyond common sense or everyday meanings (Ashworth, 2008; see Danna & Griffin, 1999). Ashworth (2008, p 11) noted Husserl “regarded [psychology] as flawed in its conceptual schemes by the tendency of psychologists to turn away from concrete experience and to develop prematurely abstract and unexamined concepts”.

Rethinking the meaning of good measurement is also advocated in the discipline of sociology.

The conventional wisdom on measurement is hollow, and we must move away from it... Researchers must regard measurement as intrinsically connected to conceptualization and, above all, fully probe a concept’s dimensional expanse when measuring. They should also contextualize their measures, both at the indicator level to ensure concept-measure congruence and at the categorical level to segregate cases into their pertinent categories, as understood by subject matter experts (Saylor, 2013, p 383).

Conceptualising is a different process to measurement and it yields a different outcome. Concepts are held personally, and many factors (e.g., feelings, experiences, and memories) influence a personal concept (Montes-Sandoval, 1999; Seedhouse, 2001; Villarruel & Ortiz de Montallano, 1992; Walding, 1991). Although concepts are held at the individual level, they are used to develop generalised or

collective concepts. As an example, common elements derived from individual patients' experiences and interpretations of pain were used to develop a general concept of pain, the main defining features of which were described as: a personal experience, an unpleasant experience, a dominating force, and endless in nature (Mahon, 1994).

Given that a personal concept does not exist independently of the person describing it, most social phenomena cannot easily be predicted, explained, or consistently defined. Further, as personal experience has no impersonal or particular meaning, any actions intended to change personal experience cannot systematically predict outcomes (Collard, 2006; Flyvbjerg, 2001). These characteristics suggest that measurement without prior conceptual development is a fraught endeavour.

### **Goertz' method of concept development**

"Concepts are about ontology. To develop a concept is more than providing a definition: it is deciding what is important" about the object (Goertz, 2006, p 27). The method developed by Goertz was selected for this study due to its unique contribution to concept construction in the social sciences (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012b; Mahoney & Goertz, 2006).

A concept is not the same as a definition or a theory. Definitions indicate a particular, impersonal, communicable meaning. Often, implicit theories are contained in a definition, so the line separating theory from definition may be unclear at times. Theories indicate a relationship, such as causality, among variables. They may be held privately or publicly. Theories strive for internal and external consistency, and are independent of the theorist (Polanyi, 1973).

In contrast, the ontology of a concept specifies its fundamental, inherent, defining attributes (Goertz, 2006; Goertz & Mahoney, 2012b). It is epistemologically constructivist, since knowledge is distilled from raw, descriptive accounts of situated experience (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006; Howe, 2009). A concept demonstrates that a common sense, ontological reality can be derived from mental processes (House, 1991; Maxwell, 2012b). Critical realists recognise the reality of mental processes and thus a concept, which is held in people's minds, is also ontologically real.

Goertz' (2006) method of concept development typically yields a three level, multidimensional structure showing the structural relationships among constitutive elements, as shown in Figure 1. Identifying meanings is the primary goal (Mahoney & Goertz, 2006). The constituents differentiating a concept play a central role in the development of hypotheses about, and explanations and mechanisms of, the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2004).

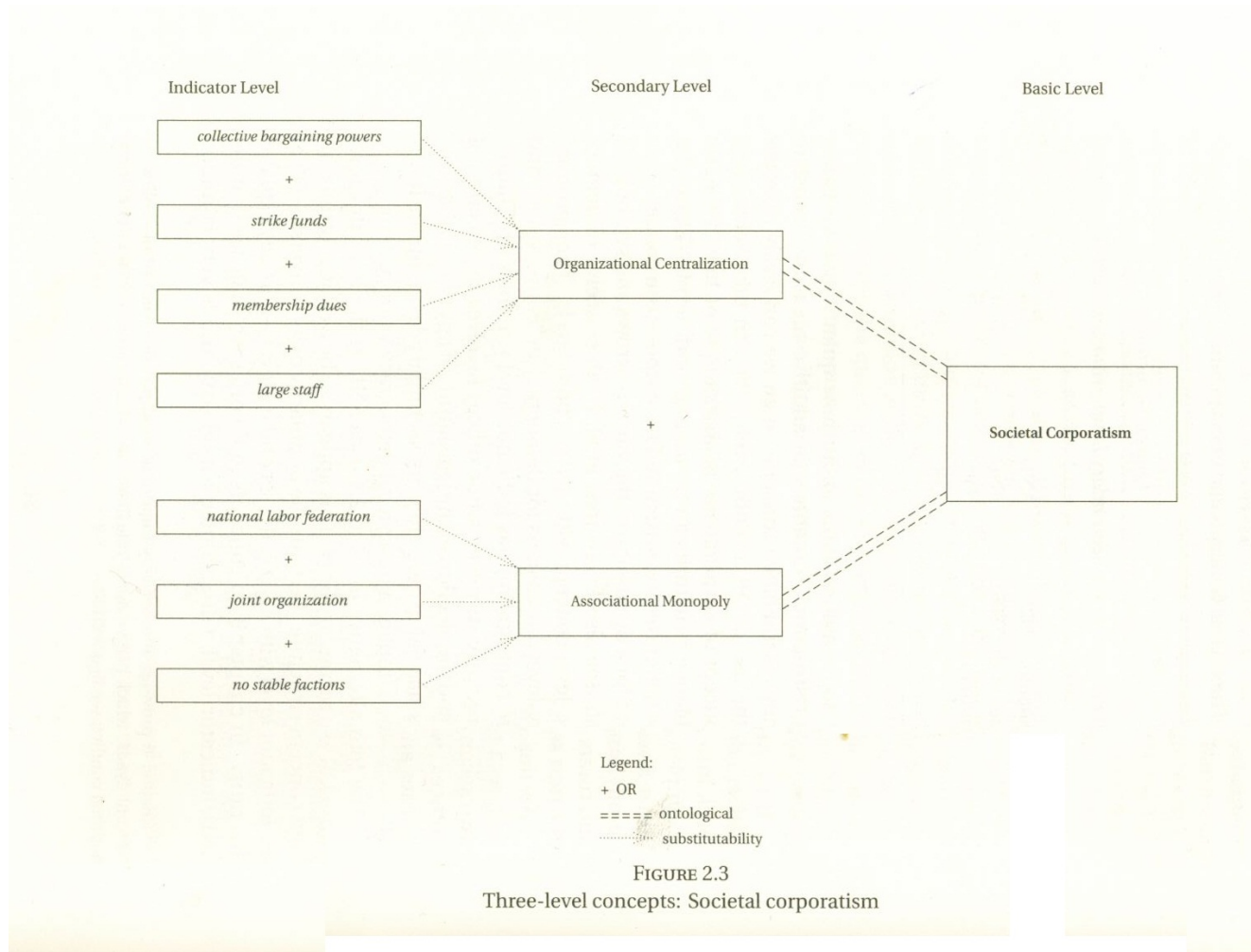


Figure 1: Three-level concepts

Source: Goertz, G. (2006). *Social Science Concepts*. Princeton, NJ; Princeton University Press.

Figure 1 above highlights that levels comprising a concept are referred to as ‘basic’, ‘secondary-level dimensions’, and ‘indicator’. Each level is bipolar and continuous.

**Basic level**

The *basic* level names the central, cognitive proposition of the concept. It refers to a phenomenal object in a particular context, for example, ‘societal corporatism’. It does not refer to a hypothetical or generic concept. The latter does not exist, and could not empirically represent all instances of the phenomenon if it did. Similarly, there is no complete concept of wellbeing, or of work wellbeing. Nor is

there likely to be, given the diverse characteristics and idiosyncratic meanings human beings ascribe to experiences of wellbeing in unique work settings.

### ***Secondary-level Dimensions***

The secondary-level dimensions of a concept identify the substantive constituents of the internal structure of the basic level (Goertz, 2006). Secondary-level dimensions are the structural features forming the intrinsic nature of the concept. In the example above, dimensions are the aspects that identify an experience as 'being' societal corporatism. Therefore, the relationship between the basic level concept and secondary-level dimensions is ontological, not causal, since *they identify the presence of the concept*. Relatively independent of each other, *dimensions are related by identity with the basic level*.

Like other levels, secondary-level dimensions are bipolar and continuous. They theoretically link the abstract basic level to the concrete indicator/data level. The structuring properties of secondary-level dimensions allow researchers to create quantitative test items from concrete indicator level data if desired.

### ***Indicators***

Indicator data are situated at the third level of the concept structure. Goertz described indicator level data as linking "the more theoretical analysis in the basic and secondary levels to the more practical requirements of converting these ideas into empirical practice" (p 62). Indicators are derived directly from data sources such as interview transcripts. They can be viewed as either substitutable and/or causal, although Goertz argued that a non-causal view of indicators made more sense in some social contexts.

### ***Concept structure***

Goertz outlined two prototypical concept structures: *necessary and sufficient conditions*, and *family resemblance*. These lie at opposite ends of the same continuum, and their differences are relevant to the present study.

The *necessary and sufficient conditions* structure is standard for multidimensional concepts, although according to Goertz, this structure is rare in natural social settings. This type signifies all secondary-level dimensions are

necessary *and* sufficient to describe the concept and to define the basic-level proposition. In a necessary and sufficient conditions structure, the unique set of dimensions differentiates the concept from any other similar concepts.

In contrast, secondary-level dimensions in the *family resemblance* concept structure are *substitutable*. Goertz (2006, p 36) described family resemblance as “a rule about sufficiency with no necessary condition requirements”. Therefore, a minimum number of dimensions are required to define the basic-level proposition, but there are no requirements about inclusion of any particular dimension(s). These concepts need only to have “enough resemblance on secondary-level dimensions to be part of the family” (Goertz, 2006, p 7).

There is a third group of concepts. In the ‘grey zone’ of hybrid concept structures, some dimensions may be *necessary and sufficient*, while others may be *substitutable* as in the family resemblance type. Hybrid concepts lie along the continuum between the poles defined by necessary and sufficient conditions and family resemblance.

### **Conceptual interdisciplinarity**

Conceptual interdisciplinarity is a form of scholarship ideally suited to working with topics without “a compelling disciplinary basis” (Lattuca, 2003, p 7). Wellbeing, a topic transcending every discipline, is discussed in relation to work settings in the following two chapters. The value of conceptual interdisciplinarity is that it promotes alternative ideas by challenging the boundaries of single disciplinary theorising. This opens up intellectual space, providing different perspectives and/or methods so that a conceptual understanding of key tropes and issues can be developed (Mansilla, Dillon, & Middlebrooks, 2002).

Many examples of conceptual interdisciplinarity indicate the benefits of adopting new and different approaches to explore complex, intractable issues. Psychosocial studies, for example, links society, structure, and affect in ways that have not been achieved in sociology, psychology, or social psychology alone, by using interdisciplinary theories and methods to interrogate issues differently (Hoggett, 2010). Hollway (2011) used psychosocial epistemology to develop creative, transformative ways of presenting data analyses. Using the starting point of

researcher reflexivity, Hollway described four new methods of presenting experiences and meanings in ethical and valid ways “while preserving the vitality of participants’ voices” (ibid, p 92). These included: writing scenically, constructing rough verse from interview accounts, using imagined ‘intimate voices’ to represent participants, and matrixial (maternal) language and social dreaming. Documented in examples, the new methods illustrated that personal subjectivity was an instrument of knowing that helped bring embodied, emotion-based, and implicit socio-cultural knowledge to life.

### **Summary**

The future of core activities in organisational psychology – the application of research to work organisations – is predicated on researchers and practitioners combining “clinical and academic as well as real-world practical skills” (Greiner, Motamedi, & Jamieson, 2011, p 171). Embracing approaches beyond experimental science will ensure the discipline remains relevant (Drenth & Heller, 2004). Including subjective experience, using interpretivist methods, and developing local concepts before undertaking any measurement are essential additions to the discipline.

### **Subjectivity**

If subjective experience is interpretive, reflecting individual perspectives, then all views are partial, because experiences are limited in space and time (Orange, 2009). Moreover, if experience occurs in social contexts, it is mutually constituted by participating minds. Intersubjectively constituted emotional experience is more than a reified concept; its power and ‘presence’ is palpable in human interaction. Affective experiences are potent features of work environments. Therefore, subjectivity merits inclusion in disciplinary research, particularly in concept development that relies on descriptive accounts of situated experience.

### **Methodological diversity**

The methodological dichotomy in organisational psychology is a false one. Research questions rather than systemic convention, belief, edict, or power need to define methodology. Well-conceptualised interpretivist data can contribute to disciplinary knowledge, and interpretivist methods complement experimental



science with a focus on different questions (Geertz, 1973). Interpretivist approaches are suited to understanding subjective experience, meaning, process, and context in organisations (Van de Ven, 1989). Therefore, acceptance of interpretive science as a relevant, appropriate methodology *in context* is a sensible addition to the disciplinary research portfolio (Bacharach, 1989).

Benefits of methodological pluralism include divergent thinking and creativity to find new directions and questions (Zyphur, 2009). Subjective experience must be retained in its integrity rather than being transformed “into operationally defined behaviour” (Colaizzi, 1978, p 53). Moreover, weak or non-existent conceptual knowledge can be remedied using interpretivist methodology to study experience and meanings in context (Beal & Ghandour, 2011; Driver-Linn, 2003).

Using methods derived from both humanities and science disciplines is appropriate for psychology, situated at the intersection of science, social science, and humanities. Collaboration across disciplines can benefit organisational psychology with a focus on psychosocial subjective experience (mind, self, emotion, experience, culture) and traditional science (brain, motivation). Without methodological diversity, integrated knowledge cannot be developed (Cassell, 2010).

### **Concepts**

Organisational psychology has avoided fundamental concept development in favour of unsubstantiated quantitative measurement. This is problematic. Goertz (2006) argued the measurement of psychological ideas (e.g., wellbeing) ought to be based in properly developed concepts. Concept construction is a necessary methodological component before quantitative measurement using surveys or questionnaires is undertaken.

This chapter identified three areas of theory and research whose absence restricts the uptake of disciplinary knowledge in applied settings. The next two chapters outline relevant multidisciplinary research on wellbeing in workplaces, thereby setting the stage for the illustrative study at the centre of this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Work and Wellbeing (Part 1)

### Introduction

Human wellbeing has been described as the “intellectual, physical and emotional pleasure which is induced by one’s own activity and which harms no one else. This... arises in part from contributions made to the pleasure of others through one’s cooperative activity” (Herrick, 1981, p 613). Applied to a workplace, this quote expresses the interdependence, challenge, effort, pride, and other good feelings employees may experience when things go well at work.

This brief introduction outlines three issues about wellbeing and work. First, the absence of conceptual clarity and the confusion of research terms in ‘work’ and ‘wellbeing’ are impediments to knowledge development. Second, values are implicit in ‘work’ and ‘wellbeing’ and need to be factored into research agendas. Third, subjectivity has a defining role in the meaning of wellbeing in work settings. The theoretical justification for these issues was provided in Chapter 1.

The first issue refers to the lack of conceptual clarity in wellbeing research in organisational psychology. Practitioners need evidence-based knowledge about the core constituents of wellbeing in work environments, but the sheer number and variety of different models thwart meaningful application to practice. As well, many inter-related terms are used to describe wellbeing, which is often conflated, and/or used interchangeably, with health. Models may refer to individual wellbeing, organisational wellbeing, or a combination of both; alternatively, human health (physical, mental, or a combination), or workplace health (often measured as performance against corporate objectives) might be the referents. Additional complications arise when work and wellbeing are used as dependent and/or independent variables. An example is ‘employee wellbeing’, a construct associated with physical health and workforce productivity (Wright & Huang, 2012) and negatively linked to job related stress and unhealthy workplaces (Day & Randell, 2014; Wright, 2010). Similarly confusing is ‘organisational health’, also related to wellbeing, with broad component attributes of healthy employees and organisations (Browne, 2002). ‘Organisational health’ comprises performance (including profit, productivity, and competitiveness variables), workers’ mental and physical health,

and job satisfaction. A further example is The 'Healthy Work Organisations' model that links three organisational characteristics – management practices, organisational climate, and organisational values – to measures of organisational health at individual and whole organisation levels (Sauter, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1990). Dependent and independent variables in the 'Healthy Work Organisations' model may overlap, creating poor definitional quality.

Overlapping constructs and/or terms create measurement problems as well. Ideas such as 'organisational health' or 'employee wellbeing' need to be conceptualised first if they are to be meaningful research terms. This touches on the issue of research relevance for professional practice raised in the Preface. Wellbeing is contextualised to specific work settings, since no two organisations are the same. Therefore, researcher-defined dimensions in a generic model such as 'healthy work organisations' or a 'psychologically healthy workplace' are likely to be problematic, as important variations in local conditions are obliterated. There is potential for confusion resulting from multiple terms, lack of conceptual definition, and how variables are used.

The second issue concerns values, which are fundamental to work. Knowing how workplace and personal values affect employees, and how values are maintained and/or undermined, is pivotal to understanding the meaning of wellbeing. Explicit and implicit emotional currents create the work environments within which employees live, act, and interact (Dewey, 1938). Manifest physical and cultural environments of a work setting result from dynamic, institutionalising processes that create orderly, stable practices from chaotic patterns of loosely organised activities (Broom & Selznick, 1955). This occurs through the subtle infusion of values that go far "beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" (Selznick, 1996, p271). Employees and workplaces are affected by these embedded cultural values, an exploration of which is necessary to understand local wellbeing.

The third issue concerns employees' subjective experiences of wellbeing, which are linked to organisational productivity (Wright, 2010). The ways wellbeing may be promoted or compromised are therefore pertinent issues for organisations. Here, the type of research methodology is relevant, as outlined in Chapter 1. As Dewey (1938) pointed out, social inquiry and practice are intimately connected.

Social enquiry methods allow issues and questions to emerge from real or 'practical' social conditions, rather than being assumed *a priori* by researchers. Experimental approaches based on researcher-defined items in questionnaires or surveys provide less rich data than interpretivist methods that draw out subjective experience. Subjective data provides insights into prevailing social processes, mechanisms, and underlying values. Concept development from meaning-infused data generates relevant *knowledge* for organisations (Markides, 2011).

In summary, there is a need to clarify and conceptualise terms such as wellbeing, work, and health. This includes compound terms such as 'healthy work organisations', 'employee wellbeing' or 'psychologically healthy workplace'. Values shape organisational culture and employee experience and are, therefore, at the heart of wellbeing. Employees' subjective, contextualised experiences are useful to clarify tropes such as work and wellbeing. The use of pre-existing questionnaire items, focusing on already-known issues, is not sufficient to clarify wellbeing since they prevent 'unknowns' from emerging (Selznick, 1996). This chapter, and the next, review literature at the intersection of knowledge about 'work' and 'wellbeing', two large, multi-perspectival fields of scholarship.

### **The primary constructs: Work and wellbeing**

This section provides a short overview of the constructs of work and wellbeing, with relevant issues, for the study.

#### **Work**

Frederick Taylor's early 20<sup>th</sup> century system of scientific management considered work to be a rational, logical activity defined by efficiency and productivity (Briner, 1999). This view shifted when research on human affect showed workplaces, their activities and related interactions are laden with emotion that profoundly influences employee and organisational performance (Fineman, 1993, 2000). The inherently emotional, personal quality of people's responses to, and descriptions of, work are expressed in terms associated with workplaces, employment, and jobs, e.g., hard yakka, effort, stress, breadwinner, overwork, workmates, responsibility, inspiration, boredom, pressure, challenge, long hours, drudgery, the daily grind, fulfilment, self-discipline, and accountability. A richly

evocative vocabulary suggests *work* is a complicated and evolving idea, with multilayered impacts on employees, families, communities, and society.

There have been many approaches to deconstructing elements of the 'work' trope. Drenth (1991), for instance, considered work contained two elements for employees. The 'instrumental' element required workers to engage in paid activities so they could acquire goods and services necessary for their survival. By definition, products of the instrumental element (i.e., the outputs of work activity) need to be valuable and useful for society so as to generate profits for employers and income for employees. The second element concerned personal expansion. Drenth believed the primary function of work was to provide "the means to liberate us from nature... In working we develop, enrich, and recognise ourselves. Working is a central existential category that opens an avenue to self-realisation" (1991, p 127). Similarly, Fineman (2006) considered that work organisations were morally bound to offer meaningful work and adopt anti-oppressive practices. These perspectives point to multiple meanings implicit in the idea of work; it is not merely a practical activity to provide income, goods, and services for employees, employers, and society. Work activities are also charged with enriching and developing people in just environments. Ideally, employees' dual survival and existential needs are supported by their job roles and tasks in the workplace.

The Meaning of Working study (MOW, 1987) provided a slightly different perspective on the work construct. Using a societal-level perspective, MOW investigated empirical descriptions of the meaning of work across eight countries. Four definitional clusters – concrete, social, duty, and burden – were identified. The *concrete* cluster comprised tangible and practical aspects of working, including earning an income, undertaking performative actions at specific places and times, and affective reactions, such as unpleasantness. The *social* cluster comprised activities by which people felt a sense of belonging, relating, or contributing to society; or benefiting others. The *duty* cluster was associated with a sense of obligation and included task relatedness and accountability. The *burden* cluster referred to physical and mental stress and exertion. The MOW study highlighted various aspects of work (e.g., goal orientation, physical activity, behavioural and emotional factors, interactional attributes) and explicitly acknowledged the

centrality of human effort and emotion. The study drew on experience and values to clarify the meaning of work.

The approaches of Drenth and the MOW study highlight alternative means of describing the work construct at different levels. In foundational concept development, personal experience, meaning, contextualised values, and features of the work setting are data inputs to be converted to knowledge. Interpretive methods provide insight into local social processes and mechanisms of social activity (Little, 2014). Survey-based research is unsuitable for developing conceptual knowledge.

A paid job consumes employees' time, and physical and emotional energy. It is associated with a level of stress and fatigue for most people. Working has many benefits, however. Jobs are a source of income, satisfaction, self-esteem, skill development, social contact, and more (Kahn & Juster, 2002). For the unwillingly unemployed or underemployed, lack of satisfying work can result in the atrophy of desired mental, physical, and psychological capacities. Despite workers' ambivalence, it is usually preferable to have a job, particularly in a work setting that reinforces and rewards employees' value.

The psychological meaning of work refers to the mental effort expended in achieving goals while delaying the gratification of personally preferred activities and desires (Freud, 1951). Using this definition, Jaques (1960) identified two basic components of work. One comprised structure, rules, laws, instructions, and limitations that permitted little or no personal discretion in completing task activities. The second was discretionary, encompassing all activities where judgment and choice are needed. Discretionary work requires the largest input of effort as it is carried out in an emotional environment of uncertainty. In Jaques' words, the psychological "intensity or weight of responsibility" involved in discretionary work results from "the psychic effort of discretion and decision, with its attendant staring of anxiety" (ibid, p 357). In professional services firms, this component can be onerous. Employees working under pressure from time and workload can experience poor physical and emotional outcomes (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996; Zolnierczyk, 2004).

Employees' work experiences, associated feelings, and thoughts are expressed in their values, attitudes, affect, and behaviour. Work settings and activities vary widely (George & Jones, 1997). Workplace values inform goals, types of work, the physical setting, organisational behaviour, and social relations (Borg, 2010). Work, a quintessentially human activity, is also infused with personal and systemic meaning and values. Any investigation of work needs to use approaches and methods that can deal effectively with numerous, complex attributes.

## **Wellbeing**

*Wellbeing* describes positively loaded experiences and affects: contentment, happiness, mental peace, relaxation, fun, conviviality, satisfaction, enjoyment, health, light-heartedness, and physical balance. Despite its superficial simplicity, however, attempts at definitive accounts of wellbeing are controversial (Swift, 2007; Collard, 2006). In psychology, individual-level wellbeing has been referred to as optimal functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001), or "all the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives" (Rath & Harter, 2010, p 137). Similarly, population-level wellbeing describes people enjoying frequent pleasant emotions and engagement, finding meaning and satisfaction in life, and having low levels of stress and depression (Diener & Seligman, 2004). These authors suggested a "partial formula for high wellbeing" is based on:

- Living in a democratic, stable society where material resources are provided to meet needs
- Having supportive friends and family
- Having rewarding and engaging work with an adequate income
- Being reasonably healthy and having access to treatment in case of mental problems
- Having important goals related to one's values
- Having a philosophy or religion that provides guidance, purpose, and meaning to one's life (ibid, p 25).

Psychology is one of several disciplines interested in the meaning of wellbeing. Philosophers have been preoccupied with fundamental questions about the topic since ancient Greek times. A modern philosophic perspective considers the

topic relates to how well or badly a person's life is going, or how good or bad it is, *for them* (Haybron, 2008). Philosophers (and experts in other disciplines) divide wellbeing theories into three basic types: Mental state theories (of which hedonism is probably the most well-known); desire or preference theories (where individual wellbeing is a matter of having one's intrinsic desires satisfied); and objective or objective list theories [where it is assessed as objectively good for a person to have various goods, e.g., Diener and Seligman's (2004) aforementioned partial formula for high wellbeing].

Philosopher Shelly Kagan critiqued the supporting rationales for all three basic types of wellbeing theories (mental state, desire/preference theories, and objective/objective list theories). Kagan proposed any theory must specify "in general terms the set of facts that comprise the *good for the individual*" (1992, p 185), and outlined three essential conditions defining what is 'good' for an individual. The first is a *content* condition, which specifies that facts about what is good for the person must be *about the person*. The second *value* condition must provide a plausible account of *why it is good* to have the specified contents. The third *benefit* condition states the *person must benefit* from having wellbeing. Kagan posited that if something was described as a genuine or ultimate benefit to a person, it *must* involve the person's intrinsic properties. Put differently, any increases in wellbeing would need to involve *changes in the person's body and mind*, as these aspects are intrinsic to personhood. She concluded the factors that made wellbeing valuable *to* a person also needed to make a difference *in* the person.

Kagan differentiated the *benefit* condition into intrinsic and extrinsic wellbeing factors. External, relational goods that do not fit the criterion of changing a person intrinsically can still be very significant factors in wellbeing, since they are personally valued. Examples might be having money, friends, or good health. Research shows such content condition factors to be important (Ger, 1997), although they may not constitute an ultimate benefit to wellbeing in Kagan's terms. In contrast, intrinsic factors might include learning, achievement, and personal growth; such experiences involve changes to a person's mind and subsequent behaviour. Kagan's theory indicates how difficult it is to define wellbeing, an issue at the forefront of this study.



From an economic perspective, Dolan and White (2006) described their conceptualisation of wellbeing as a “temporal and iterative process” (p 304). This view does not use an objective set of circumstances or a particular state of mind as wellbeing indicators. Dynamic rather than static, their concept specifies six stages: anticipation, planning, behaviour, outcome, experience, and evaluation. A person’s wellbeing is founded in many iterations of this cyclical staged process, and various outputs (‘indicators’) from the six stages yield potentially valuable information about how a person experiences dynamic wellbeing. This formulation is consistent with other process-oriented perspectives, including wellbeing as ‘flourishing’ (Seligman, 2003); ‘being’ rather than ‘having’ (Rathunde, 2001); and constantly changing motivations, goals, and behaviour (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001).

The foregoing examples of approaches to, and perspectives on, wellbeing are only a fraction of the extensive analysis and debate engendered by this interdisciplinary topic (Strack, Argyle, & Schwarz, 1991) in at least nine social science domains:

- Philosophy (Kraut, 1979; Rubin, 2004; Russell, 1996; Solomon, 2004; Young, 2003);
- Economics (Burroughs, 2002; Easterlin, 2004; Eckersley, 2004, 2005; Hagerty & Veenhoven, 2003; Hamilton & Denniss, 2000; Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Veenhoven, 1988, 1993);
- Linguistics (Wierzbicka, 2009);
- Psychology (Boniwell & Henry, 2007; Bradburn, 1969; Callan, 2007; Gilbert, 2006; Haybron, 2008; Huppert, 2009; Karademas, 2007; Keyes, Schmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Kinman & Jones, 2005; Kompier, 2003; Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, & McNamara, 2005; Rathunde, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001; Warr, 2007, 2009; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004);
- Sociology (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Kahn & Juster, 2002; Kemper, 2004);
- Health (Antonovsky, 1979, 1987; Brock, 1993; Caan, 2007; Seedhouse, 1995);
- Organisational studies (Sandelands, 2011; Smircich, 1983);
- Political science (Nussbaum, 1992, 1993; Putnam, 1995); and

- Anthropology (Ewing, 1992; Izquierdo, 2005; Molino, 2004).

This widespread interest led Lattuca (2003) to conclude that wellbeing has no compelling single disciplinary home. Without an agreed definition, it is a contested field of study, in spite of its popularity as a dependent or independent variable. Its utility in research is undermined without a clear conceptual base, and there is remarkably little agreement about how best to identify, measure, or achieve wellbeing (Cronin de Chavez, Backett-Milburn, Parry, and Platt, 2005). It has been described as vague, nebulous, and values-based; ultimately ideological (Seedhouse, 2004); comprising objective and subjective data (Clark & Gough, 2005); and derived from multiple influences (Villarruel & Ortiz de Montallano, 1992; Walding, 1991). The experience of wellbeing is known to vary across time and place, and descriptions of the nature of wellbeing change over the life course (Kahn & Juster, 2002). Wellbeing is worthy of scholarly attention because it has consistently preoccupied human beings for centuries (Holowchak, 2004; Rubin, 2004; Russell, 1996), and interest has not lessened over time.

Delineating the theoretical focus of this study is an important task of the literature review. It is evident that work and wellbeing are broad constructs with limited analytical clarity or interdisciplinary consensus. This is a problem for researchers generally, and is the focus of interest in this study. The next section builds on Chapter 1 to address two theoretical foundations of the study. The first refers to the use of subjective experiences and values to assess personal wellbeing. The second describes how multilevel theory enables a shift in focus from personal descriptions to collective or systemic wellbeing experience.

### **Theoretical issues**

This project is about conceptualising the meaning of wellbeing in work settings. It assumes employees implicitly and/or explicitly have personal knowledge about wellbeing as a feature of their local work environment, and they possess the wherewithal to adequately communicate this knowledge. The study also assumes wellbeing is described in partial ways when individuals draw on their direct personal experience. From this, wellbeing can be conceptualised as a systemic level attribute. In support of these ideas, Chapter 1 outlined the significance of personal values in

psychology; addressed issues of subjectivity, explicit and implicit emotions; and how intersubjective processes feature in the development of collective emotional experience. Goertz' method of concept development demonstrated that individual experience is used to develop collective concepts. These foundational ideas support this study.

### **Values and evaluation processes**

Rokeach (1973, p 5) defined a value as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence”. Similarly, Locke described personal values as what “a person wants, or seeks to obtain” because it is believed to be “conducive to one’s welfare” (1976, p 1304).

Meaning is grounded in values. Attributing meaning to external stimuli is the process by which people make sense of, or interpret, stored mental representations of sensory data. Interpretation is a way of analysing the personal and/or shared meanings of significant stimuli such as workplace events, structures, interactions, job roles, interpersonal interactions, and management behaviour (James, James, & Ashe, 1990). Employees find it relatively easy to describe the meaning of wellbeing in their workplace and in doing so they draw directly from lived experience. Chapter 1 argued that ‘knowing’ things about oneself and the world is subjective, embodied, and situated within a particular personal history, set of interests, and life focus. The chapter also concluded that ‘knowing’ is socially interdependent. A network of embodied relations enables employees to know ‘how things are’ in the collective environment (Pohlhaus, 2014).

Values are based in moral judgements concerned with ideas of right and wrong, good and bad (Hamilton, 2008; Law, 2007; Solomon, 2004, 2007). Philosophy has long been divided on the question of whether moral judgement is predominantly based in Kantian rationality or Humean emotionality (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, & Haidt, 1999). In psychology, the dominant models of moral reasoning emerged from the work of Piaget (1932/1965), and later Kohlberg (1969), who both emphasised the primacy of rationality and cognitive processes. The basis for evaluating issues of harm, rights, justice, and fairness is seen as located in cognitive reasoning processes

and to a lesser extent in moral emotions such as sympathy. Rationalism assumes that cognitive assessment schemas underlie appraisals of meaningful work attributes such as the desire for clarity, harmony, and justice (James & James, 1989; James, James, & Ashe, 1990). Cognitive schemas enable employees to assess the *clarity* of a job description or a manager's task instructions, the *level of conflict* between colleagues, or the *fairness* of recent pay or promotional decisions.

However, the dominant emphasis on rationality in moral judgement has been reassessed in light of recent evidence to the contrary (Hamilton, 2008). When people describe how they reason in everyday life, data indicate that emotions have a more significant role than cognitive models allowed. Haidt (2001) reviewed the evidence against rationalist approaches and concluded that cognitive evaluations were based in post-hoc rationalisations of already-formed moral judgements. A moral judgement is an evaluation ('good versus bad') of a person's actions or character, and is made with respect to a set of virtues a culture or group hold to be obligatory. Moral reasoning, in contrast, is conscious mental activity that draws on information about people to reach a moral judgement. It is an intentional process requiring effort, and is under the control of the reasoner.

The need to delineate the initial response – moral judgement – and the ensuing response – moral reasoning – in evaluation processes led Haidt to propose the social intuitionist approach to morality. Intuitionism:

[r]efers to the view that there are moral truths and that when people grasp these truths they do so not by a process of ratiocination and reflection but rather by a process more akin to perception, in which one 'just sees without argument that they are and must be true' (ibid, p 814).

Although moral intuition is a type of cognition, it is not a kind of reasoning. Haidt defines moral intuition as:

[t]he sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgement, including an affective valence (good-bad, like-dislike), without any conscious awareness of having gone through steps of searching, weighing evidence or inferring a conclusion (ibid, p 818).

Intuition is one of two forms of cognition. It is distinguished from cognitive reasoning by its characteristics: quick, effortless, automatic, and implicit (occurring outside of conscious awareness). Only the outcome, the moral intuition, is accessible to consciousness.

Haidt's social intuitionist model predicts that in situations calling for moral judgements, moral intuitions (including moral emotions) are primary, having a direct, causal role. The model rejects the idea that moral reasoning is the principal cause of moral judgements, although slow, ex post facto moral reasoning *is* needed to develop arguments that support a person's point of view when the moral intuition is identified.

Four main processes comprise the social intuitionist model:

1. The *intuitive judgement process*: moral judgements appear automatically and effortlessly in consciousness as a result of moral intuitions.
2. The *post hoc reasoning process*: moral reasoning requires effort, as a search is made for arguments to support an already made judgement. This is necessary because moral positions always have an affective component.
3. The *reasoned persuasion process*: moral reasoning is verbalised to justify one's already-made moral judgement to others.
4. Since people are highly attuned to the emergence of group norms, the mere fact that friends, allies, and acquaintances have made *a moral judgement exerts a direct influence on others, even if no reasoned persuasion is used.*

Emotions are implicit in meaning making (see Chapter 1). The strongest emotions usually occur as a consequence of events affecting a person's most deeply held values (Jones, Levesque, & Masuda, 2003). Despite this, people cannot easily tell how they reach moral judgements (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). The social intuitionist model describes a place for unconscious personal appraisals in everyday moral reasoning situations. The quick, salient 'gut feelings' can help a person to know, for example, whether to help others in need (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Haidt's model clarifies moral judgement by identifying its two separate components: intuitive judgement and post hoc moral reasoning. In addition, the primary processes involved in evaluation – intuition, emotion, reasoning, and social influence – are integrated in the social intuitionist model.

Moral intuition is garnering attention in the organisational arena, specifically in the areas of leadership, corporate corruption, ethics training and education, and divestiture socialisation (Weaver, Reynolds, & Brown, 2014). Findings from this study reveal workplace wellbeing comprises the range of intuitive, affective, cognitive, and social processes. The social intuitionist model lends theoretical weight to this study by providing a plausible account of the ease with which employees describe and evaluate wellbeing experiences at work (Haidt, 2012).

### **Multilevel theory**

If psychological experience is relational, human wellbeing arguably has its roots in the life of the group. Therefore, the study of wellbeing in work settings should utilise multilevel theory to ensure data gathering, analysis, and concept development are 'fit for purpose' at various levels of analysis.

Values vary in their breadth of content and level of focus, ranging from individual to societal and cultural levels. The values construct is "truly isomorphic", with meaningful explanations found at different organizational levels (Maierhofer, Rafferty, & Kabanoff, 2003, p 6). The broad category of 'life values' is applicable to all settings; work values, in contrast, are relevant only in work settings.

Work values indicate those aspects of the employment environment employees prefer. In work settings the most widely used levels of analysis are individual, group, and organisation, and each level is conceptually distinct. This can be demonstrated: *safety* applies at the individual level ('I believe personal safety is important'), the group level ('there is a shared belief the safety of individuals is important'), and the organisation level ('there is a general belief that personal safety is important in the work setting') (Maierhofer, Rafferty, & Kabanoff, 2003).

Consistent with theory outlined in Chapter 1, group values are conceptualised as a property of the group. In an organisation, values are considered shared (to some extent) across the work setting.

For practical purposes, multilevel theory is reduced to two levels of analysis in this study: *individual*, and *primary social group* (Bliese & Jex, 2002).

Individual level experience can be divided into 'within-person' and 'between-persons' levels. The within-person perspective reflects state-based, short-term,

transient fluctuations in moods or emotion, or bodily changes associated with health. The between-persons level refers to a person as 'the unit of interest', and investigates how variables differ *between* people. The group level refers to any meaningful unit beyond the individual, including dyads, teams, departments, and entire organisations (Pugh & Dietz, 2008). Multilevel theory provides the theoretical justification for data gathering to be conducted at the individual level, and for the outcomes of data analysis to depict a group-level feature. This study provides the output of group-level analysis, i.e., wellbeing in particular work settings.

Multilevel perspectives indicate how processes at different levels influence emotions, cognitions, and behaviour in work settings (Ashkanasy, 2011a; Bliese & Jex, 2002; Naumann & Bennet, 2000). In relation to occupational stress, for example, group level interactions in the proximal environment can exacerbate or alleviate individual responses to perceived stressors (Bliese & Jex, 2002). Interpretivist individual level data can be used to describe group level features such as networks of power and influence, the role of subgroups, and the significance of intra- and inter-organisational processes (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1999). Identifying group level meaning from individual level data parallels the process of emergence in multilevel theory (Ashkanasy, 2003). Group data thus represents the 'voice' of the group, providing an account of collective experience and phenomena (Akerlind, 2005; Bliese & Jex, 2002; Walsh, 2000).

Individual level wellbeing results from multiple transactional processes among human and environmental variables; at the group level, wellbeing is an outcome of *how the variables mutually influence* each other as elements of the work system (Briner, Harris, & Daniels, 2004). In this process, individual level input variables lose their separate identities and create new relationships of meaning for the group (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; van Veldhoven, de Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, & Meijman, 2002). From a practice perspective, group level knowledge about wellbeing can guide the development of appropriate interventions in a work setting, even if it is not possible to predict the employees who would benefit directly.

## **Work wellbeing: Proposal for a new concept**

It is not unusual for scholars to include features about work in a general framework of human wellbeing. Diener and Seligman (2004), for example, identified having rewarding, engaging work with adequate income as an aspect of wellbeing at the population level. At a more granular level, the intersection between human wellbeing and work settings is recognised as a crucial area for continuing, in-depth research.

*Work wellbeing* is a compound term denoting a proposed new concept created from findings in this study. It combines the oft-used tropes of *work* and *wellbeing*. At the same time, it is a fresh area of conceptual focus. As previously demonstrated, each term includes multiple meanings. *Wellbeing* is a generalised, umbrella term referring to a person's subjective assessment of lived experience. *Work wellbeing* refers to employees' subjective assessments of lived experience in a specific work setting. Therefore, work wellbeing is the generic term for a description of local or contextualised individual and collective wellbeing experience in a work setting. A number of researchers have argued that knowing general features of wellbeing common to every organisation is not sufficient (Cooper, Boyco, & Codinoto, 2008; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Heidrich, 1997). This is because influential features of wellbeing in particular work locations also need to be recognised.

This study uses interpretive science to describe the collective experience of work wellbeing in two organisations. It assumes local work wellbeing concepts will be unique, carrying the conceptual weight of employees' diverse, related, antithetical meanings (Ranson, 2012), since ideas about wellbeing are not separate from people's theories about it or how they evaluate it in situ (Seedhouse, 2004). From the perspective of professional practice, the term 'work wellbeing' limits the scope of related activity to areas an employer and/or employees can realistically own, address, or modify. External factors affecting work wellbeing are beyond the control of an organisation in any practical sense.

## **Approach to the literature**

A number of knowledge domains in organisational psychology and related disciplines are relevant to the intersection of work and wellbeing. Some examples



are leadership, managing organisational change, workplace diversity, prosocial and deviant behaviour, job satisfaction, training and skill acquisition, motivation and performance, group dynamics and teamwork, emotions, decision making, job attitudes, communication, work life balance/integration, work stress, and organisational justice. Each domain is extensive and relatively independent. A comprehensive review of potentially relevant literature about work and wellbeing is beyond the scope of this study. As a consequence, two decisions were taken: not to adopt a normative approach, and to restrict this review of literature.

Extensive reading for the literature review influenced the decision to narrow the focus. Research on wellbeing and work is rather fragmented. There is no integrative framework or any fundamental, 'signature' idea linking the two domains. Wellbeing is often used as a trope, i.e., a broad construct with assumed meaning. This limits its utility to advance knowledge in measurable ways. As a consequence, most studies of wellbeing are based on under-theorised questionnaires or surveys. The preference for experimental methods, despite a lack of prior theoretical development of the wellbeing construct, defines the methodological approach. Finally, although there is support to do so (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Wierzbicka, 2009), wellbeing has not been conceptualised as a situated attribute of work settings. These factors suggested a need for care when selecting literature for review, to avoid low quality studies or poor definitional clarity in the variable/s of interest. Most importantly, however, the literature chosen for review needed to be based on meaningful criteria *for this study*.

### **A review 'for' research**

Maxwell (2006) proposed using the single criterion of 'research relevance' when choosing literature to review in interpretivist doctoral theses. Put simply, he advocated students should review literature *for* research. He contrasted this approach with a review *of* literature for journal articles, wherein the goal is to *analyse, summarise, critique, and educate* about an existing field of knowledge. The review *for* doctoral research is different: its purpose is to *focus, frame, and justify the design, conduct, and interpretation of results*. It provides a conceptual framework to support the study by drawing out relevant aspects from the results. It

clarifies choices and decisions, and integrates the conceptual framework and the design. Maxwell noted the review *for* research is “an essential component of research rather than the foundation for research” (2006, p 31). These recommendations focused the three literature review chapters (1, 2, and 3).

The literature review was drafted from early in the doctoral process until final submission. Most literature was selected and written up *a priori*. However, it was impossible to predict issues that would emerge and consequently adjustments to the literature review were needed based on the outcome of data analysis. This meant that when significant, unexpected issues were raised by this study, additional literature was sourced *a posteriori* ‘for’ research.

Unlike most reviews, these chapters do not offer “ready-made theories” about wellbeing at work to explain findings. In line with interpretivist principles, the study did not:

collect data using a method that assumes it knows what and how to ask before encountering the world of its subjects, and disrespect or ignore their complex realities, or for that matter, their feelings about who is studying them and why (Kunda, 2013, pp 9-10).

The principal criterion for inclusion was relevance: whether literature *clarified, supported, or opposed issues raised by this study*. Neither the disciplinary background, nor whether literature was derived from experimental or interpretivist science, mattered provided it was relevant to issues in this study. This credentials and supports the study, as interpretivist methods can be seen to yield knowledge consistent with a range of methods (including experimental science) and/or other disciplines.

Other advantages of a review *for* research are to sharply define perspectives, ask fresh questions, and recognise valuable ideas, theories, and methods beyond the ‘home’ discipline (Mansilla, Dillon, & Middlebrooks, 2002). An interdisciplinary review enables new ways of using current knowledge for specific issues. Foundational knowledge-building research hones the intellectual space of the wellbeing trope, giving it clarity in the work context. As Kahn and Juster (2002, p

634) stated, “[T]o understand wellbeing more deeply will require research that ‘unpacks’ the concept”. Using a normative approach could leave inadequate ‘space’ for new ideas to be evaluated on their own merits.

Throughout, literature curated from a variety of sub-disciplines has been organised into topic areas relevant to issues raised by this study. The new meta-theoretical lens of work wellbeing frames the literature, thus requiring the reader to adopt a broad, inclusive, and integrative focus across six topic areas. Put differently, work wellbeing as the conceptual domain subsumes existing knowledge from relevant topic areas in this review.

The remainder of Chapter 2 takes a *macro/environmental* perspective, reviewing the topic areas of Work Settings, Jobs, and Health in relation to wellbeing. In Chapter 3 the focus shifts to *personal and relational aspects* of wellbeing, as well as the importance of *systemic values* for wellbeing. Topic areas in Chapter 3 are Subjective Wellbeing, Relationships, and Principles. Where possible, this review draws on literature derived in public and private sector professional services organisations, in order to better reflect conditions in the research sites.

### **Topic area 1: Work settings**

*Work setting* is the name for a context where the corporate objective is to generate profit or provide public services for which employees are paid. The impact of the work setting on employees’ everyday experience has attracted a great deal of research attention. Early interest focused on occupational health and safety issues (e.g., mechanical safety) to limit hazards to human health from the physical environment. Subsequently, the general environment of workplaces, including aspects such as noise levels, privacy, lighting, aesthetics, air quality, and size of work area were recognised as influencing employee health and wellbeing (Sparks, Faragher, & Cooper, 2001). Other workplace features like services (parking, cafeteria) and equipment (computers, ergonomic desks and chairs) potentially contribute to promoting employee wellbeing and health (McCoy & Evans, 2004). There is plenty of evidence that the impact of work settings “strongly influences not only the quality of working life, work performance and safety, but also general health” (Cox & Ferguson, 1994, p 99). These effects occur as a result of complex

interactions among physical, psychosocial, and organisational factors and/or processes (Miller, 1993).

Evidence that issues arising in work settings are associated with work wellbeing is confirmed in this study, and consequently it is a topic area for review. Employees' experiences of relevant aspects of work settings – physical attributes, climate, and personal mental representations of the organisation – are reviewed.

### **Physical environment and conditions**

The Aboriginal definition of 'country' as "a place that gives and receives life", or a "nourishing terrain" (Rose, 1996, p 7) is a metaphor for optimal physical work environments. Contentment and productivity in built environments are affected by the quality of place (Alexander, 2002). Workplace quality is subjectively assessed, partly according to the nature of work conducted therein. For instance, high interaction call centre employees need a different kind of "nourishing terrain" compared to knowledge workers.

The physical work setting is related to employee wellbeing (Stokols, 1992), although the precise nature of the relationship is not easy to specify. Broadly, a work environment that promotes employee health has the following features: it is a safe context that provides opportunities for social integration, and permits employees some control over internal factors such as temperature (Taylor, Repetti, & Seeman, 1997). Many researchers have noted that employees' ability to exercise some control over the environment has a significant impact on wellbeing. Wellbeing is compromised when employees cannot 'reasonably' adjust the comfort of ambient environmental conditions when required. Factors contributing to wellbeing in the physical environment include: air quality (lack of fresh air leads to 'sick building syndrome'); noise (particularly annoying is overhearing others' conversations); lack of privacy for telephone calls (either work or personal); inadequate lighting; office design (open plan or office-based layout); access to windows with external views of nature rather than the built environment; and the presence of office plants (Cooper, Boyco, & Codinhoto, 2008).

Workspace and layout arrangements affect wellbeing. Office-based employees experience improved wellbeing when they have accessible, attractive,

comfortable spaces that allow productive work as well as relaxation, networking, or socialising. De Croon, Sluiter, Kuijer, and Frings-Dresen (2005) noted open plan offices and working at closely spaced workstations lowered privacy and job satisfaction, increased employees' cognitive load, and negatively affected interpersonal relations. A survey study found satisfaction with workspace increased when employees worked in enclosed private offices providing better acoustics, privacy, and reduced proximity to others than open-plan layouts (Kim & de Dear, 2013). Although a minor benefit was improved communication between employees with adjoining desks, the benefits of easier access to interaction were less than the disadvantages arising from increased noise levels and limited privacy in open-plan arrangements.

Paying attention to many aspects of the physical work environment and conditions, and ensuring work practices are safe, support employees' wellbeing (Cox, Leka, Ivanov, & Kortum, 2004). To work effectively, people need to comfortably and easily manage aspects of the workplace environment, personal needs, and interactions with others.

### **Climate**

Physical working conditions or environments are not the only factors that can undermine wellbeing by causing psychological stress and harm. Climate (also referred to as psychological climate and organisational climate) is operationalized as *employees' perceptions of their work environment* (Parker, Baltes, Young, Huff, Altmann, Lacost, & Roberts, 2003). Generally considered an individual-level property (Griffin, Hart, & Wilson-Evered, 2000), climate describes the personal impact of a range of psychosocial factors in combination with physical working conditions and the terms of employment in a work setting (Kompier, 2003).

Predictably, psychological and organisational climate variables appear to be linked to the type of work setting and related activities. Employees make meaningful assessments about climate, how work settings function, and how the organisation is perceived (Griffin, Hart, & Wilson-Evered, 2000). Kenny and McIntyre (2005) found the most significant elements in organisational climate to be supportive leadership, goal alignment, co-worker interaction, role clarity, appraisal and recognition,

decision-making, work demands, professional development, and the relative levels of workplace distress and workplace morale (also referred to as employee satisfaction and/or wellbeing). A study of climate in school organisations identified eleven separate dimensions influencing teachers' wellbeing, including: appraisal and recognition; curriculum coordination; effective discipline policy; excessive work demands; goal congruence; participative decision making; professional growth; professional interaction; role clarity; student orientation; and supportive leadership (Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, & Dingle, 2000). Warr (2007) found features influencing wellbeing in *any* work environment focused more on 'external' factors (opportunity for personal control and skill use, externally generated goals, variety, environmental clarity, contact with others, availability of money, physical security, and valued social position) rather than those linked specifically to the type of work setting and its related activities.

Positive evaluations of psychological climate are related to employees' work attitudes, motivation, and performance (Glisson & James, 2002). A supportive organisational climate was found to correlate with employees' commitment and satisfaction (Parker, Baltes, Young, Huff, Altmann, Lacost, & Roberts, 2003). Positive climate assessments may also be causally related to productivity and wellbeing (Patterson, Warr, & West, 2004; Wright & Cropanzano, 2004). Employee perceptions of the work situation and associated conditions were causal antecedents of organisational outcomes including employee retention, customer loyalty, and financial performance (Harter, Schmidt, Asplund, Killham, & Agrawal, 2010).

Employees care about the image their organisation presents to the external world and are proud to identify with a worthy employer (Lindgreen, Swaen, & Maon, 2009). A study of how *outsiders* viewed their organisation ('perceived external prestige') revealed a relationship between employees' perceptions of their organisation's external prestige and reported job satisfaction, affective organisational commitment, and affective wellbeing (Herrbach & Mignonac, 2004).

### ***Organisation-in-the-Mind***

The climate of a work setting is internalised by employees as a unique mental representation, model, or map of the organisation in which they work (Armstrong,

2005; Reed, 1976). This has been referred to as the 'organisation-in-the-mind' (Hutton, 2000; Reed & Bazalgette, 2006). Shapiro and Carr (1991, p 69-70) described this mental map of the organisation in the following way:

The organization is composed of the diverse fantasies and projections of its members. Everyone who is aware of an organization, whether a member of it or not, has a mental image of how it works. Though these diverse ideas are not often consciously negotiated or agreed upon among the participants, they exist. In this sense, all institutions exist in the mind, and it is in interaction with these in-the-mind entities that we live. Of course, all organizations also consist of certain real factors, such as other people, profits, buildings, resources, and products. But the meaning of these factors derives from the context established by the institution-in-the-mind.

The internal map describes the kinds of activities, resources, and human relations involved in organising at work. It identifies the *experience* of how elements are structured, developed, and connected in the local environment. The mental map also includes emotional experience related to ideals, values, hopes, beliefs, and symbols in-context (Hutton, 2000). Therefore, the organisation-in-the-mind is the 'inner world' experience of interactions, relations, activities, and meaning in the work setting. Reed and Bazalgette (2006) proposed an employee might be more or less aware of aspects of the organisation-in-the-mind. One's personal experiences of tasks, roles, purposes, boundaries, rituals, accountability, competence, failure, or success are imbued with affect such as failure, disappointment, boredom, and hope. These emotions influence the perception of the organisation-in-the-mind, which may also be influenced by implicit fantasies about being cared for or disregarded, wanted, and valued. Employees' prior experiences of authority in the family and workplace infuse and shape the organisation-in-the-mind, but this emotion experience is often implicit rather than conscious. Consequently, early patterns of relations with parents and siblings are regularly replayed in interactions with managers and colleagues in the context of the work setting.

The significance of this mental construct lies partly in its capacity to influence individual and group behaviour without awareness. Employees' constructs of the organisation-in-the-mind are an important source of data about systemic dynamics

and other aspects of the work environment. These mental maps also have the power to reciprocally affect organisational dynamics (Armstrong, 2005).

### **Comment**

Characteristics of work settings have real effects on wellbeing, particularly when employees' level of physical and emotional comfort is compromised. This study raised issues about the physical attributes of work settings, as well as employees' affective experience of psychological and organisational climate. The latter were revealed in employees' personal maps of the 'organisation-in-the-mind'. Jobs were a significant issue raised by this study, justifying the inclusion of the next topic area for review.

### **Topic area 2: Jobs**

A job is a form of constructive activity. Jobs, or the work roles 'inhabited' by employees, are bounded areas of work activity with responsibility and accountability attached to the role holder. A job boundary marks the discontinuity between one job and others. Desirable features are potentially available to jobholders e.g., income, opportunities for learning and growth, self-esteem, contact with colleagues, and a sense of meaning and purpose. Engaging in mutually constructive activity is second only to satisfying one's economic goals (Herrick, 1981).

Jobs span a developmental continuum bounded by the poles of dependency and autonomy (Miller, 1993). Historically, except for mostly senior or technical roles, jobs comprised predictable, routine tasks where the opportunity to exercise individual autonomy was limited. Most jobs available to the 'working class' fell at the dependency end of the continuum. There were few opportunities for the exercise of creativity, talent, or initiative, despite that, in their other roles as consumers and citizens, working class employees were competently autonomous. With the ongoing reduction in full time jobs, and increasing automation of formerly routine jobs, this has changed. A commensurate increase in job autonomy (responsibility and authority) is now required in lower level jobs as well.

Central to living a good life is the matter of self-development. Jobs can provide a concentrated source of opportunities for individual growth and development. The expansion of personal faculties, capacity, and talent leads to



freedom when aligned with a person's innate preferences and potential. Clarke (2006, p 137-8) argued that developing oneself "is a plausible view of personal wellbeing". Self-development offers a "unifying objective explanation of how people's lives go better", while avoiding the difficulties of more subjectivist accounts (ibid, p 144; Kagan, 1992). Wellbeing is based on employees' seeking both 'process' (often agitated and uncomfortable) and 'end-state' (e.g., happiness) development goals.

Work performance increases when employees' job satisfaction is high (Ricketta, 2008). Making progress in jobs is central to job satisfaction. Job progress can be measured via feedback from peers or managers, or feedback from the work itself. The latter method is preferable. When a job is designed so employees gain knowledge about the results of their efforts in the act of carrying out the work, motivation increases (Amabile & Kramer, 2011).

Another aspect of satisfying jobs is meaning. Meaningful work, as defined by Hackman and Oldham (1980), includes the elements of skill variety, task identity, and task significance. Meaningful work is the most valued job feature (above even pay and promotions) among workers in the United States (Cascio, 2003). Meaning is reduced if leaders or co-workers dismiss or undermine another's work or ideas, when an employee loses ownership of work, when work will not be used, and when an employee is overqualified for a job (Amabile & Kramer, 2011).

### **Employment and job quality**

Research on the meaning of work led to the emergence of the 'quality of employment' or the 'quality of working life', and 'decent work' (also referred to as the constitution of a good job) constructs. The notion of 'decent work' was originally defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and made an institutional priority in 1999. The definition recognised the goal of employees obtaining "decent work and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and dignity" (ILO, 1999). This intentionally broad statement did not operationally extend the quality of work literature and consequently the 'decent work' notion is underutilised.

The forerunner of the concept of 'quality of working life' was the 'quality of life' social indicators movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This was propelled by the desire to improve the quality of life using scientific means (theory and methods) to inform policy decisions. The research agenda for the quality of employment focused on non-monetary aspects of jobs and employees' experiences of their working environments. Early research assessing work quality used criteria including workers' evaluations of their jobs (Staines & Quinn, 1979), as well as valued job factors leading to job satisfaction (Seashore, 1974). Based in workers' subjective evaluations, these approaches gave rise to widely differing accounts of the value of job characteristics linked to the outcome measure of job satisfaction.

To compensate for subjective, attitudinal accounts of the constituents of 'good' jobs, research delved into the 'objective' aspects of jobs; however, objective agreement about the constituents of a good job has not occurred and is probably impossible (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2014). Several researchers including Warr (2007, 2009) recommended lists of objective job features to be taken into account in evaluating the goodness of jobs, although this approach is also far from definitive. Features such as self-development, control, and autonomy (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), and task characteristics (e.g., variety, challenge, meaningful work, autonomy, and teamwork), are determinants of subjective wellbeing and productivity (Hackman & Oldham, 1975). Opportunities for self-directedness also motivate employees, leading to higher organisational performance (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).

Other aspects raised as important in the quality of work are: the impact of psychological stress on employee health (Gana, 2001); work-life balance (Ryff & Singer, 1998); safety and ethics of employment, income and benefits, working hours and balancing work and non-working life, security of employment and social protection, social dialogue, skills development and training, workplace relations and motivation (Körner, Puch, & Wingerter, 2009); sufficient and appropriate challenge, being heard and/or represented in relevant decision-making, adequate pay, how work is structured and organised, and personal engagement (Findlay, Kalleberg, & Warhurst, 2013; Holman, 2010).

Interest in the topic of job quality re-surfaced recently with the emergence of obvious inequalities between so-called 'good' and 'bad' jobs (Findlay, Kalleberg, & Warhurst, 2013). Bad jobs are defined as requiring low skills and paying low wages, and consequently affecting employees' health, family life, and communities in negative ways. In contrast, a good or quality job positively affects wellbeing at individual and organisational levels. Job quality is closely related to people's choices and preferences about employment conditions (Loughlin & Murray, 2013). Employees preferring or needing specific conditions (including part time, casual, or flexible hours) have reduced job quality if they can only obtain full time work. Alignment of job conditions to employees' changing choices and needs over the lifespan is crucial to maintaining job quality.

Job quality also refers to *intrinsic* job rewards. Gallie (2013) found 'task discretion' (the extent to which employees could make decisions on the job) was the most significant form of direct participation for increasing intrinsic reward outcomes. With reasonable levels of decision-making autonomy, employees use and develop job-related skills leading to higher job satisfaction and psychological wellbeing. Job quality is also affected by the specific needs of particular groups such as graduates, who seek features associated with graduate jobs: skill-relevant content, job security, and graduate-level remuneration (Okay-Somerville & Scholarios, 2013).

In summary, the concept of job quality is a subjective, values-driven, multidimensional, contextualised experience, varying by employee group, occupation, market sector, age, and personal circumstances. Ultimately the various concepts, including 'quality of working life', 'job quality', 'quality of work', 'quality of employment' and 'decent work', are confusing and confused, since they are used interchangeably and without adequate definition (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2014). It is difficult to take multiple facets of jobs into account, or to analyse jobs at several levels (from a specific work environment to broad labour market systems wherein those jobs are performed). Other confounding factors are the lack of systematic or cooperative development of constructs across disciplines, and diverse methodologies that restrict availability of reliable and comparable data sources. The primary problem, though, is a lack of agreement about a simple set of variables to define a good job or quality of work. This problem partly reflects a

*stakeholder perspective* issue. For instance, *employees* might prefer higher wages while *employers* might consider higher wages an impediment to job creation. Some people prefer job stability and others prefer job mobility. The interests of employers, employees, the markets, academic disciplines, and government are often in conflict. This limits the possibility of reconciling differences or agreeing an approach to defining the constitution of a good job. The question remains unresolved, and subjective assessments of the notion of ‘good’ jobs are the default starting point.

### **Evaluating jobs: What matters for wellbeing?**

Job-related wellbeing is personal and multifaceted. The design and content of a job, as well as its functional and social contacts, form a field of “psychosocial factors” (Levi, 1987) influencing employees’ evaluations of their psychological wellbeing and/or job satisfaction.

### ***Job characteristics***

Corporate policies fostering secure, equitable, participatory conditions and promoting employee development contribute to human wellbeing (Kompier, 2003). Integrating seven theoretical approaches, Kompier summarised the main job characteristics related to employee wellbeing in descending order of prominence:

1. Job features – skill variety, autonomy, and job demands. Skill variety can be seen in different ways, e.g., as job variety, or utilisation of skills, using the perspectives of the job and the person respectively.
2. Social support
3. Feedback
4. Task identity
5. Minimal division of labour and ‘completeness of action’
6. Job future ambiguity or security
7. Pay (money rewards, availability of money)

Empirical support for these characteristics is substantial. The essence of ‘healthy’ jobs is allowing workers to control and influence their work situation (e.g., work pace, methods, situation), having meaningful work, receiving feedback, and cooperative working relationships. In addition, workload (both quality and quantity) should match employees’ capacities and potential (ibid).

## Social support

Social support in jobs is highly valued and has a motivating function at work (Daniels, Beesley, Wimalasiri, & Cheyne, 2013). A supportive organisation refers to “the overall amount of perceived support employees receive from their immediate peers, other departments, and their supervisor that they view as helping them to successfully perform their work duties” (Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008, p 225). Satisfaction with social support includes the level of trust between people, whether interactions are helpful and contacts can be relied on for support, and the extent to which contacts help an employee feel cared for and valued (Larson, 1993).

## ***Job-related happiness***

Employees’ job-related happiness is based in attitudinal responses to work. Job satisfaction is the attitudinal construct, referring to positive evaluative attitudes or pleasant judgements employees make about their jobs and related workplace experiences (Weiss, 2002). Job satisfaction may be extrinsic (e.g., the evaluation of rewards accorded to an employee, such as remuneration and bonuses, status, recognition, and promotions), or intrinsic (from evaluations of personal rewards accruing from job performance, e.g., growth and development, self-esteem, and achievement).

Job-related happiness also refers to employees’ positive feelings, moods, and emotions about their jobs and work lives. Affective constructs include work engagement, and organisational commitment, (i.e., believing in and accepting an organisation’s goals, exerting considerable effort for the employer, and intention to stay in the organisation) (Mowday, 1998).

Many job attributes correlate with attitudinal (job satisfaction) and affective (e.g., engagement, organisational commitment) constructs. Job attributes that increase job-related happiness include: competent leadership at all levels; interesting, challenging, autonomous jobs with rich feedback; facilitating skills development for competence and growth; implementing selection and recruitment measures to maximise the fit between person-organisation and person-job; enhancing the fit between new employees and the organisation by using realistic job

preview and socialisation practices; and adopting high performance work practices (Fisher, 2010; Hackman & Oldham, 1975).

## Engagement

Engagement is an affective, job-based construct with a range of meanings. Research into personal engagement and disengagement at work began with a qualitative study by Kahn (1990). Engagement was grounded in work roles (“the houses” occupied by employees) and conditions leading to the ‘presence’ or ‘absence’ of employees’ personal, authentic selves when performing in their work roles (ibid, p 692). Presence or engagement was defined as “harnessing” or expressing/using one’s personal physical, cognitive, and emotional resources in the work role. Disengagement occurred when an employee “uncoupled” personal resources from the role, i.e., withdrew and defensively protected the personal self or resources during role performance.

Kahn (1990) identified meaningfulness, safety, and availability as the psychological conditions evoking personal engagement or disengagement. Psychological meaningfulness referred to how much return on investment accrued from one’s role performance, and was affected by how employees perceived the importance and personal significance of work elements such as tasks, roles, and interactions. Psychological safety referred to “the sense of being able to show and employ the self without fear of negative consequences”. Psychological availability was defined as “the sense of possessing physical, emotional, and psychological resources for investing the self in role performances” (ibid, p 339-41). Being *less* available resulted from individual distractions e.g., reduced physical/emotional energy, factors in their outside lives, and ambivalence towards the job.

Recent theorising about employee engagement has shifted away from this distinctive focus on psychological presence/disengagement and as a result, definitional clarity has been diluted (Dalal, Brummel, Wee, & Thomas, 2008; Saks, 2008). Current models of engagement have evolved into a job attitude describing the degree of involvement, enthusiasm, absorption, passion, and feelings employees have for their work (Harter & Schmidt, 2008; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Another term for ‘engaged’ is ‘authentizotic’, used to describe a work setting. Authentizotic

workplaces have qualities associated with authenticity and vitality (Kets de Vries, 1999). Authentic organisational features (e.g., corporate vision, mission, culture, and structure) translate convincingly to the meaning of each employee's tasks. Vitality describes employees' feelings of balance and completeness when opportunities for learning, exploration, and self-assertion are available.

Employee disengagement is problematic for organisations. Gallup's latest survey shows 52% of the US workforce feels disengaged and 18% are actively disengaged in their jobs (Crowley, 2013). Disengaged behaviours include uncaring attitudes towards jobs and employers, high absenteeism, reduced productivity, and decreased work quality (Gallup, 2010). A large-scale mixed methods study investigated the micro-level causal factors behind the 'disengagement crisis' in the US workforce (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). These authors described a new construct, "inner work lives", was based on employees' hidden perceptions, emotional experiences, and motivations during their working day. Results showed engagement depended on employees *making progress on meaningful work*. Even small or incremental steps towards meaningful goals improved "inner work life", increasing personal wellbeing and work output as employees were more creative, productive, committed, and collegial. Progress depended on management facilitation (e.g., removing obstacles to accomplishment, giving help, and rewarding high effort with acknowledgement or praise).

## Learning

Most employees seek self-development, and organisations also want to expand their reservoir of collective knowledge and skills to remain current. Campbell Quick, Little, and Nelson (2009) noted that healthy, prospering organisations provide employees with continuous learning opportunities. Learning is promoted through assessment, challenge, and support (Rock & Garavan, 2006); developmental relationships, including formal or informal arrangements (e.g., classroom or on-job training); one-off or long term interventions; mentoring; feedback; supervised 'stretch' projects; coaching; counselling; and goal setting (Ibarra, 2000; McCauley, 2002).

Self-development requires resilience and open mindedness to test, practice, and implement new ideas. Ibarra (2002) proposed “working identity” as a framework for growth and adaptation during periods of change. However, learning opportunities require employees to tolerate the attendant risk of failure. “For learning to take place, survival anxiety must exceed learning anxiety” and the risk of compromised self-esteem accompanying the learning process (Callan, 2007, p 688).

### Work life integration

Work life integration or work life balance programs are an organisation’s formal policies designed to help employees satisfy a variety of personal needs (e.g., fulfil family commitments, adjust work hours to study, or deal with stress from heavy workloads and longer working hours). A broad perspective on personal wellbeing is needed to meet the range of individual needs, with strategies including formal people management practices and priorities, a future orientation, and adapting how careers and work are constructed (Callan, 2007). Harrington and Ladge (2009) identified seven human resource policy perspectives on work life in organisations: diversity and inclusion, health and wellness, talent management, employee relations, corporate citizenship, total rewards, and cultural change.

Work life policies and practices need to reflect the evolving needs of current and future employees as well as the external environment (Cone, 2006). A high level of organisational investment, advice, time, and obstacle removal is required to support work life initiatives (Dallimore & Mickel, 2006). While employees usually perceive and value work life integration as a form of organisational support and caring, program usage rates are typically low (Muse, Harris, Giles, & Field, 2008; Reiter, 2007). For employees and organisations, managing employees’ work life needs is neither a simple nor singular activity.

Despite efforts to demonstrate the value of work life initiatives theoretically and empirically, data is inconclusive about employee commitment, satisfaction, and performance outcomes derived from implementing work life integration programs (Ollier-Malaterre, 2010). The main concerns are assessed as limited relevance, usage, attainment of work life balance, and low subjective assessments of the success of programs. As a remedy, Reiter (2007) suggested defining work life



initiatives from a situational perspective to target groups of employees with specific work life initiatives matching their situation, expectations, and values.

Contextualising work life benefits to a specific industry or organisation to identify relevant objectives could also help. Reiter suggested the most appropriate strategy was to ask employees what balance meant for them, the kind of work life balance needed or created, and which group of employees a program is intended to assist. After intervention, employees should evaluate whether their preferred forms of balance were achieved. As Reiter explained, “if work is important to your self-concept, [work life balance] programs will need to help you to achieve satisfaction – not reduced hours, not flexible delivery, but actual satisfaction” (ibid, p 289).

### **Comment**

This topic area highlighted the importance of jobs in work wellbeing. Dallimore and Mickel (2006) suggested an organisation’s strategies to improve job-related wellbeing should centre on *providing advice and examining organisational practices*. Issues to probe include: clarifying employees’ expectations, addressing employees’ desires for additional types of advice (i.e., what to do and value), acknowledging internally-based obstacles, and understanding employees’ perceptions of work environments. Data would integrate personal (e.g., job satisfaction), job (details and context), and macro (e.g., contractual) experiences in a locally relevant assessment of job features/obstacles, thereby facilitating job-related wellbeing for employees.

### **Topic area 3: Health**

This work wellbeing study raised issues relevant to managing physical and mental health at work, resulting in the inclusion of topic area 3 in the literature review.

In academic and lay contexts, ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’ are used as interchangeable terms and, indeed, as synonyms (see Ganster & Rosen, 2013). This reflects a widely held assumption that positive health or wellbeing, and negative health (disease or ill-health), are polar opposites on a single continuum. This is not the case. Health philosopher David Seedhouse (2001, 2004) challenged the assumed equation of health and wellbeing by drawing a clear distinction between the

constitution of wellbeing and negative health, demonstrating the two concepts are separate and qualitatively different.

The 'Foundations' concept of health identified the basis of health as *autonomy*, or the ability to act or to do anything within the limits of one's natural resources (Seedhouse, 2001). Personal health is defined within the parameters of an individual's unique constraints and assets, and assessed within the person's limits e.g., of capacities or education (ibid). For example, the health (*autonomy*) of a person with a broken leg (expected to heal in two months) is different from a person with permanent nerve damage preventing a leg from bearing weight and where proper functioning will not be regained. Each person's natural resources are different. This concept of health is universally applicable, since it is tailored to the individual by the individual (with assistance from health advisors) to maximise the person's health potential.

According to this definition, the difference between health and wellbeing is clear: wellbeing has a subjective element that health does not. Wellbeing, like happiness, is an umbrella emotion (Solomon, 2004). A bipolar wellbeing continuum (negative to positive wellbeing) comprises a diverse range of personally selected, preferred dimensions. Health as 'autonomy within one's limits, resources, or assets' *may* be a desired dimension of personal wellbeing, but the reverse cannot be true. The differentiation of wellbeing and health as having distinctly separate features, based on subjectively and objectively assessed dimensions respectively, is a fundamental assumption of this study.

Physical and mental illness are relatively easy to define. They are based in the medical model, which addresses only illness and disorder (Qualls, 2002). Until recently, mental *health* has largely been understood as the absence of mental illness, rather than as a positive construct in its own right.

### **Healthy workplaces, wellbeing, and health**

In workplace and research contexts, 'health' and 'wellbeing' need to be properly defined as common usage suggests the terms are interchangeable. It is likely that researchers and practitioners are confused about their distinctive properties. Both terms are used to refer to related topics, for example, healthy work

environments; healthy jobs; and individuals' physical, mental, spiritual, and social wellbeing (Lowe, 2003). The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) in the United States described a *healthy organisation* as a multidimensional construct, with culture, climate, and practices promoting the twin aspects of employee health and safety in the work environment, and organisational effectiveness (Sauter, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1990). Employees in a *healthy organisation* feel valued and able to resolve conflicts; associated management practices include recognition for quality work, supportive supervision, opportunities for career development, and actions consistent with organisational values (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101/>). Benefits of a *healthy organisation* include increased job satisfaction and job performance, and reduced absenteeism, accidents, workers compensation, and turnover (ibid). Another example is the term '*whole workplace health*' (Cynkar, 2007) with at least five dimensions: employee involvement in job related decision-making, work life balance through flexible work scheduling and other benefits, employee growth and development through continuing education and leadership development, physical safety and psychological security, and employee recognition through monetary and non-monetary rewards. *Whole workplace health* focuses predominantly on employee experience and outcomes. Recently, interest in the concept of the *Psychologically Healthy Workplace* has increased, although research is fragmented and the concept lacks a clear, consistent definition (Day & Randell, 2014).

Given its meta-theoretical position in this thesis, 'wellbeing' (and often, 'health') is associated with all topic areas, although the direction of the relationship between 'wellbeing' and other variables, or indeed between wellbeing and health as separate constructs, can be unclear. This leads to confusion. While this difficulty is not easily solved, it does indicate greater rigour is necessary when researching work wellbeing (and health).

A workplace is, in effect, a local community or a small-scale version of communities in wider society. Research into the constituents of community wellbeing reflects related research into organisational wellbeing. The context of communities within cities, regions, and nation states; their social, physical, and economic linkages; and the forces and institutions of wider society are important to

a community's development, viability, and sustainability. Research also considers communities holistically, recognising their welfare depends on different parts functioning well and in balance. Local communities are not just physical settings (Christakopoulou, Dawson, & Gari, 2001). Integral dimensions of community wellbeing are: a place to live, a social community, an economic community, a political community, a personal space with psychological significance to its residents, and being a part of the larger city. Within each dimension, various issues must be considered, closely mirroring aspects employees consider when assessing organisational wellbeing. As 'a place to live', for example, the degree of satisfaction with housing and environmental conditions, quality of services and local facilities, perceptions about changes in local conditions, and personal safety are relevant. 'Social community' includes the strength of formal and informal social support networks and the strength of community spirit. 'Economic community' aspects include income, employment, and training opportunities for residents. 'Political community' assesses participation in the political life of the local community, and the effect of local administration systems in meeting community needs. 'Personal space' investigates residents' subjective feelings about their locality, and the personal and symbolic meanings it represents for them. 'Personal space' also explores the sense of belonging to an area, residents' pride in living there, and their future plans for living in the community. Finally, the 'Part of the city' aspect assesses residents' economic and social linkages with the wider urban area, access to facilities and services outside the local community, transport links, and perceptions of their community (ibid).

The analysis by Christakopoulou, et al (2001) uses the community as the focus for research about constituent elements that create and define wellbeing in context. In so doing, the study lends support for using a work setting as the focus for wellbeing. It is axiomatic that interrelated bio-psycho-socio-technical factors operate in all human groups, whether in communities or workplaces. A 'work wellbeing' frame ensures relevant components for this study (outlined in topic areas) are integrated into a coherent account of contextualised wellbeing, rather than fragmented, decontextualised aspects of experience.

### ***Psychological wellbeing and health***

The commercial benefits of a healthy workforce include lower health care costs, less absenteeism, and higher productivity (Cooper & Patterson, 2008). Campbell Quick, Little, and Nelson (2009) concluded that individual and organisational health are related. Salutogenesis (Antonovsky, 1979) describes the principal factors maintaining personal mental health. It is based on an individual's Sense of Coherence, an enduring, dynamic confidence about the predictability of inner and outer environments and things working out reasonably well. Sense of Coherence comprises meaningfulness, comprehensibility, and manageability (ibid). In work settings, meaningfulness is the most crucial aspect, providing motivation for employees to see work demands as challenges, worthy of personal investment of energy, effort, and engagement. Eustress, or 'good' stress, is the result of cognitively appraising stressors (e.g., a job promotion) as positive or challenging. Positive stress is a potential motivator for achievement and growth, and meaningfulness draws on personal participation to shape outcomes.

Comprehensibility, the second aspect of Sense of Coherence, is associated with consistency in one's work situation, confidence in job security, and supportive, positive, two-way communications in social relations at work. Manageability, the third aspect, requires a balance between over- and under-load, availability of resources (to individuals and the whole system), and complex work to stimulate the release of human potential. Salutogenesis views employees' capacity for creating a sense of meaning as a key driver of personal mental health, with supporting organisational factors such as systems and practices that engender a sense of comprehensibility and manageability.

Interest in wellbeing rather than mental dysfunction in the workplace closely followed the emergence of the positive psychology movement (Pearsall, 2003; Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). Psychological wellbeing is theorised using two forms of wellbeing identified in philosophy, Hedonia and Eudaimonia. These are differentiated by their primary orientation towards either personal, momentary happiness, or meaning (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, forthcoming; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Waterman, 1993). Self-oriented Hedonia refers to an individual's positive affective experience,

feeling good, and having a happy life. Eudaimonia, oriented towards issues beyond the self, is characterised by contributing to the wider community. The concept of psychological wellbeing is based on the Eudaimonic perspective and outlines six dimensions for a meaning-oriented life: Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, and Self-Acceptance (Ryff 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; see also Gilbert, 2006, and Solomon, 2004 for similar approaches).

### **Reduced wellbeing and health**

Issues relevant to reduced wellbeing, poor occupational health, and workplace distress were raised by this study. Reduced wellbeing falls into the research domain of stress, a reaction with positive (eustress) and negative (distress) forms. Workplace stress (a derivative of the stress construct) refers to changes in a person's physical or mental state as a result of situations posing a real or perceived challenge or threat (Colligan & Higgins, 2005). Distress results from assessing stressors as negative or threatening. Distressing experiences are recognised as having the potential to lead to wide ranging mental and physical consequences with harmful impacts on human health and wellbeing (Akerboom & Maes, 2006; Bond, 2004; Caulfield, Chang, Dollard, & Elshaug, 2004; Cox, Leka, Ivanov, & Kortum, 2004; Hinshelwood & Skogstad, 2002; Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millett, 2005; Kolbell, 1995; Mustard, 2004; Sonnentag & Jelden, 2009).

### ***Causal factors of stress***

Workplace induced stress results from the interaction between employees' personal characteristics and the source of environmental factors that exceed employees' real or perceived abilities to successfully handle expectations (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Lewandowski, 2003; Marsella, 1994; Pfeffer, 2010; Taylor, Repetti, & Seeman, 1997; Warr, 2009). The pressure to adapt one's behaviour and supporting attitudes and/or beliefs is considered one underlying cause of stress reactions (Lazarus, 2000). However, stress is not simply a physiological reaction to stressors (Colligan & Higgins, 2005). Allostatic load (AL) theory is the primary vehicle to understand human stress physiology and its relationship to health at work (Sterling & Eyer, 1988). The AL model provides consistent evidence for the connection

between work stressors and primary mediators. The latter are triggered by the human central nervous system, and are the physiological basis of self-reported, affective outcomes such as anxiety, job attitudes, and job-related tension in employees. Determining the causal bases of secondary or tertiary stress outcomes developing over extended time frames is difficult, as physiological processes are not linked to the affective or cognitive responses to environmental factors (ibid).

Kenny and McIntyre (2005), in an extensive review of constructions of occupational stress, concluded, “ ‘stress’ and ‘risk’ are vague concepts, which serve to obscure rather than explain social relations” (p 44) and, “There is no such disease state as occupation stress. It is much more productive to focus on stressors” (p 49). A review of models of occupational and workplace stress revealed researchers’ long-standing interest in identifying the causes of work stress. The majority of models point to similar workplace features (e.g., work scheduling, work load and work pace, career concerns, role stressors, job content and control, and interpersonal relationships) (Sauter, Murphy, & Hurrell, 1990); organisational factors (structure and climate, cultural and political environment, and interface between home and work) (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997); too much or too little challenge; the orderliness of work and the work environment; social demands of work; and the degree of compatibility of work goals and values with employees’ non-work life (Schabracq & Cooper, 2003). More recently, stressors were identified as overload, job insecurity and complexity, job variety, insufficient resources, inadequate remuneration and benefits, political power, poor communication, low participation rates in decision-making, and the prevailing organisational climate (O’Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2009). Additional workplace stressors include physical risk factors and exposures (e.g., chemical toxins, machinery, temperature, ergonomic features), and psychosocial risk factors (psychological experiences and demands of the workplace, e.g., time or performance pressure, role ambiguity, emotion work, and situational constraints such as obstacles hindering task accomplishment, conflict, and uncivil behaviour) (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Karasek & Theorell, 1990; van Veldhoven, de Jonge, Broersen, Kompier, & Meijman, 2002; van Veldhoven, Taris, de Jonge, & Broersen, 2005; Zapf, 2002).

Employers recognise the implications of reduced wellbeing and health by providing employer-funded primary prevention programs to improve employees' mental and physical health. Employee Assistance Programs contain plans to prevent and manage stress. These programs support individual and organisational needs and must be continually reviewed and evaluated to maintain relevance (Giga, Cooper, & Faragher, 2003). A multilevel systems approach to work-related psychosocial hazards is more effective than strategies that simply focus on individual workers without addressing work conditions (LaMontagne, Keegel, & Vallance, 2007).

Work-related stressors such as the experience of working, conflict, and violence are relevant to issues raised by this study.

### Working

Personal health is related to perceptions of conditions in work settings and to the actual experience of working. Harter & Stone (2012) evaluated two types of work settings – engaging and disengaging – for their impact on human health. Conditions in engaging work settings were rated highly by employees, and low in disengaging work settings. The health impacts of engaging and disengaging settings were evaluated by looking at employees' moment-by-moment changes in affect and its relation to levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Investigating the impact from the perspectives of 'between-days' and 'within-day' yielded significant results. The first was simply the stressful impact of working itself. The second was the impact of engaging versus disengaging work conditions. Employees in engaging work settings had lower cortisol levels during weekday mornings *only* (i.e., not in the afternoons) compared with employees in disengaging work settings. On Saturdays (a non-work day), cortisol levels in both groups were the same. The study concluded both the experience of working and local work conditions create health-compromising affective and physiological momentary states for most people.

### Conflict

Toxic work environments are demanding, pressurised, ruthless, and prone to induce fear, paranoia and anxiety in employees (Colligan & Higgins, 2005). Human interaction can be a significant source of stress, especially when conflict levels are high. De Dreu (2008) found conflict produced few valued consequences in either



task-related or relationship-based disputes. Moreover, when conflict was analysed at multiple levels (individual, group, intra- or inter-organisation), and long and short-term horizons were included, positive outcomes from conflict at one level were usually cancelled out by negative outcomes at another level. Conflict and other forms of mistreatment reduced individual wellbeing, overall health, and job satisfaction, while increasing stress and psychosomatic complaints (ibid; Martin & Hine, 2005).

## Violence

Wellbeing depends on the safety of employees, customers, and visitors in a work setting. The importance of safety is recognised and usually espoused at all levels of an organisation. Any action, behaviour, threat, or gesture that can reasonably be expected to cause physical, psychological, social, or even spiritual harm, injury or illness to a person in a workplace is considered to fall into the broad categories of workplace violence or aggression (Chechak & Csiernik, 2014). Violence includes overt or covert expressions of hostility, obstructionism, bullying, and harassment, as well as overt physical aggression from co-workers, supervisors, customers, and others beyond the direct work environment (Neuman & Baron, 1997).

A study of public sector workplace violence found customer-facing employees experienced a significant level of aggressive, violent customer behaviour, resulting in detrimental effects on employees' health (Bishop, Korczynski, & Cohen, 2005). However, these authors observed managers and front line employee 'victims' of customer-related violence together rendered the experience of violence invisible by using formal organisational policies, processes, and procedures to 'explain' violent behaviour. The researchers hypothesised social processes, intended to camouflage the experience of violence, resulted from a prevailing organisational ideology of customer sovereignty that disallowed victims' critique or retaliation.

A study of workplace violence in a commercial organisation described male managers' 'silencing' female managers' cultural experience and information, leading to health problems and negatively affecting business performance (Lampe, 2002). The cause was a disjunction between management communications about the value

and importance of female managers in the company, and managerial practices that devalued female managers. Male managers avoided threatening the patriarchal social order by actively ignoring female managers' accounts of negative workplace experiences. This led to organisational inequity, systematic exclusion, and demeaning of women managers, resulting in reduced wellbeing and compromised health.

### **Comment**

Organisational environments, decisions, and management practices affect wellbeing and health at every level of analysis. This section reveals a lack of clarity in how 'wellbeing' and 'health' are defined, researched, and used in work settings.

### **Interim conclusions**

Literature about work settings, jobs, and health was relevant to issues raised by this study. This selective review revealed repetition and fuzziness in antecedents, causes, and outcomes of wellbeing in each topic area. One notable limitation is that rather than developing theoretical models linking various elements, many studies simply describe relevant attributes. Without a unifying, over-arching, interdisciplinary meta-theory, research about wellbeing at work is fragmented and duplicated. Arguably, a concept such as work wellbeing is needed to integrate existing and future research.

Topic area 1 described features of work settings relevant to wellbeing as: opportunities for personal control, learning, and development; having committed co-workers, supervisory support, adequate resources, work variety, and adequate performance feedback. Improving employees' perceptions of work conditions was associated with beneficial outcomes in employee satisfaction, engagement, individual performance, motivation, and organisational commitment. These outcomes were assumed to be proxies for, or indicators of, work wellbeing in topic area 1.

In the second topic area, jobs were shown to contribute to work wellbeing when corporate policies establish secure, equitable, participatory conditions encouraging employee development. Antecedents (e.g., competent leadership, autonomy, social support, rich performance feedback, and ensuring employees

make progress on meaningful work) positively influence job satisfaction and affective experience. Job satisfaction and positive affect (happiness) were assumed to be proxies for work wellbeing in topic area 2.

The third topic area dealt with the broad notion of health. Concepts of healthy organisation, wellbeing, and health were explored and disambiguated to some extent. It was concluded that, like community wellbeing, work wellbeing is a multidimensional concept requiring multilevel analysis to elucidate its bio-psycho-socio-technical factors. From the perspective of poor health, work is perceived as a stressful activity causing reduced wellbeing. Affective outcomes such as anxiety and job-related tension result from stressful work conditions e.g., overt or covert workplace conflict and violence.

To conclude, despite risks from workplace stressors and their potential impacts on wellbeing and health, employees can usually handle harmful work circumstances and conditions without becoming unhealthy. They use sense-making and active shaping processes, drawing on sophisticated, values-based cognitive and affective skills, to identify and deal with work threats, challenges, and problems (Briner, Harris, & Daniels, 2004). This is important for understanding what happens if and when employees' ability to deal with work threats is compromised. The point is taken up at the beginning of Chapter 3 in topic area 4: Subjective Wellbeing. The remainder of Chapter 3 describes Relationships (topic area 5) and Principles (topic area 6). Finally, conclusions from the literature review chapters pave the way for the work wellbeing study.

## Chapter 3: Work and Wellbeing (Part 2)

### Introduction

This chapter reviews literature in another three topic areas relevant to issues raised by this study of work wellbeing. As with Chapter 2, literature to expand understanding is curated from various sub-disciplinary domains. Here, the review encompasses subjective wellbeing, relationship factors, and systemic values in topic areas 4, Subjective Wellbeing; topic area 5, Relationships; and topic area 6, Principles respectively.

Topic area 4, Subjective wellbeing (SWB), considers a single theory only, in response to a practical issue raised by this study. From the outset, interviews revealed an unanticipated emphasis on and concern with the 'dark side' of work wellbeing. The dark side referred to employees' personal experiences of stressful workplace events and conditions that affected their wellbeing, as described in topic area 3, Health. Put simply, interview data indicated the extent to which some employees suffered physical and psychological impacts from work-related stressors. To elucidate this experience, topic area 4 describes the Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis (SWB Homeostasis; Cummins, 2010), an empirical account of biological processes underlying adaptation to, and recovery from, harmful events. Although not everyone is adversely affected, it is important that psychologists and managers know how to discern and support employees who are.

As noted at the end of Chapter 2, employees' cognitive and emotional skills are generally sufficient to handle the majority of workplace difficulties. Briner, Harris, and Daniels (2004) found employees' sense-making and active shaping processes reduce the impact of negative workplace experiences; consequently, most environmental stressors do not significantly undermine wellbeing or the ability to perform. Evidence from the work wellbeing study supported Briner et al's (2004) conclusion. However, the decision to review evidence for, and implications of, Cummins' (2010) theory ultimately lay in the practice perspective motivating this study. The Theory of SWB Homeostasis may help practitioners and managers understand and/or manage the impact of harmful workplace events (e.g., interpersonal conflict, work overload, marginalisation, violence) resulting in reduced

subjective wellbeing. Topic area 4 describes the proposed biological mechanisms that moderate the consequences of work harms for subjective wellbeing, psychological health, and performance. It also addresses the consequences to employees of high impact negative events, and the need for appropriate organisational responses if subjective wellbeing is significantly adversely affected. The Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis has considerable relevance for professional practice.

Topic area 5, Relationships, outlines some benefits and pitfalls associated with workplace interpersonal relations. Human beings are socially oriented. Chapter 1 noted subjective experience is relational from the beginning of an infant's life (Powell & Spelke, 2013; Selby & Bradley, 2003). Interactions with colleagues, subordinates, managers, leaders, teams, and the wider organisation are ubiquitous and assumed. The quality of relatedness affects productivity and is influenced by factors such as power and status, toxicity, communication, collaboration, management style, and cooperation.

Topic area 6, Principles, examines how collective values may be expressed in the organisation's public behaviour. A reasonable alignment of values between employees and the work setting is central to workers' identification with, and commitment to, the organisation. Principles describe collective perceptions of ways a work setting might express contextually relevant, appropriate behaviour, both internally towards employees and externally in society.

This chapter concludes with implications from the literature review and outlines specific propositions supporting the work wellbeing study.

#### **Topic area 4: Subjective wellbeing**

Subjective wellbeing (SWB) refers to a person's positive affective experience (Diener, 2009). Comprehensive reviews of subjective wellbeing (Diener, 2009; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) point to a wide range of correlational and causal factors such as culture, genes, personality, cognitions, goals, resources, behaviour, and the objective environment. Extant SWB literature is vast and beyond the intent and scope of this review. The topic falls within several disciplinary areas including the good life, positive human emotions, and life satisfaction theories (Haybron,

2008; Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999). Employees' subjective wellbeing is a crucial dimension of satisfaction in work settings.

The Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis (SWB Homeostasis: Cummins, 2010) is based on data derived from the large scale Australian Unity Wellbeing Index project since 2001 (Cummins, Eckersley, Pallant, Van Vugt, & Misagou, 2003). Cummin's (2010) full exposition of the theory argues for biological homeostatic controls to explain the universally observed consistency and positivity of SWB. This contrasts with the prevailing assumption of cognition and emotion-driven personality variables (especially neuroticism and extraversion) comprising SWB (or its absence) (Headey, Holstrom, & Wearing, 1984, 1985). SWB Homeostasis is described as "a state of equilibrium or balance that can be affected by life events or challenges" (Dodge, Daly, Huyton, & Sanders, 2012, p 228). SWB Homeostasis underscores how balance in employees' mood and behaviour is negatively affected by the impact of sustained harms.

### **The Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis**

Research into subjective wellbeing has universally demonstrated it is normal for people to feel good about their lives and about specific areas of life experience such as work (Cummins, Gullone, & Lau, 2002; Diener, 2000, 2009; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). Both individual and population SWB levels consistently range within the satisfied (positive) area of the response scale most of the time (Cummins, 2010; Cummins & Nistico, 2002). The Theory of SWB Homeostasis challenges prevailing explanations for this universal pattern.

According to Cummins (1998, 2003, 2010), the specific attributes of the pattern (i.e., consistent, normal, and positive) suggest the distribution of SWB is similar to other innate personal characteristics under strong genetic control. Homeostatic systems, processes, and controls help to maintain a stable, restricted range of measurements for a variable. The Theory of SWB Homeostasis proposes a biological system of homeostasis to explain the basic mechanism supporting the internal management of individual level SWB. Like other homeostatic systems, the internal system aims to defend a threshold value of SWB (called the 'set point', or

'set point range'). If the threshold value is exceeded, and homeostasis is defeated, the system acts to regain control and return SWB to the individual's set point range.

The SWB set-point range (on a 0-100 point scale) lies between 70-80 points, which are the theoretical upper and lower thresholds of the range. The upper threshold (80 points) represents the dominant source of control that will change, depending on the strength of a challenging agent. The lower threshold (70 points) is the level at which challenging factors will activate a person's strong homeostatic defences. With mild threats or challenges, SWB varies within the set point range. When no threats are present, SWB averages to the theoretical set point of 75. The goal of the biological homeostatic system is to defend the positive sense of personalised, general, and domain-specific wellbeing. These assumptions indicate the biological homeostatic system is expected to respond to factors that challenge its operation (Cummins, 2010).

### ***Homeostatically Protected Mood***

Cummins demonstrated empirically that Homeostatically Protected Mood (HPMood: *ibid*) is the basis of subjective wellbeing. HPMood is defined as a "deep and stable positive mood state" (Cummins, 2013, p 10) comprising the combined affects of happiness, contentment, and excitement (Davern et al., 2007). It is subconscious, less intense and more enduring than emotions, which have a distinctive cognitive content. HPMood is biologically based, providing the motivation for individual behaviour. As the dominant affective constituent of SWB (Davern et al., 2007), it is also the basis of the steady state set point that homeostasis seeks to defend.

### ***How SWB Homeostasis functions***

SWB Homeostasis theory accounts for variations in HPMood by looking at "the balance of good and bad momentary experience and the resilience of the homeostatic system" (Cummins, 2010, p 5). As expected, in an environment of sustained good experience, HPMood remains within the upper portion of the set point range. Conversely, when strong, enduring challenges occur, HPMood will on average be located within the lower portion of the set point range. When challenges or threats increase, homeostatic maintenance attempts to prevent HPMood from

falling below the lower threshold of 70 points. This is successful while the homeostatic system is effective, but if challenges are too intense the homeostatic system is overwhelmed. In this situation, SWB will be controlled by the challenging factors, and not by homeostatic defences. Put differently, SWB is then dominated by the emotional state that overwhelmed homeostasis and HPMood. The shift is explained as follows:

When people report a level of SWB outside their set-point range, they have simply lost contact with their set-point mood-affect. That is, at the time of data collection, their level of SWB was being controlled by a powerful emotional state which overwhelmed homeostasis, and so dominated their awareness. Within this alternative conception, each person's HPMood and set-point remains unaltered and the abnormal level of SWB reflects attention to the dominating emotional state (Cummins, 2010, p 12).

In summary, SWB Homeostasis and the impact on HPMood explain the effects of harmful workplace experiences on employees:

1. Employees experience both positive and negative workplace events. The balance of positive and negative events, and the effectiveness of an employee's homeostatic system, determines whether SWB (known as HPMood) remains within the normal set point range, i.e., between 70-80 points.
2. If mostly positive experiences occur, HPMood remains in the upper portion of the person's set point range i.e., between 75-80 points.
3. If predominantly negative experiences occur, HPMood is likely to be located in the bottom portion of the set point range (between 70-75 points). If conditions deteriorate, the homeostatic system will attempt to protect HPMood from falling below the lower threshold of the set point range, i.e., below 70 points.
4. If employees report a strong negative emotional state, their SWB may be below their set point range, suggesting they have lost contact with their normal HPMood. At the time of data collection, HPMood was dominated by a powerful emotional state that overwhelmed their homeostatic system and



this emotional state prevailed in their awareness. Their abnormally low level of SWB indicates attention is focused on a particular issue and its associated emotional state, with a consequent inability to work effectively.

5. Cummins theorised the loss of HPMood as the essence of depression. Over time, if external and internal conditions reduce the impact of challenging factors to allow homeostatic control to be restored, re-connection with HPMood is possible. At that time, the person is no longer depressed, and reported SWB also returns to its normal set point range.

### **Implications for work settings**

This Theory contributes to knowledge by describing the biological basis for SWB and psychological outcomes of major workplace harms that overwhelm homeostasis. At a practical level, it indicates the need for diagnosis and intervention if employees report very low SWB. Most work settings inadvertently challenge employees' HPMood. As Briner, Harris, and Daniels (2004) noted, employees usually manage these challenges adequately, such that SWB is not unduly affected. Put differently, employees' homeostatic defences are generally sufficient to maintain HPMood within the set point range. Employees might describe such conditions as 'challenging but manageable', and perhaps report how they integrated or resolved the challenge to minimise harm.

If challenges are severe and sustained, however, an employee's internal homeostatic buffers become overwhelmed. Intense, ongoing conditions such as conflict, persistent criticism, marginalisation, lack of recognition, 'bad' jobs (Findlay, Kalleberg, & Warhurst, 2013), victimisation, injustice, or bullying can cause employees to lose contact with HPMood and experience persistent low affect (despair, disconnection, alienation, resentment, anger, hurt, withdrawal). If corrective action is not taken, depression ensues (Cummins, 2010). Therefore, HPMood is a potent data source about employees' wellbeing in the work setting. If employees describe low HPMood, it is noteworthy. Direct action may not be required, although it could be a warning sign to address some conditions. If an employee subgroup refers to shared experiences of distress or suffering, a systemic feature could be responsible. Reports of workplace conditions causing personal

distress, suffering, or health problems signal that conditions are interfering with employees' subjective wellbeing and potentially their health.

The Theory of SWB Homeostasis has an important place in a practitioner's theoretical repertoire. It lends empirical weight to experientially derived practice knowledge about the damage that can occur when conditions challenge workers' SWB. If objective, causal, biological systems explain reductions in SWB, attention is directed toward harmful conditions overriding genetically determined biological mechanisms, supporting a conclusion that corrective action is probably needed.

### **Topic area 5: Relationships**

The implications of social connection and disconnection in work settings are explored in this topic area. The value of decent relationships cannot be overestimated. Socially connected people enjoy longer lives and have increased resistance to somatic diseases such as cancer (Eisenberger, 2012; Eisenberger & Cole, 2012).

Early Greek philosophy recognised the importance of social contact in wellbeing. Meaning-oriented Eudaimonia includes an aspect of personal character development that is only acquired by participating in the socio-political life of the community (*polis*). Eudaimonia develops through active investment in collective life, participating in social processes of change and exchange with other community members. As essentially social beings, it is considered impossible for a person to live apart from the community, yet be happy in the Eudaimonic sense (Young, 2003).

The concept of 'meaning' is defined as having a 'connection' with others (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). Belongingness is fundamental to psychological wellbeing and health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010), and contributes to social cohesion, a crucial attribute of healthy groups (Heon-Klin, Sieber, Huebner, & Fullilove, 2001). Meaning-as-connection at work is a fundamental human value and is linked to employee resilience (Antonovsky, 1987; Overell, 2008). Employees seek opportunities for meaningful participation, to gain a sense of purpose, and to expand their self-concept.

Formal organisations are "relational spaces, containing multiple and complex frontiers, frames and interfaces" that provide opportunities for interaction and

meaning production (Wood, 1998, p 1209). The ebb and flow of social interaction means the proximal view of human behaviour in workplaces is disorderly rather than neat. Agency is more or less distributed as employees actively participate, negotiate, cooperate, fight, collaborate, and challenge each other in the course of everyday life. Experiences of interaction can contribute to feelings of belongingness, wherein employees feel “personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others” (Goodenow, 1993, p 80).

### **Social capital**

Individual social interactions and the norms and networks enabling collective action are referred to as social capital. It is the ‘glue’ that improves project effectiveness and sustainability, builds members’ capacity to work together to address common needs, fosters inclusion and cohesion, and increases transparency and accountability (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001). Human life is more productive with dense networks of social ties; incentives for personal opportunism are reduced, collaboration and trust are enhanced, and people’s sense of self broadens due to the enjoyment gained from reaping collective benefits (Putnam, 1995). The qualities of social capital are similar to traditional values of a good society – equality, mutuality, and responsibility.

Wellbeing, based in community spirit and the quality of formal and informal social support networks, is identifiable in personal/private, civic/community, and economic/work domains. Satisfaction of private level needs, desires, hopes, expectations, and fears *requires* a person to engage with others. The process of ordering myriad social relations aimed at satisfying personal needs eventually leads to the development of institutional arrangements, which in part enable the formal operations of commerce. Consequently, economic activity also depends on connectedness in private and community life. This implies workplace ‘communities’ depend not only on formal structures. Informal structures “whose dynamism is not merely instrumental, but also affective, value-driven, and overwhelmingly non-instrumental” are also necessary (Sauer, 1997, p 1186).

Wellbeing is, therefore, based in a social ecology of interdependent relations through which people can develop, flourish, and generate cumulative actions aimed

towards a common 'good'. A positivist view of economy such as those embodied in corporatist values is devoted to maximising self-interest and lacks a well-rounded concept of civic relations. Economic perspectives ought rather to conceive of workplaces as "social meaning schemes revealed in concrete transactions" (ibid, p 1184). Relational transactions at work impose many demands (or burdens, e.g., emotional labour) on employees (Hochschild, 1983). Workplace communities that function as living systems bring social relations to the fore, and the 'glue' of social capital allows diverse meanings and demands to co-exist.

### **Support**

Social support has been defined as "a flow of communication between people involving emotional concern, caring, information, and instrumental help" (Logan & Ganster, 2005 p 92). A culture of support, respect, and fairness is an aspect of a psychologically healthy workplace (Day & Randell, 2014). Various forms of social support such as communication practices and the quality of social relationships influence interpersonal wellbeing. Huppert (2009) identified the components of wellbeing at work as 'feeling good' and 'functioning effectively', each comprising interpersonal and individual aspects. While the individual aspects of wellbeing are relatively easy to identify, the relational aspects of 'feeling good' and 'functioning effectively' are less intuitive. Interpersonal emotions in 'feeling good' are being 'respected' and 'recognised'. 'Caring', 'helping', and 'mentoring' are the relational 'giving' behaviours in 'functioning effectively' (ibid). Put differently, giving as well as receiving support is motivating (Freeney & Fellenz, 2013).

Perceived organisational support (POS) refers to employees' perceptions about the extent to which the organisation values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing. Employees' perceptions of organisational support are linked to favourable or unfavourable treatment they receive from the organisation. In a meta-analysis, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found the strongest effects on POS were three forms of favourable treatment from the organisation: fairness or procedural justice, supervisor support, organisational rewards (e.g., recognition, training, job security) and job conditions (e.g., reduced role stressors). Employee behaviours associated with POS include affective commitment (employees'

emotional attachment to the organisation), job satisfaction, intention to stay, and improved job performance.

Perceptions of co-worker support are strongly related to POS (Yoon & Lim, 1999). Additional sources of support may be found from direct reports, internal customers, and teams. The constructs of POS and the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1989) are differentiated, although both are based on the norm of reciprocity to describe and explain the employer-employee relationship (Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). The psychological contract refers to employees' perception of the terms and conditions of the exchange relationship with the employer, described in more detail below.

Gençöz and Özlale (2004) described social support as enhancing psychological wellbeing by generating positive affect, a sense of predictability (through experiences of mastery and control), and feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. In addition, these authors identified differences between aid-related social support and appreciation-related social support. Aid-related support helped reduce receivers' stress by being informed and assisted; it was also likely to decrease the possibility of experiencing some controllable life stresses. Appreciation-related support alleviated symptoms of depression in receivers through being nurtured and reassured about their worth; it also improved psychological wellbeing in givers, who valued their self-worth, talents, and potential to help others. This study also demonstrated the value of giving and receiving support to increase awareness of personal potential and self-efficacy, and to learn to actively manage personal psychological wellbeing.

## **Groups**

The sections on groups and leaders present a selection of research drawn largely from the dominant, positivist domain of management science favoured in organisational psychology. An alternative body of knowledge about groups, leaders, and members is less well known in the discipline. This knowledge has been developed using methods of experiential learning and reflection. It is described in literature from disciplines such as socioanalysis, psycho-social/psycho-societal studies, group relations, socio-technical systems, organisational psychodynamics,

and consulting. The focus, to understand unconscious dynamics, forces, and factors influencing member, group, and leader behaviour, is largely at odds with management science methods. Based in the hermeneutic tradition of discovering contextualised meaning (Sievers, 1994), the intent is not about specifying desirable behaviours in members, groups, and leaders. The purpose is to inductively develop knowledge about the impact of unconscious group dynamics on leader, follower, and group behaviour by observing and collectively processing people's lived experience in the here and now (Armstrong, 2000; Diamond & Allcorn, 2003; Ewing, 1992; Fineman, 1993; Hinshelwood, 1987; Jaques, 1955; Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987; Newton, 2005; Obholzer, 1994; Reed, 1976; Schön, 1983; Sievers & Beumer, 2006; Smircich, 1983; Smith & Zane, 2004; Stokes, 1994; Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1999; Zyphur, 2009). The value of these approaches is acknowledged in this thesis.

In a ten-year review of team effectiveness research, Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp and Gilson (2008) highlighted the increasing emphasis on the significance of social affiliation. Meaningful interactions in effective groups include: spontaneous interpersonal actions (Fineman, 1993), wise management decisions and actions (Dunphy & Pitsis, 2003), and fulfilling obligations or responsibilities to the team or supervisor (Hamilton, 2008). Baumeister and Leary (1995) deduced that people possess a pervasive motivation to develop and maintain enduring interpersonal relationships with minimal conflict or other aversive interactions. They seek opportunities to participate in groups, particularly where members can express "mutual, reciprocal concern" and enjoy regular, pleasant interactions (ibid, p 520).

Employees working closely together influence each other in many ways. Group processes originate in individuals who "use one another in order to stabilise their inner life" through implicit and explicit means (Fyhr, 2002, p 2). Therefore, individual and group level phenomena and emotions are interrelated and socially constituted (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Barsade, Ramarajan, & Western, 2009; Shadish, Fuller, & Gorman, 1994; Sievers & Beumer, 2006). Individual employees' motivation influences colleagues' attitudes and behaviour, shaping team dynamics via processes of emotional contagion in cascades of cooperative behaviour through social networks (Fowler & Christakis, 2010; Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Hirschhorn, 1990; Niedenthal & Brauer, 2012). Even the

construct of employee engagement has been identified as a form of collective mood, resulting from the convergence of individual mood states in a group (Pugh & Dietz, 2008).

### ***Teamwork***

The quality of teamwork is variably related to project performance and members' wellbeing (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001). The construct of 'teamwork quality' comprised six facets (communication, coordination, a balance of member contributions, mutual support, effort, and cohesion) reflecting how well members interacted or collaborated. It was strongly associated with team members' wellbeing (defined as personal success, contentment with their work situation in the team, and opportunities for learning). However, the strength of the perceived impact of teamwork quality on members' wellbeing depended on whether performance was rated by a team member, team leader, or manager. Members consistently rated teamwork quality as contributing more to team performance than did team leaders or managers. The authors observed that being a member of a congenial team could bias members' performance perceptions, while managers and team leaders (who were more detached than team members) were less convinced that teamwork quality positively influenced team performance. Teamwork quality might increase members' comfort, although group cohesion could conceal counterproductive dynamics such as consensus, coercion, conformity rather than creative thinking, unilateral decision-making, procrastination, lack of leadership, personal agendas, and expedient arguments (Sinclair, 1992; Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

Wellbeing in teams is related to members' 'voice' and active participation in work decisions that affect them. Psychologically empowered teams control their proximal work environment and functioning, resulting in higher performance and job satisfaction (Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004). The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, a 'leaderless', self-regulating, self-governing group, successfully functions without a conductor. Since 1972 it has operated on a system of shared, collaborative leadership. Guiding operational principles include: empowering orchestra members, requiring individual responsibility for product and quality, creating clear roles, sharing and rotating leadership, learning when to listen and talk, seeking consensus,

and pursuing the organisation's mission with passion and dedication (Seifert, 2001). All musicians contribute ideas about interpreting musical compositions and collegial feedback is expected. The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra highlights crucial aspects of a work environment that not only engages and stimulates professionals, but also produces exemplary work. The operating principles may be a guide to increasing employees' whole-hearted involvement in teamwork. It is an example of democracy in action, revealing that voice and active participation are consistent with commercially viable outcomes, professional success, and members' wellbeing.

In contrast, being a member of a devalued group can have a direct negative effect on emotional wellbeing (Katz, Joiner, & Kwon, 2002). Members identifying with a devalued social group (e.g., ethnic minorities, gay men/lesbians, women) are vulnerable to distress (especially depressive symptoms) via three pathways. Internalising negative stereotypes about one's group potentially reduces self-esteem. Being devalued because one is a member of a particular group can lead to emotional distress that is not connected with one's self-esteem. Members of devalued groups may also be socialised to develop internalised attitudes and behaviours, thereby increasing the risk for emotional distress. Models of depression contain themes of devaluation and rejection, thus explaining the link with membership of a minority group (ibid).

### ***Considerations: Context matters***

Teamwork has become increasingly common as a form of work design. However, outcomes of team working initiatives are inconsistent. The source of variability is located in the work context, since successful team initiatives are highly context dependent (McGrath, 1984). A study by Sprigg, Jackson and Parker (2000) investigated the impact on wellbeing of characteristics of the production process (including context) and the type of work design. The study assessed the consequences of implementing a common form of team working in two different production settings in one organisation. The primary difference between the two settings was a contrasting level of process interdependence. Results provided strong support for contextually specific work design interventions. In the setting where work was highly interdependent, teamwork improved performance outcomes,



reduced employee strain, and increased job satisfaction. In the setting where employees normally worked independently of each other, real task gains were not achieved from cooperative arrangements. Consequently, imposing teamwork in low interdependence settings was counterproductive, increasing levels of employee strain and reducing job satisfaction.

Teams are neither appropriate to every task, nor the best vehicle for workers, nor the key to effective organisational performance (Sinclair, 1992, p 611). Every task-focused group encounters difficulties common to the human condition, such as anti-task behaviour (Bion, 1961; Lawrence & Armstrong, 1998), poor task definition, and impossible tasks (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1987). Team decision-making can be a complicated and fraught experience, subject to the imposition of strong wills and political agendas (Kets de Vries, 1988). The process of *how* decisions are made may better indicate the effectiveness of teamwork rather than the final decision itself (Bion, 1961). For many workers who prefer to work alone, team-based tasks can be a source of significant stress and reduced job satisfaction (Terkel, 1974). With different tasks, environments, and members, “teams require context-specific definitions of group work” (Sinclair, 1992, p 614).

### **Leaders**

“The line manager relationship is the most important relationship for anyone in an organisation” (Robertson & Flint Taylor, 2009, p 167). Creating a positive working environment reduces absenteeism, sabotage, accidents and protests, and improves morale and productivity (Marsella, 1994). Leaders’ feedback to employees positively influences motivation and trust levels and enhances team performance (Geister, Konradt, & Hertel, 2006). Managers need to balance task and relationship orientation to increase wellbeing, as overemphasising task orientation creates employee strain (O’Driscoll & Beehr, 1994). Employees’ job satisfaction is also influenced by the behaviour, affect, and attitudes of managers *above* the level of employees’ immediate supervisors, due to the impact of these managers in relation to aspects such as promotion, pay, and job security (Dalal, Bashshur, & Crede, 2011).

Like teamwork, leadership requires a nuanced understanding of localised factors, constraints, and complexities. One mode of leadership “does not fit all work settings; style does make a difference. It depends on where one works and the psychological person-vocational fit of those being led” (Gilbert, Myrtle, & Sohi, 2014, p 1). Supervisor behaviour is a statistically significant variable in predicting employee psychosocial wellbeing, beyond other variables including age, health practices, social support at home and work, and stressful life and work events (Gilbreath & Benson, 2004). The relational nature of work requires leaders to have interpersonal sensitivity and skills, competence, concern, compassion, empathy, and respect for people (Gilbreath, 2004; Rubin, 2004). Participative and democratic leadership styles usually increase wellbeing (Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, & Mcnamara, 2005). Leader behaviours fostering social affiliation at work include: recognising employees as individuals, controlling the expression of negative emotion while encouraging positive emotion, and respecting employees’ needs for refreshment while encouraging high performance (Campbell Quick, Little & Nelson, 2009). Trust in managers and employees, and using personal relational resources such as giving and receiving, promotes psychological wellbeing (Freeney & Felenz, 2013; Kelloway, Teed, & Kelley, 2008).

Leadership is central to group behaviour (Rice, 1965). There are multiple models of leadership, e.g., Leader-member exchange theory (LMX). LMX suggests the presence of high-quality relationships (characterised by respect, trust, and mutual obligation between supervisors and employees) enhances wellbeing and work performance (Volmer, Niessen, Spurk, Linz, & Abele, 2011); and increased job performance, employee development, commitment, and job satisfaction (Zhou & Schriesheim, 2009). Another model, Servant leadership, also emphasises the quality of relationships between employees and leaders. Servant leaders are described as empowering and developing employees by displaying humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship; and providing direction (van Dierendonck, 2011). LMX and servant leadership are examples of models emphasising ethical, caring, relational leadership.

Transformational leadership emphasises leaders’ personal charisma, which is also referred to as idealised influence. Transformational, leader-led interactions to

promote employee wellbeing include encouraging the free expression of ideas, listening to and understanding differences, integrating views through open-minded discussion (Tjosvold, Wong, & Chen, 2014), and persuading and convincing staff (Greenleaf, 1998).

Another example, Authentic leadership, is conceptually based in both hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing. Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) described the characteristics of authentic leaders as self-awareness, unbiased processing, authentic behaviour and actions, and relational authenticity. These qualities increased leaders' eudaimonic wellbeing, which is displayed through their personal expressiveness, self-realisation or development, flow experiences, and self-efficacy or self-esteem. Followers of authentic leaders are influenced to display similar qualities of eudaimonic wellbeing, as a result of personal and organisational modelling and identificatory processes (ibid).

Finally, instrumental perspectives on leadership are primarily concerned with issues of productivity and organisational viability. Any wellbeing that may accompany these organisational objectives is intrinsic (Warr, 2007). Instrumentally oriented leaders focus on everyday interactions such as:

- Maintaining the quality of working relationships;
- Feedback and performance appraisal processes;
- Creating opportunities for personal and professional growth, development, and making promotion decisions;
- Ensuring jobs are suitable;
- Setting and reviewing salary levels;
- Managing conflict or disagreements;
- Setting work objectives and deadlines;
- Aligning corporate and employee values.

### **Recognition**

A psychologically healthy workplace is likely to be dependent on employees receiving adequate recognition for the value of their contribution (see APA: <http://www.apaexcellence.org/resources/creatingahealthyworkplace/employeerecognition/>). According to Saunderson (2004), the most effective form of recognition occurs in

work settings with a strong, supportive culture. Monetary rewards, the most obvious form of employee acknowledgement, include fair financial compensation, competitive benefits packages, and regular pay increases with bonus payments for performance. However, research suggests remuneration is not necessarily as important as other forms of reward, both formal and informal (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Swift, 2007). Other effective, formal methods of recognition include ceremonies, awards, and organisational documents such as newsletters or emails (Day & Randell, 2014). Methods of informal recognition range from managers' praise and thank you notes to highly personalised expressions of sincere appreciation (Luthans, 2000; Saunderson, 2004). Employee recognition is a significant predictor of employee health and satisfaction, organisational effectiveness, and reduced employee stress (Browne, 2000).

### ***Psychological contract***

The psychological contract is the significant, often unspoken set of assumptions employees hold about managers, the workplace, and conditions in areas such as pay and benefits, career development, promotion, and recognition (Rousseau, 1989). The contract evolves from explicit and implicit promises made, or perceived to be made, between the individual and the organisation, and perceptions of gaps between what the employer promised to deliver and what employees receive.

Negative emotions at work have been ascribed to three causes: managers' behaviour, workload and task problems, and corporate policies (Basch & Fisher, 2000). Managers are largely responsible to maintain employees' perceptions of, and satisfaction with, the psychological contract. One measure of the psychological contract comprised two components, managers' expectations relating to the organisation's obligations, and managers' obligations relating to the perceived organisation's expectations (Cable, 2010). Each component has relational and transactional obligations towards employees. Cable pointed out that the content of psychological contracts appears to vary depending on employee level and context as well as individuals' specific foci of interest.

When the psychological contract is jeopardised, employees can become

dissatisfied with their leaders, the workplace, and conditions therein. Managers are seen as responsible to fulfil the psychological contract and breaches are considered as "broken promises rather than just unmet expectations" (Campbell Quick, Little, & Nelson, 2009, p 227). Breaches of the contract result in anger, a sense of injustice and betrayal, decreased job satisfaction and organisational commitment, and increased intention to leave. The intention to transmit a harmful rumour in the workplace increases when an organisation breaks job-related promises (Bordia, Kiasad, Restubog, DiFonzo, Stenson, & Tang, 2014). Whether the rumour is believable or not has no impact on the motivation for revenge. In contrast, when organisations over-deliver on the psychological contract, positive emotions tend to increase (Conway & Briner, 2002). The psychological contract is a bellwether for negative emotions and dissatisfaction with management.

Employees and organisations benefit from pursuing mutual bonds to promote wellbeing while minimising expressions of conflict. Misused power has the potential to be pathologically destructive and toxic processes can destroy individual and collective wellbeing (Bakan, 2004; Knights & Willmott, 1989). Incivility, a relatively mild form of toxicity, is related to employees' perceptions of justice and intention to leave (Griffin, 2010). Literature about conflict (see Chapter 2), toxicity, and power is relevant to issues raised by this study of work wellbeing.

### ***Toxicity***

Even with a quality work setting, good jobs, and a healthy, supportive environment, systemic wellbeing cannot be maintained consistently. Rational, planned organising does not preclude chaotic, destructive human processes from occurring in organisations (Burrell, 1997; Rees, 1995a; Schabracq & Cooper, 2003; Sievers, 2006; Whitebrook, 1996). These forces originate at the individual level. Psychiatrist Wilfred Bion described a human being as "a group animal at war, both with the group and with those aspects of his personality that constitute his 'groupishness'" (1961, p 168). The human desire to participate in social groups kindles ambivalent feelings about being included and excluded (Klein, 1952). Ambivalence and other conflicted emotions reverberate in work settings. For example, employees may not fit comfortably into a local work environment; they

may not function well in teams or, conversely, alone; have the interests of the organisation in mind; or identify with the organisation's goals. Hidden personal and emotional difficulties can also affect interpersonal relations e.g., the inability to relate realistically to others without being too withdrawn or demanding, pushy or compliant, egotistical or selfless, vain or greedy. Currents such as these emerge from individual dynamics and affect the social context within which they occur.

Frost (2003) coined the term 'toxic processes' to refer to the destructive ways people behave at work. At the centre of toxic processes are decisions and actions (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004). Work roles and relationships are the vehicles through which decisions, actions, and emotions are enacted. The potential to create workplace toxicity is considerable. It can be generated at all phases of decision-making, feeling, and acting cycles, and spread via social processes such as emotional contagion (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994). Attempting to minimise the impacts of toxic decision processes by using rational accounts (such as reframing), or procedures to suppress or eliminate negative emotion (e.g., fear), normally fail (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004). Bullying, for example, cannot be effectively explained away or ignored (Seel, 2001; Sievers, 2006).

Social pain, an issue raised by this study, occurs when employees are excluded or ostracised from teams or decision-making, not listened to, berated, or cannot connect with colleagues because of differences in cultural background. Social neuroscience is a new area of research that connects the outer social world with human biology to understand links between social experiences (e.g., social pain) and health. Animal and human studies reveal overlaps in the neurobiological underpinnings of physical and social pain. Analogous to physical pain in its neurocognitive function, social pain feels like physical pain and is often described in physical terms as 'hurt feelings' or a 'broken heart' (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). fMRI studies also reveal that the neurobiological bases of 'feeling understood' or 'not understood' were linked to neural regions associated with social connection and negative affect respectively (Morelli, Torre, & Eisenberger, 2014). Eisenberger (2011) described the unpleasant experience of social pain as associated with actual or potential damage to one's sense of social connection and/or value.

Frost considered that the cause of toxicity was the failure to take account of employees' emotional attachment to their contributions at work. Toxicity often occurs when decision makers or those who initiate action ignore the potential negative impacts on others. If toxic behaviours are not dealt with appropriately, conflict, suffering, and pain may be entrenched in workplace relations (Lawrence, 1995). This dynamic appears to occur particularly in public sector organisations (Hoggett, 2006; McHugh, 1997)

Employees who act to reduce, neutralise, buffer or heal toxicity are "toxin handlers". They "focus on the emotional needs of individuals and on the emotional linkages and relationships within organisations" (Frost, 2003 p 62). Frost found behaviours that reduced toxicity included listening, holding a space for healing, buffering others' pain, extricating people from painful situations, and transforming pain. An organisation's success often depends on how well emotional pain is handled. Recovery from toxic emotional experiences may be facilitated by policies and practices that support more compassionate behaviour (Dutton & Workman, 2011; Porath & Pearson, 2010). However, the potential impact of toxicity on employees, the organisation system, and consultants or practitioners working with the system is heavy. As Smith and Zane noted, "Any action scientist, or consulting system, is likely to get caught up in a parallel playing out of certain problematic dynamics operating in the organization he or she is trying to assist" (2004, p 47). The theory of SWB Homeostasis (outlined in topic area 4) also indicated the potential for toxic events to harm employees. Frost was a toxin handler who died of cancer. It is likely that his unrelenting fight against organisational toxicity, and support for the role of compassion in organisations, was a contributing factor in succumbing to disease (Frost, Dutton, Maitlis, Lilius, Kanov, & Worline, 2006; Smith, Miller, & Kaminstein, 2003).

Wellbeing is based in life-affirming organisational processes underpinned by evidence-based decisions and actions. However, evidence is not always sought or respected in work settings. This was seen in a study examining the effects of training and development on organisational innovation (Sung & Choi, 2013). Extensive empirical data revealed a positive relationship between corporate expenditure on internal training, interpersonal and organisational learning practices, and increased

innovation performance. Despite supportive evidence, Sung and Choi found most organisations responded to crises by *cutting* training budgets and *downsizing*. These actions reduced and degraded the emphasis on innovation that would have helped organisations survive threats and ensure future growth. This is one example of the impact of toxic decisions and actions on organisational success. Although cutting costs appeared intuitively sensible and timely, the flow-on effect of restricting innovation had a direct, destructive impact on corporate viability. The decision to reduce learning and development budgets was irrational and fear-driven, disregarding objective evidence to the contrary.

### ***Power, status, and control***

The use of coercive power and status is endemic to organisations. Kemper (2004) used the two primary relational dimensions of power and status to describe work environments. Power is displayed when one person compels another to do something the other does not want to do. Status is displayed when a person voluntarily complies with the wishes, interests, and desires of the other. Power behaviours may be explicitly toxic, e.g., force, deprivation of benefits, shaking fists, grimacing, shouting, interrupting; or implicit emotional actions such as lying, deceiving and manipulating. Status behaviours include being considerate, sociable, caring, respectful, and loving, i.e., acknowledging others' value. Controlling employees is grounded in formal and informal relationships based on variables such as authority, gender, seniority, skill, politics, personality, and age (Fineman, 2000). According to Spinoza, Davis, and Glennon, "politics happen wherever wisdom is finite and people are interdependent" (2014, p 1).

Displays of power and status influence social relations and heighten employees' emotional responses (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Lawrence, 2008). Outcomes of power-based interactions may be positive or negative, ranging from fear and humiliation to pride and achievement (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999). Emotional outcomes of positive power and status interactions are confidence, enthusiasm, security, and trust. Misused authority, power, and status result in negative emotional outcomes like depression, fear, anxiety, shame, anger, guilt, and distrust (Kemper, 2004; Lawrence & Armstrong, 1998; Shapiro & Carr, 1991).



If power and status are used inappropriately, control accumulates and becomes vested in management; consequently, employees' control is reduced. Destructive power and status behaviours potentially distort or deprive employees' "autonomy of the active, creative self, locating it in managers, [or] the organisational system". In contrast, constructive interactions enable personal autonomy "to remain in individuals as agents of volition, self determination and subjectivity" (Hinshelwood, 2001, p 159). When deprived of personal agency or control, the outcome for employees is a sense of alienation. A study of the problems arising from an apparently arbitrary management decision to change the design of work relying on the contribution of several teams revealed alienation was the shared experience (Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). All interdependencies among the teams were disrupted. Workflow became irregular and the error rate increased as teams began to feel powerless and anxious. Team members attempted to control their collective anxiety using implicit social defenses (in particular, projecting feelings of incompetence onto other teams with whom they had previously cooperated). Mutual animosity increased. To remedy the crisis, managers became involved and directive, instructing teams in how to work; consequently they had less time for their own jobs. Neumann and Hirschhorn concluded the effect of power driven decision processes created poor work design and disruption to what had been a smooth, well-functioning process.

Power relations are also observed in the use of inanimate features in work settings. Two critical studies interpreted the use of colour and location to structure implicit power relations in workplaces and reduce employees' agency. Connellan (2013) investigated how adopting the colour 'white' exercised subtle control over employees' thoughts, feelings, and behaviour in workplaces. The use of 'white' as a design feature in workspaces represents a "powerful institutional presence" (ibid, p 1529). White embodies, materialises, and expresses a particular organising and controlling element in the design of interiors and towards people, e.g., in laboratories and hospitals, doctors' white uniform coats represent power, status, and the predominance of science. Connellan argued that white walls implicitly discourage employees' emotional expression through a homogenising aesthetic.

Whiteness also represents institutionalisation, conformity, and complicit power relations, due to its singular, generic qualities and repressive colonising influence.

A second study examined implicit power dynamics in a process of modernising work places, corporate operations, and external image (Hirst & Humphreys, 2013). These authors evaluated the impact of removing out-dated and/or low status activities (e.g., paper-based storage facilities) to peripheral sites, while simultaneously updating and refurbishing the principal workplace. Distal sites, or 'Edgelands', contained unattractive warehouses and buildings associated with cheaper industrial areas and manual trades; affected employees were inevitably isolated from the modernised office. Hirst and Humphreys considered this change process 'purified' the refurbished workplace through the use of open plan designs to facilitate teamwork and interaction, provide uplifting spaces, and reduce hierarchical status. The modernising process with its implicit dynamics of power and control elevated the status of selected groups and reduced the status of others.

### **Comment**

This brief review about relationships at work allows some meta-conclusions to be drawn. Arguably the most important is to locate research in a specific context. Several authors drew attention to the differential impacts of local factors that invalidate generalised assumptions or conclusions. This issue was raised in the present study. The second conclusion is the centrality of belonging and meaning in workplaces. The section suggests organisations that disregard relational needs may ultimately fail to thrive.

### **Topic area 6: Principles**

Topic area 6, Principles, describes the significance of meaning- and values-based behaviour in work wellbeing. Meaning and ethics are important to employees, a point that organisations do not always recognise or acknowledge sufficiently.

Principles, as the term is used in this study, are systemic preferences for how the organisation should behave towards employees in the work setting and externally towards the wider community or society (Maierhofer, Rafferty, & Kabanoff, 2003). Collective values are stable assessments that maintain over time and across situations, and occupy a central place in interactions between employees

and the organisation (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008). Employees care about their organisation's values, assumptions, and propositions for correct action, and want them enacted in its code of conduct, means and ends of action, and ways of thinking (Hofstede, 1984; Ros, Schwartz, & Surkiss, 1999; Schwartz, 1999). Seen from a different angle, Principles indicate the areas of identification between employer and employees. This "coalescence" of identity "generates a sense of individual conviction and a willingness to devote increased effort to the organisation" (Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008, p 326).

Principles are derived from individual-level values. Congruence between one's personal values and organisational values may influence employees' life- and job-related decisions and job satisfaction. The congruence of local values in a work setting has major implications for every facet of wellbeing. A study of the interaction between values congruence, workload, and burnout revealed that workload and values conflicts were integral to burnout or engagement (Leiter, Frank, & Matheson, 2009). Significantly for women, values congruence buffered the relationship between work overload, symptoms of burnout, and professional efficacy.

Issues of justice at work include the nature of associated decisions, processes, actions, interpersonal exchanges, and outcomes. For individuals and groups, justice and ethical leadership (e.g., role modelling, fairness in daily interactions with employees) influence wellbeing (Neubert, Carlson, Kacmar, Roberts, & Chonko, 2009). Employees may question whether corporate interactions and decisions are (un)fair, why they may be regarded in that light, and how they impact wellbeing in context (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Crawshaw, Cropanzano, Bell, and Nadisic (2013) found perceptions of justice were linked to employee outcomes including emotions (e.g., pride, anger, moral outrage, sadness), attitudes (e.g., trust in management, job satisfaction, organisational identification), and behaviour (e.g., individual performance, organisational citizenship behaviours, sabotage, aggression). Employees acted to restore (perceived) loss of fairness in workplaces by eliminating or discouraging unfair conduct, enacting retributive behaviour (e.g., punishing perpetrators), or seeking revenge for breaches of the psychological contract (Bordia, Kiasad, Restubog, DiFonzo, Stenson, & Tang, 2014). Fairness is important not only for work-related concerns, but also for its own sake in

the wider community context (Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005).

Organisational beliefs, attitudes, and values are embedded in the cultural environment and communicated to employees via norms, socialisation processes, and how managers respond to critical organisational events (Tesluck, Farr, & Klein, 1997).

Apart from concerns about fairness, Principles range from micro or internally focused concerns (e.g., the desire for autonomy and influence, social relationships, and security: Campbell Quick, Little, & Nelson, 2009; Warr, 2009) to macro or external issues (e.g., contributing to community, sustainability, and the nature of social impact). Overell (2008) highlighted an increasing prioritisation of meaning at work, reflecting a preoccupation with experience, feeling, fulfilment, personality, value, and identity. This “new culture of inwardness” provides an “opportunity to *make oneself*, to fulfil potential and to achieve personal life goals” (p 44). Principles also reflect a metaphysical orientation. Pink (2005) described ‘wholeness’ as the feeling of being complete and alive, and suggested it was a core value in developing satisfying lives and organisational effectiveness. Rubin (2004) highlighted C.G. Jung’s (1916/1960) interest in individuation, personal uniqueness, meaning, wholeness, processes of integration, and an awareness of sacredness as emerging issues in workplaces. Human development, enhanced by playful exploration and manipulation of the environment, creates enjoyment and “a sense of effectiveness and competency and of autonomy, initiative, and industry” (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 1999, p 286).

The literature reviewed below describes Principles relevant to issues raised by this study.

### **Corporate social responsibility**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) refers to the obligation of a business to meet the needs of its stakeholder groups while generating a profit. Stakeholders are the other groups in society who bear the risks of wealth creation that are not borne by the business itself. These groups may include employees, who in their non-work roles of citizens, shareholders, and consumers may hold differing opinions about their employer’s activities (Long & Sievers, 2012). CSR acknowledges the possibility

that corporate goals, associated with exploiting commercial opportunities, may often create negative social impacts. Therefore, CSR focuses attention on managers' dual responsibilities to make decisions about pursuing commercial goals and ensure the values associated with social, environmental, and ethical outcomes are also included in corporate actions. However, CSR is more than behaving in this honest, trustworthy manner. In a broader sense, society legitimates businesses to undertake commercial activities *because* there is a belief in shared responsibility for the impact of corporate actions on the totality of stakeholders (Gray, Owen, & Adams, 1996). Therefore, an interdependent relationship exists between all stakeholders and organisations in relation to damages, interests, obligations, and rights in the social domain (Freeman, 1997).

Management is not a morally neutral endeavour, as leaders are responsible to act to further an organisation's goals, including fiscal growth (Roberts, 1984). However, it is employees who generally have the primary daily responsibility (and burden) to implement ethical corporate behaviour at work (Collier & Esteban, 2007). Businesses are affected by employees' evaluations of CSR policies and practices, and reciprocally, employees are affected by their employers' CSR actions (Hsieh & Chan, 2012). Despite this, employees are the most under-researched stakeholder group towards which an organisation must represent its CSR values and stance (Lindgreen, Swaen, & Maon, 2009; Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). Only limited, equivocal evidence is available about employee attitudes towards CSR, and more research about the relationship between CSR and employee wellbeing is needed (Peloza & Shang, 2011).

Employees' attitudes towards the introduction of CSR into their workplaces were the focus of one grounded theory study that developed concepts in two construction firms in Chile (Rodrigo & Arenas, 2008). The point of relevance for this review was how employees responded to their company introducing CSR. Two orientations of employee attitudes were found: 'towards the organisation', and 'towards society'. Notably, when employees saw their social views and vision reflected in the employer's CSR stance, identification with the organisation increased. Attitudes towards society included the social importance employees attached to their work, and their collective sense of social justice.

However, the study also demonstrated that implementing CSR programs did not necessarily lead to positive collective attitudes towards employees' work, CSR, or their employer. For instance, when contract employees on low wages saw corporate financial resources directed towards external stakeholders, they felt marginalised and angry. Contract employees considered they should have received pay rises before CSR initiatives were enacted. This subgroup's view was reflected in the collective perspective that CSR actions were not sufficiently equitable. It was concluded that good salaries, benefits, and working conditions were essential for all employees if employees were to develop positive attitudes towards CSR. Although conclusions from this conceptual study cannot be generalised, it established that employees carefully evaluated the CSR initiatives for underlying fairness and equity for all stakeholders, including themselves.

### **Security**

Security is a collective value expressing the core human need for financial survival in an era of employment precarity. Workplaces are loaded with concerns about money and possessions. In capitalist cultures, financial metrics determine organisational behaviour at every level through the focus on profit, productivity, efficiency, and individual performance (Bakan, 2004; Burrell, 1997; Grey, 2005). Capitalism assumes not only that employees equate career success with increasing salary and associated material success, but that the mindset pervades work settings. This is consistent with widespread beliefs about the importance of pay in satisfying employees' extrinsic rewards needs (Diener, 2009; Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993).

Pay is only one aspect of materialist values, which are inherently more complex than interest in money (Judge, Piccolo, Podsakoff, Shaw, & Rich, 2010). Materialist values seem to be associated with cognitive evaluations such as life satisfaction, rather than with affective assessments (e.g., happiness or wellbeing) (Oishi & Schimmack, 2010). Richins (1994) found that materialism comprised *success* (possessions are used to judge one's own and others' success); *happiness* (the belief that acquiring and having possessions leads to happiness and life satisfaction); and *centrality* (how central possessions are in a person's life).

Holding materialistic values may challenge an employee's sense of personal wellbeing in both work and non-work settings. Satisfaction with pay is predicted in part by the ranked position of an employee's wage within a comparison set such as their organisation, as well as absolute and relative wage indicators (Brown, Gardner, Oswald, & Qian, 2005). In the work domain, a consistent negative relationship is observed between materialist values and individual wellbeing indicators (including intrinsic reward satisfaction, extrinsic reward satisfaction, job satisfaction, and career satisfaction) (Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010). These authors concluded employees valuing materialist goals were more likely to be *dissatisfied* than fulfilled, mainly because structural conditions must preclude all but a few from achieving senior roles that offer higher remuneration. Non-work indicators of personal wellbeing are also negatively related to materialist values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Kashdan & Breen, 2007; Kasser, 2002; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Money was found to be relatively unimportant in creating personal wellbeing, while meaning and happiness were found to be more important (King & Napa, 1998; Scollon & King, 2004; Swift, 2007).

Srivastava, Locke, and Bartol (2001) focused attention on the importance of a person's motives for making money. They argued from a psychological perspective that materialism is a misguided attempt to substitute money for the proper use of one's mind. When undertaking intellectual effort in the pursuit of work goals, the mind is being used virtuously, since money is honestly earned as a product of thinking. This argument viewed money as beneficial rather than harmful because it helped satisfy needs and desires. It was morally neutral as it neither conferred virtue nor redeemed vices. Srivastava, Locke, and Bartol argued that money should not be used to camouflage poor psychological health, or be expected to relieve self-doubt, low-self esteem, and other mental problems (2001; Christopher, Kuo, Abraham, Noel, & Linz, 2004; Christopher, Morgan, Marek, Keller, & Drummond, 2005).

Overall, the evidence suggests pay, profit motives, and financial values driving commercial organisations are not consistently aligned with employees' personal values. Goals associated with meaning, and the discipline needed to live a moral life, appear to lead more often to personal freedom (Hamilton, 2008). While

employees need money to live, a preference for meaning provides purpose and motivation for life.

## **Meaning**

The relationship between meaningfulness derived from work activities and work wellbeing has been noted in previous topic areas. There are substantial differences between happiness (satisfaction, or subjective wellbeing) and meaningfulness (a cognitive and emotional assessment of whether a person's life has purpose and value) (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, forthcoming). Although happiness and meaningfulness are substantially and positively inter-correlated, their roots are based in different philosophical orientations. Happiness (hedonic wellbeing) is having desires and needs satisfied. Meaningfulness (eudaimonic wellbeing) comprises distinctively human qualities such as self-expression, reflection, and integrating past and future to derive personal meaning from life experiences. Aspects common to both forms of wellbeing include feeling connected to others, thinking others are connected to oneself, feeling productive, and not being bored or alone.

Differences between happiness and meaningfulness are important, however. Happiness, located largely in the present moment, is associated with an easy life, good health, feeling good, and having enough money to buy desired objects (necessities and luxuries). Linked to doing things for the self and benefits received from others, happiness describes fairly carefree lives with few worries or anxieties, being a taker rather than a giver, and having little thought for the past or future. Baumeister et al concluded that "happiness without meaning characterizes a relatively shallow, self-absorbed or even selfish life, in which things go well, needs and desires are easily satisfied, and difficult or taxing entanglements are avoided" (ibid, p 15).

Meaningfulness, in contrast, transcends the present moment and endures. Culturally dependent, it links a person's past, present and future realities and possibilities together. It is associated with being a 'giver'. The benefits others receive from one's positive actions, such as being helped or cared for, create a sense of meaning in the benefactor. Meaning is also found in "serious involvement with



things beyond oneself and one's pleasures, ... often to the detriment of happiness" (ibid, p11). Difficult, stressful undertakings such as sustained work projects are felt to be more meaningful, although they provide less happiness due to the associated worry and anxiety (Jaques, 1960). Feeling bad is sometimes an inevitable component of meaningfulness. Caring about personal identity, or how one expresses and reflects oneself within society, is part of a meaningful life.

Globally, there is a trend for jobseekers to find work that provides a sense of purpose, personal meaning, opportunities for creativity, and fulfilment (Cone, 2006; Rubin, 2004). For many workers, a secure salary is not sufficient if daily work tasks fail to broaden horizons, enhance lives, or increase 'feelings of humanness' by allowing people to be themselves. Income loses its power to provide happiness once basic needs are satisfied (Easterlin, 2004; Morgan-Knapp, 2010; Sen, 1987). Gallup's 'The State of the Global Workplace Study' (2010, p 2) described "decent work" as "work that acknowledges basic aspirations such as stability, self-expression, and personal development".

Philosophers who study work issues highlight the increasing importance of jobs that enrich employees' sense of meaning (Becker, 1992; Sharma, 2004; Young, 2003). Krznaric (2013) suggested a meaningful career is built around pay, achieving status, making a difference, following one's passions, and using one's talents. However, for many employees, status and income do not generate the same fulfilment that can be derived from making a difference, following one's passions, and using personal talents. Moreover, according to Krznaric, job status or prestige is ultimately less meaningful than gaining others' respect, which also includes appreciation for the value of employees' contributions to their jobs.

### **Comment**

The focus on Principles in this study provided a meta-category from which to consider collective concerns about the local expression of values in a workplace. The Principles described in this topic area may have relatively wide currency among workers generally, although they cannot convey contextualised variations. Examples of local Principles are described in Chapters 5 and 6 where the concepts from this study are presented in detail.

## Conclusions

This chapter investigated three multilevel aspects of work wellbeing: how subjective wellbeing is maintained and implications for work settings when SWB is compromised, interpersonal relationships, and the importance of systemically desired values in corporate behaviour. Some literature was duplicated across topic areas, an artefact of using a topic-based framework to gather interdisciplinary contributions to work wellbeing.

SWB Homeostasis described the impact of negative work experiences on employees. The theory demonstrates that distress, resulting in loss of contact with homeostatically-protected mood, is a potent data source about the quality of workplace experience and how employees are faring. Causal factors need to be addressed if the intention is to help employees regain SWB and ultimately to avoid potential depression (Cummins, 2010).

Decent interpersonal relationships are fundamental to wellbeing, satisfaction, and growth at work. Employees are highly motivated to build and maintain conflict-free, enduring, collaborative, meaningful connections. Toxic decisions and actions can have potent negative effects at work. When power and control are misused, systemic wellbeing is undermined. Leadership calls for emotional and interpersonal qualities and skills, including intelligence, self-awareness, and self-management ability. Employees seek friendly, respectful, supportive colleagues who share the load of multiple activities including achieving team goals. The need for teamwork is highly contextualised to an organisation's work processes.

Chapter 2 concluded that there was considerable overlap among antecedents and outcomes of wellbeing in the areas of work settings, jobs, and health. Both work climate and jobs were found to be affected by opportunities for personal control, learning and development, having committed co-workers and supervisory support, being properly resourced, work variety, autonomy, rich performance feedback, and meaningful work. Health was potentially affected by the organisation of work (i.e., how it was scheduled, its pace, load, content, level of challenge, and degree of personal control); employees' career concerns; social demands and support; and the compatibility of work goals and values with employees' non-work life.

The literature review chapters raise questions about the relative importance of various elements for work wellbeing. Given the range of possibilities, which elements are relevant in a particular work setting? An approach that enables wellbeing to be conceptualised from employees' personal experiences, attitudes, feelings, and values is needed to address this question. The difficulty of conducting or applying experimental research in work settings indicates methods must be attuned to the reality and vagaries of local social systems, and interpretivist research is better suited to these conditions. A concept-building process taking these requirements into account is outlined in Chapter 4.

### **Theoretical foundations of the project**

Three propositions underpinning the work wellbeing study were derived from the review of literature in Chapters 1, 2, and 3:

1. Wellbeing is always located in, and particular to, a context or culture (Ryff & Singer, 1998). In considering the nature of 'a good life', "the question is loaded with cultural assumptions, and in a sense can only be answered from within the cultural world which has given rise to it" (Wierzbicka, 2009, p 260). Therefore, assessing work wellbeing needs to be based on the concerns and personal valuations of people who are directly affected, rather than superimposed judgements from other sources (Collard, 2006).
2. The quality of subjectively experienced relational and emotion experience is fundamental to work wellbeing (Armstrong, 2000; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Bradley, 2005; Griffiths & Scarantino, 2009).
3. Wellbeing in a workplace reflects a unique set of explicit and implicit collective values (e.g., development, growth, meaning, recognition) and a unique set of objective needs (e.g., jobs, health, resources, money) (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002; Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010; Drenth, 1991; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Nussbaum, 1992; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993; Oishi & Schimmack, 2010; Rock & Garavan, 2006; Seedhouse, 2004; Staines & Quinn, 1979). A research approach that can surface the range of explicit and implicit collective requirements is required (Leavitt, Fong, & Greenwald, 2011).

## **Chapter 4 Research Design and Methodology**

This chapter begins with an outline of the research questions and project aims, followed by a review of the characteristics of qualitative enquiry and the paradigms influencing the project. Other areas addressed include project design, ethical considerations, and methods of data collection, management, and analysis.

Two organisations, Property and Finance, provided bounded data sets from which local wellbeing concepts were developed. The study used interpretive science methods, as described in Chapter 1.

### **The research questions**

The study investigated the nature of wellbeing experiences and how they were created in work settings. The study was used as a way to demonstrate the value of interpretive science for developing conceptual knowledge about work wellbeing. Therefore, the research questions were formally stated as:

1. What is the nature of systemic wellbeing at work?
2. In what ways can interpretive science contribute to psychological knowledge about wellbeing in work settings?

The relationship between wellbeing experiences in work settings, and how work wellbeing was described conceptually, was central to the study.

Additional sub questions explored in this study included:

- What does wellbeing mean to employees in work settings?
- How similar are the meanings of wellbeing across work settings?
- Are meanings generalisable or contextualised?
- To what extent does knowledge derived from interpretive science overlap with experimentally derived knowledge about wellbeing?

Answers to these questions are potentially valuable for practitioners as well as scholars, since contributing to wellbeing at work is likely to improve employee satisfaction and performance. These questions are comprehensively addressed in Chapters 7 and 8.

### **Project aims**

The questions above served the project aims (already stated; see p 10):

1. Document the process of developing local concepts of wellbeing in two work settings.
2. Describe the significance of findings and critically assess their contribution to theory.
3. Evaluate how interpretive science contributed to researching concepts of wellbeing at work.

These aims could be approached in several ways. The core values, associated worldviews, and philosophies that shaped the project are described.

### **Ontological and epistemological perspective: Constructionism**

Constructionism is the theory of knowledge underpinning this project. The worldview of constructionism holds that social meaning or truth is constructed rather than discovered, and that meaning does not exist independently of a human mind or separately from an interpersonal context. Constructionism refers to the collective, social generation and transmission of meaning (Crotty, 1998). Although the world and its objects possess *potential* truths, meaning is always indeterminate until an interactive process of construction occurs between human consciousness and objects in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). A form of physical reality underlies constructions of the physical world; in constructionism, however, social meaning or concepts are neither purely objective in a positivist sense, nor purely subjective in the sense of being individually *created* rather than constructed.

A person's experience of wellbeing at work illustrates this. For an individual employee, any work experience has multiple potential meanings. One employee experiences a manager's high standards as harsh or punitive, while another interprets the same standards as facilitating career development. In this situation, the meaning of the manager's actual behaviour is neutral or indeterminate, neither objectively good nor bad. However, all employees interpret their interactions with others, and construct their own versions of meaning. Personal perspectives interactively shape meaning. Interactions between employees and managers consist of observable behavioural 'data', but the constructionist lens sees the data as possessing no inherent objective meaning. On the other hand, the meaning an employee constructs can never be purely subjective, simply because it is generated

from phenomena, or 'objects' of experience: perceptions of another's behaviour. Therefore, individual human consciousness (subject) and experience (object) are intimately linked in employee constructions of wellbeing (meaning) attributed to interactions. By their very nature, behavioural 'objects' limit the meaning possibilities, which can be constructed by a human mind, in time and space (Levi-Strauss, 1966).

The social significance of context as a directing, organising source of human thought and behaviour, rather than simply an outcome of human thought and action, is central to constructionism (Crotty, 1998). Constructionist research requires the researcher to move beyond conventional meanings of objects to reinterpret and uncover deeper knowledge about the contextualised meaning of experience. Employees are embedded in a social matrix where a shared source of (mostly implicit) meaning-making strategies about wellbeing experiences already exists (Stapely, 1996). Individualised meanings about wellbeing are constructed within this collective organisational field. The dynamic interplay between a unique set of employees and a particular work setting invites the assumption that wellbeing is a local, contextually defined experience. Research shows that no two organisations are the same (Hofstede, 1984), as no two families function identically. Therefore, individual employees who are influenced by social dynamics in a particular work setting generate contextualised perceptions of wellbeing.

Subjectivity shapes the construction of knowledge, suggesting that perceptions of wellbeing in work settings are generated at the intersection of subjectivity and experience. The natural science paradigm is not suitable for research involving subjective elements such as values, beliefs, assumptions, presumptions, and conditioning (Howe, 2009; Love, 2002). This influenced the selection of research design and methods.

### **Research specialisation: Phenomenography**

Constructionism favours methodology and methods supporting emergent research. It avoids specific hypotheses, experimental variables, or pre-determined procedures for data collection (Howe, 2009). Phenomenography is a 'research specialisation' rather than a methodology (Marton, 1986; Svensson, 1997) that falls

in the constructionist fold. Phenomenography was chosen because knowledge is developed at a systemic level by exploring “the range of meanings within a sample group, as a group, not the range of meanings for each individual within the group” (Akerlind, 2005, p323).

Phenomenography emerged in 1970 as a ‘research tradition’ in education, to provide an alternative to the dominance of “positivistic, behaviouristic and quantitative research” (Svensson, 1997, p 171). Svensson’s collaborator Ference Marton first used the word ‘phenomenography’ in 1981 to refer to research that aimed to describe “the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them” (Marton, 1986, p 31). Teachers’ concerns about students’ academic development and attainment in school subjects provided the impetus for its growth.

Phenomenography focuses on the kinds of ‘objects’ (phenomena) that are described, as well as the resulting ‘conceptions’ (knowledge) that can be integrated into fields of knowledge and research (Svensson, 1997). Beyond education, phenomenographic research has included wider social science issues (Bowden, 2000), including organisational change (Dunkin, 2000). Goals are similar in all disciplines: to identify and describe various conceptions about aspects of experienced reality, or everyday life phenomena (Akerlind, 2005; Bowden, 2000). Researchers generally use semi-structured interviews to obtain descriptions of how familiar phenomena are experienced in a specified context (Orgill, 2007). When analysed, data yield a second order perspective on knowledge of experiential reality. In contrast, a first order perspective describes what a phenomenon ‘is’ (Marton, 1981). Second order perspective descriptions form a collective social construction that is idiosyncratic to a group in context. The contextualised nuances of a second order description cannot be derived from a first order description of reality ‘as it is’ in a generalised, rather than local, state.

Svensson (1997) described underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions of phenomenography as ‘general’, noting that its roots as an empirical research tradition were based in practice rather than philosophical ideas. It has no “articulated metaphysical foundation” (ibid, p 165). Ontological

assumptions centre on the observable nature of the objects of research. The products of research, 'conceptions', are knowledge created from the process of human thinking about external reality. The resulting knowledge is essentially constructivist.

The epistemological position in phenomenography overlaps the ontological position. Two epistemological assumptions underlie phenomenography: the centrality of description in all research, and the data reduction processes used to derive an abstract, condensed form of knowledge (Svensson, 1997). Data reduction yields summarised categories of variation. The variation focuses on similarities and differences in conceptions of the research topic. The categories are viewed as a 'set of parts' of a conception, e.g., of wellbeing located in a specific context. This idea is parallel to dimensionalisation in grounded theory and in Goertz' (2006) approach to structuring concepts.

Phenomenographic methods are straightforward. Data collection is exploratory and undertaken within a single context. Researchers typically interview around 20 individual participants from the same context to derive categories. Interviews gather an individual's descriptions of cognitive, experiential, affective, and cultural perceptions of the substance of the phenomenon. Data are analysed in context, without pre-defining meanings or categories (Svensson, 1997). The output, a 'form of thought' or 'conception', is separated from the thinkers, similar to "epistemology without a knowing subject" (Marton, 1981, p 196). Variations in the meaning and structure of experience are understood within a delimited relational and phenomenal domain, and no attention is paid to individual variables (Marton & Fai, 1999; Svensson, 1997). Dimensions from just one person are sufficient to understand the structural dimensions of a social group (see Bazeley, 2013, p 6).

A determining reason for choosing phenomenography was the shift in research perspective away from people as the 'source of variation' (i.e., individual differences) to the phenomenon that varies (i.e., multiple conceptions of the phenomenal reality) (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography does not rely on detailed participant characteristics, since the task is to describe the object of interest at the systemic level. It enables researchers to investigate characteristics of the system, not individuals in the system.



## **Research methods**

Several compatible approaches are used to collect and analyse data. There were no precedents for conducting a foundational interpretivist study of wellbeing in work settings. A creative approach was used here to adapt pre-existing, established methods to the specific research task.

The design involved using participants from two organisations to develop two separate, local concepts of wellbeing. The study was not a dual case study design, since neither organisation was to be studied as a case (Eisenhardt, 1989). Instead, the design provided two independent concepts that were derived from contextualised experience in two unrelated work settings (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Both concepts were developed without reference to the other and then subsequently compared.

In the early stages of concept development, e.g., when the components of a trope such as wellbeing have not previously been specified, comparative data can provide new perspectives (Eisenhardt, 1989), and perhaps complement incremental theory building in experimental science. Developing two concepts was necessary so that the outcomes could be compared against existing knowledge from empirical science about wellbeing at work. This process made it possible to determine whether interpretivist methods had in fact contributed to extending knowledge of work wellbeing.

Two research methods were used: interviews, and a process of concept development. Individual interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire, developed for the project from two unrelated, pre-existing approaches. The method of analysing and developing concepts described by Goertz (2006) was used to formalise the conceptual output from the two research sites. An explanation of each tool and method and how these were integrated is provided.

### **Developing the interview questionnaire**

Interview methods were needed to surface, specifically and unambiguously, participants' subjective awareness of their thoughts, needs, feelings, learning and achievements from wellbeing experiences. An interview questionnaire was compiled from two pre-existing interview approaches. The Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation

Technique (ZMET) (Zaltman, 1996), and The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format (Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2006), were modified and combined into a single questionnaire. A copy of the questionnaire versions one and two can be found in Appendix A. An outline of each approach is provided.

***ZMET: Using visual images to communicate meaning***

Harvard Business School academic Gerald Zaltman originally created the Zaltman Metaphor Elicitation Technique (ZMET: Zaltman, 1996) as a market research tool in the early 1990s. ZMET was designed to surface “mental models that drive consumer thinking and behaviour” by using visual images to stimulate participants’ thoughts and feelings (Zaltman & Coulter, 1995, p 36). The ZMET approach, using visual images, has been used in the social sciences to understand participants’ knowledge of organisational issues (Catchings-Castello, 2000) and in broad commercial and academic situations. For example, a recent study, *Thoughts and Feelings about the U.S. Economy*, (online reference: Olsen & Zaltman, 2012) involved 24 x 2 hour individual ZMET interviews to understand the emotional and psychological effects of the economic crisis on the lives of Americans ([http://olsonzaltman.com/media/ZMET\\_USeconomy2012-full.pdf](http://olsonzaltman.com/media/ZMET_USeconomy2012-full.pdf)).

ZMET draws on interdisciplinary knowledge from the social and biological sciences, computer technology, and humanities domains (Zaltman, 1996). Several important premises about human mental functioning underpin ZMET. First, thoughts occur initially as images, rather than in language. Second, visual images are used to stimulate and express metaphors about the focal topic. Third, metaphors are central to emotion and cognition, the mental processes by which people understand their behaviour. Emotions, grounded in embodied experience, give rise to thoughts or cognitions; or reason, emotion, and experience co-mingle in decision-making (Catchings-Castello, 2000; Zaltman, 1996). Images are used to inspire awareness of metaphorical meaning, which is interpreted by the viewer at emotional and cognitive levels. The interpretation is based in personal experience. Images as metaphors capture human experience directly and personally, and it is this feature that has made images a powerful research tool.

Social science research has a long history of using artistic forms as metaphors for organisational activity (Hurworth, 2003; Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008; Taylor & Hansen, 2005). Visual media allow research participants to speak about unique experiences in relative psychological safety. In effect, images become 'screens out there', a detached space onto which participants project their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, feelings, experiences, and concerns (Gilroy, 2007; Taylor & Hansen, 2005). In this research project, participants personally selected images that captured relevant, meaningful aspects of their wellbeing experiences. Thus, chosen images were grounded in their embodied experience, and participants expressed relevant meanings in words to describe significant features of wellbeing in their work setting.

A fundamental premise of this project was that subjective knowledge is core to developing a foundational concept. Subjective knowledge may be generated from image-inspired narratives in at least two ways. Participants' experiential knowing is derived from accounts of their direct personal perception and contact with people, places, and events. 'Presentational knowing' is their expression of and communication about personal meaning and significance through images (Heron & Reason, 2001).

The stimulus of a visual image inspires verbal records of individual, spatial, and social relationships (Grady, 2008). Therefore, it provides insights about multiple levels of experience in a particular setting. Data gathering is facilitated when participants relate to images that express meaningful aspects of their personal experience. It generates data with rich knowledge of the impact of localised social processes in wellbeing experiences.

#### Instructions to participants

As per published ZMET method (Zaltman, 1996), participants were asked to prepare for the interview by finding eight images to represent their thoughts and feelings about eight different aspects of what wellbeing meant to them in their current work setting (see Property and Finance Information Letters to Participants, Appendix B). Images were brought to the interview, where approximately 50% of interview time was spent exploring their meanings in context. Although participants'

images were collected, they were not included in the findings. This decision was taken because images were essentially a stimulus for participants' use only, to enable them to articulate their explicit and implicit feelings and thoughts about subjective experiences (Baumeister, Masicampo, & Vohs, 2011). Images that held particular meanings for participants would likely have different meanings for readers, and including them might distract from the pure focus on developing systemic descriptions of wellbeing. Moreover, phenomenography uses language, not images, as the medium to communicate collective data.

Major benefits of ZMET were that it avoided the constraining effects of researcher-designed questions and surveys. It also balanced verbal-centric techniques with non-verbal, image-based channels of communication in data gathering. This allowed participants' latent and implicit knowledge to emerge. Exploring images was an opportunity for participants to speak about relevant aspects of the topic with limited prompting from the researcher. The resulting descriptions of "emerging thoughts and feelings" (Bagley, Clarkson, & Power, 2006, p 6) included emotional-affective and rational-cognitive aspects of participants' embodied experiences.

#### *Raw data: Examples from the project*

The following images are examples of raw data provided by participants, who used these images as a trigger to describe personal knowledge about work wellbeing. The specific, unique meanings encased in images would be difficult (if not impossible) for a researcher to decode without the addition of participants' clarifying verbal accounts.

Participants often assigned a title to images to capture the essence of its meaning, e.g., "freedom" in the first example from participant 11 in Property:



The sky represents freedom. Opportunity to express yourself in a free way... To have freedom for my day-to-day activities such as design, such as innovative ideas to be accepted, so I'm not just to sit in a small square... Freedom to innovate, freedom to have flexibility in dealing with day-to-day situations, either when you're talking about design or negotiation or finding solutions to different kind of problems. Organising something, so could be design, could be project management, could be any day-to-day activity in which I expect a bit more flexibility. Or more freedom, or more rights to make decision that may be not business as usual.

In the second example from Property, participant 6 acknowledged the organisation's contribution to self-care for health:

Within the organisation here we have been given a lot of tools to encourage us to eat well and healthily... You are encouraged to bring in food and take care of yourself and to make sure that you are looking after yourself.



In Finance, alterations in management style and thinking underpinned widespread systemic change. Participant 10 from Finance described problems arising from perceptions of work-related inequity and injustice. Two examples of images exploring these themes are provided from participant 10.

“Having a realistic workload”



As you can see, that's quite an amazing effort to have to manoeuvre from one place to another. Like any organisation anywhere... and the whole [of Finance]... people are expected to work longer and harder... which is fine, but again the balance of when you are a mum and you've got kids and trying to balance that home work life... it's not always easy... [Unrealistic workloads are] more and more happening and especially with the financial crisis, it's going to keep happening in all organisations, yes.

“Everyone needs support”



This is ideally what... I think the only reason that [Finance]... and they do provide

support for one another, no matter what your situation. Yes, support and understanding, I think is really important... people are all different, with all different disabilities or abilities and regardless of that you need support... *Finance* [offers support but] it's just my department that doesn't really! I'm the only one that will actually aim to try to do something about it. Because there's other junior people or people where English is not their first language, so they might be taken, not advantage of, it's just that they wouldn't stand up to these [new] people.

### ***The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format***

As noted in Chapter 1, practice and research in many disciplines, including organisational psychology, are not necessarily integrated (Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010; Briner, 2010; Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Rousseau, 2007). Problems can arise in applying research to work settings. One remedy is to generate actionable knowledge oriented to "a pragmatist epistemology" (Hoshmand & O'Byrne, 1996, p 197). Investigating local issues using participants' first-hand experience of the context helps to develop actionable knowledge. Such data may contribute to constructive change in the local settings (Reason & Torbert, 2001; Rosenfeld & Tardieu, 2000).

An action learning and reflective process was added to the interview questionnaire. The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format (Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2006) is a series of questions designed to help teachers to retrospectively identify successes in their school activities. In the process of identifying actions that led to successful outcomes in schools, actionable knowledge is generated from tacit knowledge. This kind of knowledge may be generalised and widely implemented (Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2006).

A modified version of The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format asked participants to describe a vignette of a significant personal wellbeing experience in their work setting. Questions drawn from the Inquiry Format asked for local knowledge of the causes (people, roles, actions, context, location, time, etc.), resulting changes and outcomes, negative consequences, key contributing actions, and learning (for self and others). The research focus in the second part of the

wellbeing interview was purely on emic experience, data, meanings, and perspectives in context.

The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format was chosen because, as Sykes, Rosenfeld and Weiss (2006) note, it is logical to review successful initiatives for learnings that could influence future action. In the present study, the power of the technique derived from participants' memories of a real wellbeing experience, deconstructed and examined in the interview using the process of retelling and thinking through significant elements. The Inquiry Format assumes that practical, relevant knowledge exists 'in the field', and that researchers are able to discover and disseminate this knowledge to work settings via published accounts. In addition, the Inquiry Format has demonstrated ability to create leverage for change in participants' own thinking and behaviour. It does this in two ways. First, it models the practice of reflective thinking, and second, it provides quality local knowledge to promote intra-organisational learning and change (Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2006).

### **Developing Concepts**

A concept refers to the essential aspects of a specific phenomenon.

Theoretical material relating to concept development was outlined in Chapter 1.

Although phenomenography describes how to develop concepts from raw data, Goertz's (2006) approach was chosen because it is clearly and formally documented and respected in the literature. Both methods specify parallel steps, but for simplicity, only Goertz' method was outlined in Chapter 1 and here.

A concept has content and structure. The first 'product' of analysis is a set of content descriptions referred to as secondary-level dimensions. These are the constituents that play a central role in the development of hypotheses about, and explanations and mechanisms of, the phenomenon of work wellbeing (Maxwell, 2004). They enable the local concept of wellbeing to be operationalised and investigated (Bazeley, 2010). The structural relationships among the levels in a concept are important, as all elements together indicate the contours of local work wellbeing.



### ***Three level concepts***

Goertz' (2006) concepts are multidimensional and multilevel structures that usually have three levels: 'basic level', 'secondary-level dimensions', and 'indicator level'. The levels were outlined in Chapter 1 and demonstrated in Figure 1. Poles are usually referred to as positive and negative, but in this study, poles did not consistently represent a positive or negative position. Hence, it was decided to refer to poles as high or low where possible. Where high and low did not apply, the poles were differentiated by the relevant subgroups.

The basic level names the wellbeing concept in the local work setting. Secondary-level dimensions supply the theoretical links between the abstract or basic level, and the concrete or indicator level of the concept.

Indicator data are derived directly from interview transcripts. They guide decisions about which aspects of local phenomena, people, or instances to include in the concept. Indicators are usually provided as statements that elaborate aspects of dimensions. Operationally, they guide researchers about what to include in questionnaires or scales, since they are "empirical data... the variables that are actually coded for and form the bases of quantitative measures" (p 7).

### **Data collection**

Data collection involved individual, semi structured interviews in two work settings. The first step in data collection involved finding research sites.

### **Selecting work settings**

It was decided that two research sites, one public and one private sector, could reveal somewhat different experiences of wellbeing (Macklin, Smith, & Dollard, 2006; Strathern, 2000). Both organisations provided professional services, albeit of different types. The private sector organisation was called 'Property', and the public sector organisation was 'Finance'.

### ***Property***

Property, the first research site, was a small to medium size organisation employing around 100 professional, technical, and administrative staff. It was an internal consultancy division of a property development company. The business was

managed as an autonomous profit centre. Property's services included: feasibility assessments, design, building support, and value engineering. Property had offices in several Australian cities. The researcher had no prior contact with Property or its parent organisation.

The study took almost a year to begin, despite early interest. Discussions with various employees and managers progressed slowly until the general manager agreed in-principle to proceed. Within a fortnight a signed letter of approval indicated that interviews could start in a few weeks. Permission was contingent on Property having access to findings from the study.

### ***Finance***

Finance was a public sector organisation. Agreement to conduct the research was predicated on no identifying background details being made available. The researcher had no prior contact with Finance, although two colleagues (who worked in the organisation) were influential in helping to gain approval.

### **Selecting participants**

Decisions about participant selection were driven by pragmatic concerns to minimise disruption to everyday work (Property) or employees' right to choose whether or not to participate (Finance).

In an ideal world, best practice processes to select participants would comprise the following five sequential steps: 1) Draft an email outlining the project and provide this to the general manager/senior manager, who would circulate it to employees under his name. 2) Send a separate email to all employees, inviting in principle expressions of interest to participate in the research. 3) Employees would reply directly to the researcher to ensure their privacy. 4) The researcher would send pre-interview information to interested employees. 5) If an employee was not selected for interview but wanted to participate, the researcher would interview the employee regardless of whether the additional data were needed.

This process did not eventuate in either work setting due to the need for pragmatic efficiency and the impact of time constraints. In both work settings, site representatives were appointed to recruit participants, maintain control of the process from an internal perspective, and minimise disruption to employees.

Employees were selected by the site representative (Property), or were invited by the site representative and subsequently agreed to participate (Finance). This opportunistic recruitment method provided a sufficient data set in both organisations.

The researcher conducted 16 one-off, individual interviews in Property (only 14 could be used) and 16 in Finance to ensure data saturation. This was reached when ten to twelve interviews had been completed in both sites. Saturation meant that no new ways of experiencing wellbeing in the respective work settings emerged from additional interviews (Orgill, 2007). Nevertheless, all selected participants were interviewed.

### ***Property***

The general manager sent an email (drafted by the researcher; see Appendix C) to sanction the study and call for volunteers, who were to respond to the researcher. It went to all Property staff in the state.

After three weeks of limited response the researcher requested help from the organisational site representative, who quickly recruited roughly equal numbers of males and females from various job functions. The representative allocated participants a date, time, and room for interview, and sent out the Information Letter for Participants. This process was streamlined and efficient. Employees were entirely comfortable with this method, none refused to participate, and all but a few arrived at the interview on time and well prepared. Interviews were completed within six weeks.

### ***Finance***

The organisational representative recruited participants, as the public sector organisation was laden with cultural protocols including respecting employees' right to decline participation. Finding enough participants took a long time due to a high refusal rate, and as a result, interviews spanned a period of five months. Some employee categories were under- or not represented in the data set, including senior managers and specialists.

## **Preparing to interview**

Two documents, the Information Letter to Participants and Consent Forms, were provided to participants prior to the interview.

### ***Information Letter to Participants***

The Information Letter to Participants (Appendix B) was emailed to participants prior to interview. It provided information about the purpose of the project, instructions on how to prepare for the interview, audio recording, ethics and confidentiality, feedback to the organisation, and researcher, supervisor and university contact details. The purpose of the project was described as “to develop an understanding of what wellbeing means, specifically in this organisation”.

Participants’ preparation for the interview was to choose eight pictures or images that each expressed a *different* feeling or thought about what wellbeing meant to them in the organisation. Participants had at least a week (and usually longer) to choose images (Chio & Fandt, 2007). As the researcher intended to collect and retain images, participants were asked not to bring any originals they wished to keep.

The Property version of the Information Letter was changed slightly for Finance at the latter’s request (see Appendix B).

### ***Consent Forms***

Consent forms (Appendix D) were emailed with the Information Letter. Participants signed two copies, one for themselves and one for the researcher, which was returned to the researcher at the interview.

### ***Testing the interview questionnaire***

A pilot study of the interview questions in Property and Finance was not undertaken, although an early format was trialled on four people in an unrelated organisation. Their feedback focused on the proposed questions, wording, how they interpreted the questions, and whether questions would provide the desired descriptive data. Changes were made to reduce the number of questions, increase clarity, and expand the focus of the interview.

## **Conducting interviews**

Individual interviews created a private context for participants to describe personal experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded. Recordings were supplemented with the researcher's notes about the participant's behaviour, comments, expressions, and emotional reactions, as well as the researcher's own responses to the interview.

All interviews began with signing consent forms, recording participant demographics, outlining the interview structure, and assuring confidentiality. This process took approximately five minutes. The interview then proceeded directly to data gathering. Participants' visual images inspired their descriptions of wellbeing, associations, memories, reflections, stories, desires, and experiences. Many participants had provided titles to express the theme of an image. Free-flowing reminiscences suggested that most participants felt comfortable being interviewed. Being able to position themselves at some distance from their descriptions through the use of images may have contributed to feeling comfortable. As Chio and Fandt (2007, p 488) noted, images provide "some psychological buffering as the self is not quite a part of the picture".

## ***Developing interview questions***

Version 1 of the questionnaire combined questions 1-17, adapted from ZMET, with questions 18-26, which were modified from The 'Learning from Past Success' Inquiry Format. Version 1 was used in Property for the first six interviews (see Appendix A).

Data analysis began as soon as interviews were transcribed, resulting in two significant changes to the first version of the questionnaire. The second version of the interview questionnaire was introduced from the seventh interview. Interpretive methods allow the investigator to adapt the research process if necessary. Richards (2005, p 11) noted, "[Q]ualitative enquiry is fluid and flexible. You will be able to change your design as you learn from the data."

It was apparent at this early stage of analysis that responses to questions 4-17 inclusive ('Elicit constructs' and 'Sensory images') contributed little to furthering understanding of wellbeing. As well, participants became impatient with these

questions in the interview, so it was decided to delete them after the sixth interview. Responses to these questions were not included in data analysis.

Another, more significant factor prompted a change to the interview questionnaire. During the first six interviews, participants raised a theme that had not been included. The theme referred to the 'dark side' of wellbeing. It was clear from participants' descriptions that they believed difficult or 'dark' personal experiences (e.g., disappointment, loss, setback, hardship, criticism, conflict, and failure) were potentially valuable in understanding the nature of wellbeing. From their accounts, the value of 'dark' experiences to wellbeing depended on how a person viewed and handled them. To explore the significance of this unanticipated perspective, a tripartite question was developed and introduced into the second (and final) version of the questionnaire from the seventh interview. Although neither the question nor the term 'dark side' were piloted, interviewees immediately and consistently understood its meaning. The use of 'dark' was part of the lingua franca at work. No interviewees requested clarification.

The new question below was used in the remaining Property, and all Finance, interviews:

4. Wellbeing could include the planned, structured, visible, nurturing aspects of an organisation. An opposite or 'darker' side may contain hidden, upsetting, and unplanned aspects of organising.
  - What is your experience of the darker side of Property/Finance?
  - What makes you feel bad, angry or sad here?
  - How do you deal with the darker side?

Adding this question meant that six fewer transcripts dealt with the dark side. However, answers to the questions enriched the data, and corroborated the bipolar nature of wellbeing by supplying more information about difficult aspects in work settings (Goertz, 2006).

In version two of the interview questionnaire, the number of questions was reduced to 13. Questions 1-3 were unchanged from version one, Q4 was the new question about the dark side, and questions 5-13 were renumbered from version one (see Appendix A). Therefore, all but six interviews covered the following aspects:

*Image description*

Participants described how each image related to their thoughts, feelings, and associations about the meaning of wellbeing in their work setting. The researcher probed the meanings of visual metaphors. Participants explored and expanded descriptions of their stories, experiences, attitudes, values, and feelings.

#### *Absent & opposite images*

Participants described image/s they would like to have brought, but could not find, in order to surface additional ideas. They imagined and described images of the opposite of wellbeing. The researcher probed the meaning of absent and opposite images.

#### *Dark side*

Participants described experiences they considered to contain hidden, upsetting, and unplanned aspects of organising, and how they dealt with 'dark' experiences of wellbeing in the organisation. It was acknowledged that wellbeing comprised negative aspects.

#### *Vignette of personal wellbeing experience*

Participants described in detail one significant personal experience of wellbeing in their organisation. Aspects investigated included: who was involved; what generated the experience of wellbeing (people, roles, actions taken, beneficiaries, context, location, time, other information); any changes and outcomes that occurred (in them, the situation, and/or the organisation) from the experience; any negative consequences or costs of the experience; the most important actions contributing to the experience; their own and others' learning about wellbeing from the experience; and how they would describe their understanding of wellbeing after having participated in the research interview.

#### *Final questions and close*

The researcher solicited final questions about the research process, plus any additional comments, thanked the participant, and ended the interview.

The technique of using images allowed participants to describe personally significant wellbeing experiences intimately. As a result, data were nuanced, reflective, and relevant. Preparation for interviews was adequate, and most participants appeared to be quite emotionally engaged in the process. At the end,

many commented that they had gained from the opportunity for personal reflection during the process of preparing for and participating in the interview.

### **Ethical considerations**

The researcher's stance was consistent with a deliberative, inclusive approach to social research (Howe, 2009), and values were aligned with a politically democratic view of research. This recognised participants as active, informed interlocutors in the process. The researcher was not positioned as an expert or authority in interviews.

### **Informed consent**

All intending participants were informed about the study in the Information Letter to Participants (Appendix B), and again at the beginning of the interview when they were invited to raise any personal concerns about participating. Participants completed formal consent documentation (see Appendix D) in accordance with the University's Human Research Ethics Committee requirements. One Property participant subsequently withdrew after interview, citing fears that data might reveal their identity. The participant's data was destroyed and images were returned.

### **Support for participants**

The question of providing psychological support for participants was considered at ethics approval stage, but the research questionnaire was thought to be unlikely to pose a significant risk. This proved to be correct. Interviewees spontaneously raised the issue of the dark side of wellbeing at work and used the research interview as an opportunity to talk about these experiences. The researcher checked that all participants felt psychologically safe at the conclusion of each interview. No one claimed or appeared to be negatively affected by raising 'dark' issues. On the contrary, several participants commented they appreciated the chance to reflect on 'dark' experiences. Interviewees also had the right to withdraw from the research process at any time during or afterwards. One person took this up, citing fear their responses could be recognised by management. As noted previously



the record of this interview, plus all supporting material (e.g., images, interviewer notes) was subsequently destroyed.

### **Confidentiality**

Measures were implemented to ensure confidentiality. Despite the researcher's intentions, it was not possible or even culturally appropriate in either organisation to maintain complete confidentiality about who was being interviewed, as meeting rooms had glass walls, and colleagues in the vicinity could see who was participating. However, strategies to protect confidentiality included not discussing interviews with site representatives or other employees, and ensuring feedback to senior managers did not disclose participant details or data. This was easy to achieve, as phenomenographic data is aggregated and individual identities are submerged in a wider conceptual perspective. Results thus provided no trace of individual contributors.

The researcher is a registered psychologist in Australia, aware of and bound by requirements regarding confidentiality. All interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analysed by the researcher. No names were included in transcripts.

Audio recordings were stored securely in the researcher's office on several external hard drives. Transcribed data were kept on the researcher's laptop, backed up on external hard drives as well as online file recovery. Hard and soft copies were password protected and stored securely in a locked filing cabinet. Hard and soft copy backups were also password protected and stored securely in the supervisor's university office.

### **Data preparation**

#### **Creating data records**

Data sources included a variety of documents: interview transcriptions, the researcher's reflective notes from interviews and during transcription, memos, records of interactions with contacts in Property and Finance, and unsolicited emails that clarified or expanded some participants' comments in interviews. NVivo software was used to facilitate the process of identifying themes from interview transcriptions. Participants' images were not uploaded into NVivo as data records, although they were scanned into separate files on the laptop to maintain soft copies.

A manila file was created for each participant's set of data (transcription, images, interview questionnaire with the researcher's notes, and copies of any email communications).

### **Transcription**

The researcher transcribed all interviews in full, using two computers simultaneously; one had voice replay software, and the other had recording software. The setup was: a Macintosh computer used Audacity, "free, open source software for recording and editing sounds" (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) to replay interviews through a single earpiece inserted into the researcher's ear. At the same time the researcher repeated the entire interview word for word through a headset microphone linked to a PC using Nuance Preferred Dragon Naturally Speaking v10 software.

The method efficiently generated interview transcriptions in word document format with around 80% accuracy first time. When an interview was fully transcribed, it was saved as a single word document. The entire recorded interview was replayed again to make corrections to the transcription document. A third check involved re-reading the whole transcription to ensure that spelling and punctuation reflected the participant's intentions as best as could be determined. Some minor changes were made at this stage. Transcription began as soon after the interview as possible, often the next day. Interviews were transcribed in order of data collection.

### **Data analysis**

No attempt to theorise work wellbeing was made prior to commencing interviews. Observations of participants' interactions outside of interviews were not used to supplement interview data. Participants' reflections, ideas and statements about subjective, local experiences *they classified as wellbeing* defined the boundaries of the concept in each work setting.

The researcher coded all data. However, this did not compromise analytical quality. Coding was discussed regularly with Bazeley, principal supervisor at the time. Ultimately, however, all coding decisions were made in accordance with the researcher's understanding of the data and the purposes those data were intended to serve. Validity lies in whether the coding and resulting analyses generated

insightful, meaningful, useful results (Bazeley, 2013). Feedback from both research sites demonstrated this was indeed the case, indicating a single coder was not a limitation of the analysis.

The process of analysing data began as soon as each interview was transcribed. NVivo versions 7 and 8 facilitated the analysis of transcriptions. In Property and Finance, the first analytic step was to examine the set of interview transcripts for ideas about wellbeing. Ideas were iteratively arranged into emerging categories of related themes in NVivo (Bazeley, 2013; Richards, 2005).

The initial framing of instructions in the Information Letter to Participants made data reduction relatively efficient. Following ZMET protocol, the Information Letter to Participants (Appendix B) requested participants to select images capturing eight *different* aspects of what *wellbeing meant for them* in their current organisation (Brew, 2001). Prior to interview, participants had consequently oriented themselves to categorising their personal thoughts and feelings about wellbeing in the work context, and sought to express their ideas in visual images of their own choosing. Many participants provided a title to express the image's central theme, e.g., challenge, comfort, camaraderie/giving back to community, ethics/values, achievement, freedom, security, comfortably remunerated, quality, keeping busy, teamwork to achieve for greater good, friends among diverse backgrounds, innovation welcome, fun in the office, aging, teaching-learning, routine, happiness, praise, and friendship. Therefore, raw textual data were loosely pre-arranged in participant-provided, thematic chunks of image-related description. In the second part of the interview, their reflections were grounded in the details of historical accounts of actual wellbeing experiences they had encountered in the work setting.

Svensson (1997, p 162) noted, "the most significant characteristics of the approach [to data reduction] are the aiming at categories of description, the open exploratory form of data collection and the interpretative character of the analysis of data". Descriptions of categories and themes were drawn from textual data; they were not imposed a priori from pre-determined ideas about wellbeing. 'Bracketing' personal views during data analysis was necessary at every stage in order to stay close to participants' intended meanings (Ashworth & Lucas, 2000; Walsh, 2000).

Despite the request for eight images representing eight different aspects of the meaning of wellbeing, most participants managed about four separate aspects, although just two or three aspects were quite common. Several images in a participant's collection often represented slight variations on the same theme, thereby providing a rounded view. This close focus on wellbeing from different angles provided data about aspects of significance, meaning, context, behaviour, values, destructive elements, consequences, and other variables embedded in their understanding of the topic. Several participants noted the duplication of themes in their set of images. The limited number of aspects overall was reflected in the final concepts, where each dimension contained related material that was reasonably differentiated from the content of other dimensions.

### **Shifting from individual to group view**

When all individual transcripts had been thematically analysed, the selected quotes from transcripts formed a thematic data set about wellbeing in the entity of the organisation. At this point, attention shifted from individual subjects and their abstracted quotes to a holistic view of the meanings in the set of quotes in each category. Individual perspectives were abandoned in favour of a focus on "the 'pool of meanings' discovered in the data" (Akerlind, 2005, p 325). Individual perspectives were thus reduced to a system-wide view.

Reducing data in each category required many iterations and comparisons, sorting/re-sorting data, interpreting and reflecting on contextualised meanings, and continuously developing/redeveloping categories. It involved reducing duplication or overlap, splitting categories that contained too many ideas, and clarifying diverse nuances embedded in small textual chunks and re-assigning them to suitable categories (Liamputtong, 2009). Property data were analysed three times from different starting points. The first analysis began with themes derived from images, and categories were developed from image-related themes. A second analysis started with accounts of wellbeing experiences (questions 5-13 of the interview questionnaire) and moved back to image descriptions. The final analysis began with images again. The benefits of this were that data were analysed using two different sets of initial categories. This process tested the structural robustness of the

developing framework. All analyses aligned closely, inviting the conclusion that this way of understanding the data was reasonable and justifiable.

Any limitations in the analysis reflected personal perspectives and biases associated with the researcher, rather than the procedure itself. Although researchers make every attempt to bracket their personal views to let the data speak, ultimately this can only approximate interviewees' meanings or intentions. This problem is sometimes referred to in interpretive research as the "double hermeneutic because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of what is happening to [her or himself]" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p 3). The current procedures are the best available, but all human minds have idiosyncratic blind spots that fail to see what other researchers might in a set of data.

Data reduction in Finance was undertaken twice. In the first instance, it was analysed without reference to Property results that had been completed more than a year before. Finance management initially requested speedy feedback on the concept findings. A second analysis was undertaken a year later when the Finance results chapter was being written. Greater analytic refinement was needed and the re-analysis resulted in improved clarity and precision.

The term 'category' in phenomenography means the same as 'secondary-level dimension' in Goertz' approach. Henceforth, 'secondary-level dimension' is used to reflect that Goertz' method was used as the basis of concept development. Phenomenography and Goertz's (2006) approach to concept development agree on the primary criteria for assessing the quality of data reduction. Akerlind (2005, p 323) summarised these as:

1. All dimensions reveal "something distinctive about a way of understanding" a phenomenon;
2. Dimensions "are logically related, typically as a hierarchy of structurally inclusive relationships" (or, in Goertz' terminology, a structured concept);
3. Concepts "are parsimonious... the critical variation in experience observed in the data [is] represented by a set of as few categories [dimensions] as possible".

## **Developing local concepts: Property and Finance**

### ***Property***

The analytic process began by sorting actual interview statements (indicators) into thematic categories that provided the content base for secondary-level dimensions. NVivo 7 software was used to assist in identifying and sorting indicators, and developing dimensions. Although participants had named broad themes in the interview, a high level of rigour was needed to develop non-overlapping dimensions. An early version of results reduced more than 80 thematic categories to eleven dimensions, called (at the high poles): Goal achievement, Collegiate affiliation, Social affiliation, Family incorporated, Principled behaviour, Freedom, Respect, Recognition, Career opportunity, Physical comfort, and Equanimity. Further iterations of analysis reduced the number of dimensions to six. Participants' positive and negative comments about aspects of wellbeing indicated that dimensions were bipolar. That is, each dimension was a continuum from high to low; a mixture of positive and negative aspects of wellbeing experiences constituted each dimension. Further, it was quite clear that participants held personal, mental maps about how wellbeing was constructed. Analysing personal experiences was the transformational process that produced the abstract concept.

Indicators were linked through dimensions to the basic level concept. This ensured that the concept was based on subjective, experiential data. All indicators in each secondary-level dimension were substitutable. Indicators can provide the content for future quantitative measures e.g., questionnaires or surveys. This is the method of operationalising the basic level and secondary-level dimensions (Goertz, 2006).

### ***Finance***

After transcribing interviews, NVivo 8 software was used to help categorise themes. No prior coding categories were imposed on the raw data. The first analysis phase identified ten secondary-level dimensions: Growing, Accomplishing, Restoring balance, Bouncing back, Collegiality, Cooperating, Respectful conduct, Recognising performance, Security, and Organisational vitality. With further refinement, the

number of dimensions was reduced to six. Initially, the basic level was called Satisfaction with Work Life at the positive pole.

As explained earlier, Finance data was re-analysed a year later when the results chapter was being written in order to further clarify the local concept.

The final versions of Property and Finance concepts are described in the next two chapters.

## Chapter 5: Work wellbeing in Property

Findings from Property are presented in this chapter. First, brief descriptions of the data context and how the concept of wellbeing in Property was developed from interview data are provided. This is followed by a detailed description of all concept elements.

The concept reveals how employees inside the Property work setting understood one feature, work wellbeing, as a multidimensional and nuanced experience. The findings demonstrate that the approach taken in the study was an effective way of discerning a local concept of work wellbeing, as well as the factors affecting wellbeing in this context.

It is important to recognise that the study set out to conceptualise wellbeing in Property. This chapter, therefore, is purely a description of wellbeing in context. It does not address the question of whether wellbeing 'existed' in the Property setting, or how to intervene to 'improve' wellbeing. These and other questions are dealt with in Chapters 7 and 8, where the two concepts are integrated, issues relating to the concepts are discussed, and implications of the study are explored.

Throughout this chapter, some longer direct quotes are provided to illustrate core aspects of dimensions. Each indented quote is followed by an identifier, shown as P + a number ranging from 1 to 14. 'P' indicates the participant was from Property, and the number indicates the person's position in an alphabetical list of participants' first names.

### Data context

Property was a private sector, medium sized consultancy offering architectural design and technical expertise to its parent company, a commercial property developer. The company had a stated, proactive commitment to employee and community wellbeing, e.g., supporting employees who chose to contribute to local charity initiatives in the neighbouring area. Internally, the company's efforts in relation to maximising wellbeing were intended to make the workplace as comfortable and inviting as possible for employees and visitors. This was realised in the physical office environment and an egalitarian organisational structure, and many other initiatives including a focus on workplace safety.



During the data-gathering period, the researcher observed the following features of the internal environment.

### **Work setting**

The organisational structure appeared to be quite flat. The layout of workstations did not appear to differentiate hierarchical importance by providing special views, privilege, or access to employees with high status. There were virtually no typical indications of prestige (e.g. private offices) attached to senior management roles. The only exception was that two senior staff each had a small meeting table near their workstations, which were in other respects the same as other employees' workspaces. Managers were seated within their team environment.

All employees shared the same facilities, e.g., lunch areas, access to food and drinks, meeting rooms. Transparency was the norm in interactions, daily activities, and meetings that were visible to everyone in the vicinity. The non-hierarchical social environment was reflected in friendly, helpful, and occasionally engaging (humor, teasing, etc.) interactions at all levels. Employees seemed to be busy working on solitary and/or group tasks, moving fluidly from one to the other as required. The workplace had a vibrant 'buzz' of focused, mostly harmonious, self-directed productive energy, without being frantic.

The office environment was elegant, purpose-built, well appointed, functional, and delightful, with a high sustainability rating. The benefits of the work setting included spectacular water views, television, and newspapers, among other features. A combination of shared open plan and private spaces provided employees and visitors with a congenial work setting.

### **Participants**

Sixteen semi-structured interviews were conducted in meeting rooms at Property's Sydney office. Female participants (n=7) ranged in age from 24 – 49 (mean = 34.8 years, *SD* = 10.47 years). Male participants (n=9) ranged between 36 – 57 years (mean = 46 years, *SD* = 6.38 years). Property employed more males than females.

Participants across the organisation were loosely selected on the basis of workload, availability, gender, and maximising work role diversity. The organisational representative used her discretion and knowledge of people's workload to opportunistically choose suitable participants, with roughly equal numbers of males and females.

Data from two females could not be used. One withdrew consent after interview, citing concerns that her responses might identify her, although it was explained that no individual data would be available to the organisation or be identifiable in the final concept. Her images were subsequently returned to her and the audio recording erased. The other interview was lost due to the inexplicable failure of both recording devices. Therefore, a total of 14 interviews were analysed to develop the Property concept.

Two subgroups were identified within the set of participant data. Subgroup data are presented at the end of this chapter to highlight the importance of variations in some dimensions of the concept. The features defining the subgroups were fatherhood and migrant background. These significant participant characteristics provided comparative viewpoints that helped to distinguish the dimensions of the concept. The impact of these subgroup features is described in detail in Chapter 7.

### **Interviews**

Individual Property interviews lasted around 1.25 hours and were held in private meeting rooms during the working day. All participants chose and brought images that depicted their perspectives on wellbeing. The semi-structured approach allowed participants to freely select the areas of greatest relevance to themselves, within the frame of the research focus and the time allowed. This freedom allowed a previously unrecognised aspect about the 'dark' side of wellbeing to emerge early in the Property interviews. It was a fortunate outcome; as a result of adjusting the interview questionnaire to incorporate the changes, concepts from both sites were arguably more complete.

## **Developing the concept**

The concept was developed only from participants' interview data. No other source material or contextual information was included in the analysis. The focus was foundational research and concept development using pure subjective data and interpretivist methods. Therefore, participant interviews supplied all content from which the concept was developed. As outlined in Chapter 4, the Information Letter to Participants (see Appendix B) gave participants the freedom and responsibility to nominate their significant wellbeing experiences in the organisational context, using visual metaphors and verbal description. This ensured the concept reflected a specific, contextualised view of wellbeing in the work setting.

## **Concept type**

The concept was developed through a typical interpretive analytic process using NVivo software to record the categories developed from transcribed data, as described previously. After establishing the final set of dimensions at the secondary level, the question of the type of concept was addressed. As outlined in Chapter 1, Goertz described three prototypical concept types: necessary and sufficient conditions (falling at one pole of the 'concept type' continuum), family resemblance (falling at the opposite pole), and a hybrid structure comprising elements of both (falling somewhere in the 'grey zone' of the continuum between the two poles). A decision about the Property concept 'type' was part of the development process. The question of type was addressed by counting the number of participants who spontaneously referred to each secondary-level dimension. The count showed that all participants referred to three of the six dimensions. For the remaining three dimensions, 13/14 participants referred to two, and 12/14 referred to one. This meant that all secondary-level dimensions that constituted the basic level were very close to the necessary and sufficient conditions pole of the 'concept type' continuum, and conversely, very distant from the family resemblance pole. Although a hybrid structure was considered initially, the count convincingly indicated a necessary and sufficient conditions concept structure.

Therefore, the Property concept consisted of six necessary and sufficient (i.e., non-substitutable) secondary-level dimensions. The term 'non-substitutable'

indicated that all six dimensions were necessary, and they were also sufficient to describe the basic level. A dimension could not be exchanged for any other dimension, and all six dimensions need to be present for local wellbeing to exist in the work setting. Non-substitutability is represented by AND, which is indicated by \* in Fig 5.1. 'AND' showed that the presence of each dimension was required, and that other dimensions were not required to describe work wellbeing in Property.

### **Domains**

Data analysis revealed the presence of three unexpected domains that were integral to the concept. The three domains were Self, Relationships, and Principles. Domains defined a dimension's perspective or orientation in relation to wellbeing. That is, when participants were reflecting on their experiences of wellbeing, implicitly they were considering those experiences from one of three vantage points: what they liked, preferred, wanted, or valued 'for me' (Self); 'with others' (Relationships); and 'from the organisation called Property' (Principles).

It was decided to call these vantage points 'domains' to indicate their perspectival character. The 'Self' domain captured the collective set of personal values in relation to the implicit question, 'What do I want/prefer/value for myself in this organisation?' The 'Relationships' domain captured the collective set of interpersonal values in relation to the implicit question, 'How do I want/prefer to relate with people in this organisation?' The 'Principles' domain expressed the collective set of values in relation to the implicit question, 'How do I want/prefer Property to behave towards employees and the wider community/society?' All dimensions fitted into Self, Relationships, or Principles domains, and the structure of domains was arranged into a hierarchy with Self at the lower end, Relationships in the middle, and Principles at the higher end.

### **High and low poles**

The question, 'how much of a dimension is needed to experience wellbeing?' must be considered. Dimensions are bipolar. High-level poles, and their associated evaluations, described systemically desirable aspects of a secondary-level dimension. Low poles, with associated descriptive accounts, underlined the undesirable dimensional aspects that contributed to constraining, reducing, or sabotaging the

experience of wellbeing in the system. In a necessary and sufficient conditions concept, high levels on all dimensions indicate that wellbeing is broadly present in the local work setting.

In some cases, a dimension may be asymmetrical, e.g., health and pay (Goertz, personal communication). People in good health may not think about health as important to their wellbeing, but if they become ill it moves higher up the list of desired dimensions. If employees are well paid in comparison with the industry average, pay may not seem especially relevant. However, if employees' financial needs increase significantly, or pay cuts are implemented during an economic crisis, it will most likely move to a more prominent position. Therefore, health- and financially-related dimensions tend to be critical when they are low, but less important when they are satisfactory or high.

### **Interpreting the concept diagram and descriptions**

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to describing the *local concept of work wellbeing*. A detailed description of the process of developing the concept was outlined in Chapter 4, Methodology. The Property concept is shown over the page in Figure 5.1.

The concept diagram is a single page schematic of the descriptive elements constituting work wellbeing in Property. Each element – basic level, secondary-level dimensions, and indicators – contributes to how work wellbeing is understood systemically. The basic level describes the local conceptualisation of work wellbeing, as well as how it is experienced at each pole. Secondary-level dimensions depict the necessary and sufficient constituents of the basic level, as well as how they are experienced. Indicators are the raw data from which dimensions are derived.

Therefore, when the reader shifts from a focus on the concept diagram into descriptions of each level, it is important to recall that all elements together elucidate the *local form of work wellbeing*. The apparent simplicity of the concept diagram belies the detail, discerned from interview data, that constitutes the 'flesh and blood' of wellbeing in Property.

## THREE-DOMAIN CONCEPTS OF WORK WELLBEING

### PROPERTY: COLLABORATIVE PRODUCTIVITY

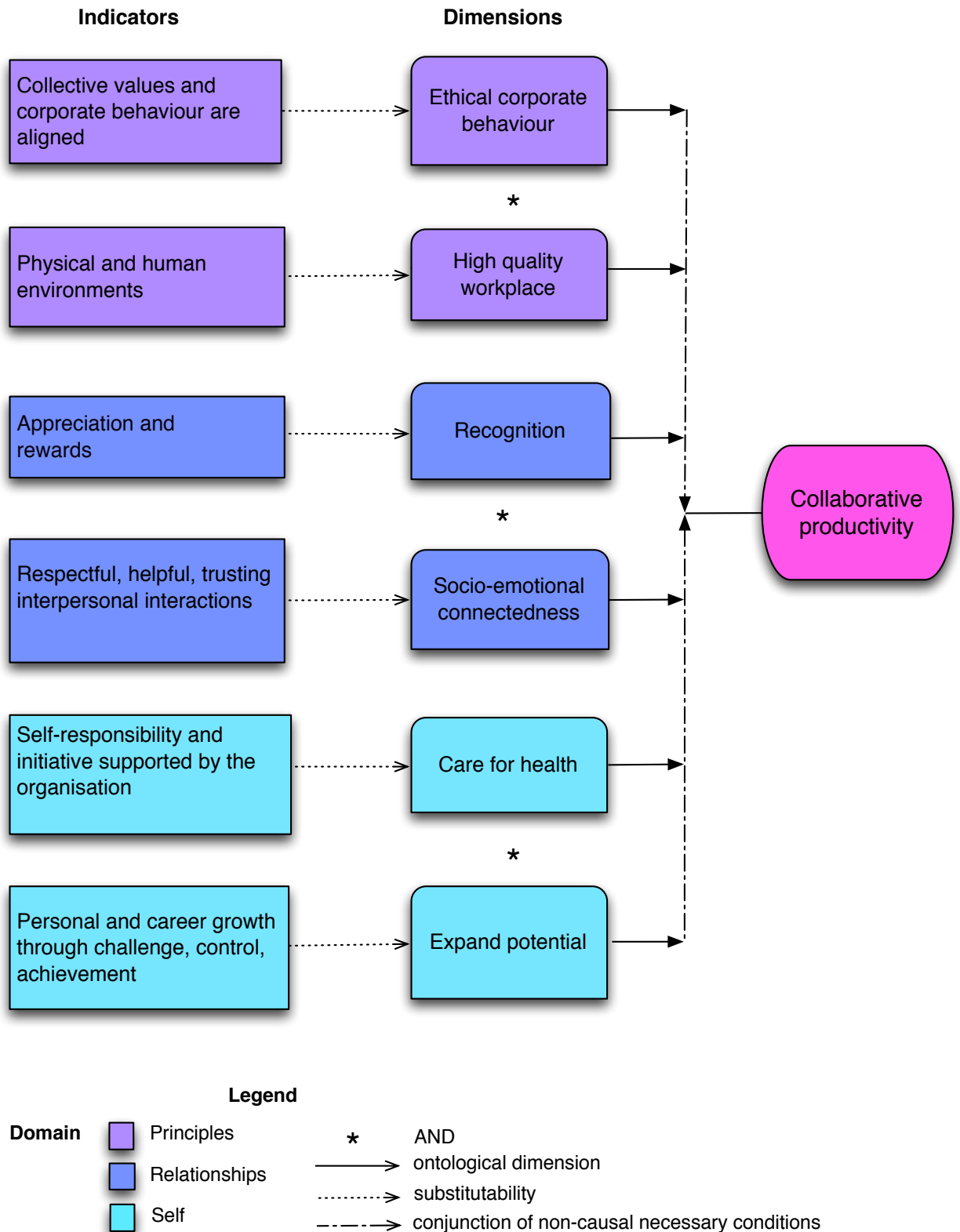


Figure 5.1

## General description of the concept

The basic level of work wellbeing in Property was conceptualised as *Collaborative Productivity*.

Six secondary-level dimensions were arranged in the Self, Relationships, and Principles domains. Dimensions in the Self-domain were *Expand Potential*, and *Care for Health*. Dimensions in the Relationships domain were *Socio-emotional Connectedness*, and *Recognition*. The Principles domain included *High Quality Workplace*, and *Ethical Corporate Behaviour*.

Detailed descriptions are provided below for each dimension. In Figure 5.1, the solid arrow linking dimensions to the basic level shows that dimensions are ontologically sufficient to describe Collaborative Productivity in Property. The broken arrow shows that dimensions do not cause Collaborative Productivity, although all are necessary elements in its existence.

Indicators are the content bases of each dimension. All indicators are substitutable as shown by the dotted arrows linking indicator boxes to secondary-level dimensions. A pool of representative indicators for each dimension is shown in Appendix E.

Note that no attempt was made to assess the level to which work wellbeing existed in Property. This study simply set out to describe the elements and structure of a group level/systemic feature called work wellbeing in Property.

Throughout this chapter and the next, words in double quotation marks (“xx”) and longer quotations set apart in smaller font are taken directly from participants’ transcripts. These quotes represent an accurate reflection of a collective voice or view on a particular aspect. Words in single quotation marks reflect the author’s interpretive voice.

## Basic level

It was a difficult task to define work wellbeing in Property, due to the inherent variability in human values and preferences. This awareness was expressed in different ways:

It's very hard to articulate a sense of wellbeing, and exactly what it is. I mean, it could encompass so many things, and trying to narrow it down is hard. (P2)

Wellbeing is about enjoyment. (P4)

I think we all could learn from others what they mean by wellbeing, because the only given, or truth, that I know is for everybody, everything is different. (P14)

Ultimately, work wellbeing in Property was seen as a co-creation between employees and the organisation. It was understood to be distinct from uses of the term 'wellbeing' in different contexts, such as economic wellbeing, freedom from stress, psychological wellbeing, health, happiness, or employee engagement.

The conceptualisation of work wellbeing in Property was 'Collaborative Productivity'. This attribute named the high pole of the basic level continuum. At the opposite end, the low pole was 'Self-interested Isolation'. Wellbeing comprised emotional experiences of contentment, effort, satisfaction, comfort, output, performance, and enjoyment in the work setting. The structure and focus of work roles, challenging activities, the human environment, and the physical setting were factors affecting local work wellbeing:

People's work, no matter what people say, is inextricably linked to their wellbeing. What they do, not just what they do, how they do it, how other people around them perform and do what they need to do and provide what they need to provide, is totally and inextricably linked to how they feel about themselves and what they do. So people can have all the hobbies that they like and do whatever they like on the weekends or at night, but inevitably, working people are defined by their work. And if they don't feel good about it, if they don't feel more than good about it, if they don't feel that not only are they good at what they do but their organisation is good at what it does and that everything in between them and their organisation is good as well, then you're not at an optimal level of wellbeing. And then they can feel good about themselves and then they can cope with everything else in their life. (P13)

### **High pole: Collaborative Productivity**

Collaborative Productivity in Property required a high level of output-oriented, focused, helpful, supportive contribution from everyone involved in a piece of work. This included working in a collaboratively productive way in client briefings,



when analysing requirements, designing solutions, and delivering requisite recommendations, professional services, and/or advice to clients within strict deadlines. Collaboration included productive teamwork and high individual performance/output across internal and external organisational boundaries.

Collaborative, productive effort and output occurred when results on dimensions in the three domains of Self, Relationships and Principles were at or close to the high poles. This meant there were sufficient opportunities in Property for personal and professional growth and achievement; a reasonably healthy balance between work and personal life; and an environment of human interaction characterised by respect, trust, friendliness, cooperation, and recognition. Collaborative Productivity was also predicated on the organisation representing the values embedded in the Principles domain, including supplying and maintaining a High Quality Workplace, and displaying Ethical Corporate Behaviour.

#### **Low pole: Self-interested Isolation**

Self-interested Isolation described the selfish and self-centred pursuit of personal financial, material, or other gains and advantages. At the low pole, behaviour was often secretive, uncommunicative, and withdrawn, with an almost complete focus on individual needs rather than collaborative achievement. Employees avoided interaction with colleagues by emotionally cutting-off or hiding in the background at work. Some ignored their families and associated responsibilities. The low pole also expressed disappointment, particularly about personal needs not being met at work. Additional aspects associated with Self-interested Isolation included low capacity for necessary teamwork or hard work; workaholism, procrastination or timeserving; and idiosyncratic interpretations of reality.

#### **Secondary-level dimensions**

Secondary-level dimensions linked basic and indicator levels. Dimensions provided a *theoretical foundation for the basic level concept* of Collaborative Productivity. Six dimensions comprised the domains of Self, Relationships, and Principles.

## Self domain

The 'Self' domain captured collective values in relation to one implicit question that participants asked themselves when reflecting on wellbeing in Property: 'What do I want/prefer/value for myself in this organisation?' This domain comprised the dimensions of Expand Potential, and Care for Health, as indicated in Figure 5.2.

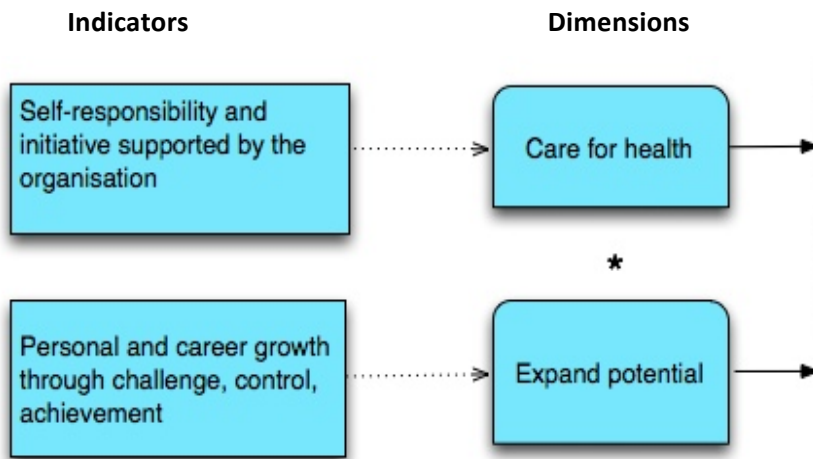


Figure 5.2: Property Self domain dimensions

### ***Expand Potential (high pole)***

There was overwhelming agreement that personal and career growth, development, achievement, challenge, and realising one's potential were fundamental to work wellbeing in Property. Clear expectations about task goals, and having enough challenge, autonomy, and opportunities for personal achievement helped to Expand Potential. These interconnected aspects are described in detail.

#### Achievement

High achievement was a core aspect of expanding potential. For many employees, work wellbeing and achievement were synonyms: "wellbeing at work is completely wrapped up in the work itself and achieving at that work." Succeeding on a difficult project increased employees' pride and confidence. It also satisfied the collective desire for the organisation to benefit commercially from employees' high levels of effort, competence, and achievement. It seemed that most employees

wanted to succeed. “Good work is expected”, but significant achievements, on the other hand, were rare, demanding considerable intellectual work. “[A] big challenge and an outstanding solution is special.” Memories of big successes sustained employees through difficult times on other projects.

#### Clear expectations

Tasks, goals, and performance expectations needed to be very clear to ensure work wellbeing. Employees needed to know what was expected of them in each area of work. With specific responsibilities and stated objectives, employees could apply their skills, experience, and knowledge.

#### Learning

Challenging work was needed to ensure that learning and development continued. Being “thrown a challenge” was “fun”. Technical specialisation was a “passion” and a source of intellectual stimulation. Employees described the process of professional development as iterative. There were often periods of intense discomfort followed by relative ease when mastery was achieved. Gaining mastery or going through a rapid growth period was a more manageable emotional experience when employees had enough support from colleagues, supervisors, and managers. It helped to have access to training, mentoring, feedback, help, advice, and encouragement to reduce the anxiety associated with learning. Overall, having support, with a “safety net” of professional input when necessary, balanced the feeling of being in “free fall” during a learning phase. Optimism was a helpful mindset for achieving success.

It was hard to keep up to date professionally. There was very little time during the working day to maintain current knowledge of codes, regulations, and innovative developments. Inevitably, some work was completed in the evening, at home, or on weekends. Most learning occurred on the job, although this was often seen as a two edged sword.

#### *Time*

Learning required time to properly think tasks through and mentally absorb new knowledge. Enjoying challenges was predicated on having time to plan how to

do tasks well, and a realistic rather than frantic pace. Although deadlines were inevitable, “working in a hurry does not generate the same quality of developmental experience”. Dealing with challenges needed “balance, not rushing or pressure or stress, but rather good organisation and planning.” Time, therefore, was an essential element of learning and achieving. Without adequate time to absorb and integrate new material, the quality of an experience of learning, a peak achievement, or a high demand project was compromised.

Employees wanted to exercise a degree of preference in how to carry out tasks. Allowing employees a reasonable level of choice and flexibility in deciding how to undertake the work contributed to their professional growth.

### Autonomy

Autonomy was a core attribute of expanding career potential. Choice and control were essential to having autonomy. Employees sought the freedom to exercise personal initiative, and to have personal control over how they managed tasks. Expanding one’s potential was described as being able to live one’s chosen passions or ‘dreams’ while being fairly safely contained within, and supported by, the wider ‘dream’ of the organisation’s purpose:

[Property is] not gender, position or age-related so much as what you have to say and how you can contribute, and there’s space for you if you’ve got something to say and you want to contribute. (P8)

The freedom to take personal initiative provided many possible opportunities for innovation, adaptation, problem solving, organising, managing, and developing mastery. Having a manager’s trust and belief in employees’ ability to succeed was crucial. Employees considered feedback was an essential component in growth, regardless of whether the feedback was positive or negative. Managers’ comments enabled employees to sustain their confidence levels, keep trying, and maintain productivity, and it reassured them that managers were interested in their progress.

It was important to have control over work tasks and related deadlines. This reduced stress and increased on-job learning. In the Property environment, employees assumed that being stretched was inevitable. However, having personal

control enabled people to structure the work environment and to moderate workload pressure with some occasional downtime. Delegated control was also a signal that managers trusted people to succeed. The universal preference for personal autonomy in their work was captured in the following:

[The Manager said] 'Here's a description of what we want. Can you go away and think about it and put something together for us and then we'll talk about it later?' So, I feel like I've got options to go about doing it in my own way and then coming up with a solution and I really like that aspect of things. I don't like being prescribed: you have to do it this way and follow this set of steps... Yes, just being able to do things your own way and not having someone look over your shoulder every five seconds and making sure you're doing it right. (P9)

### ***Constrict Potential (low pole)***

Constrict Potential resulted from unclear expectations about what was expected of employees, and/or insufficient opportunities for challenge, autonomy, or achievement. Constricted potential led to significant emotional distress, including frustration, resentment, and apathy. Personal grief was expressed at the lack of achievement opportunities and the consequent reduction, over time, in self-confidence and beliefs about an employee's potential to learn and grow.

Management behaviour had a direct impact on constricting potential. Decisions, directives, and actions that were inconsistent or poorly thought through were the main cause of reduced opportunities for development. Where an environment of managerial control was too 'tight', or alternatively too unpredictable or 'chaotic', growth was severely limited. In these situations, employees were unable to focus properly on the task, as too much time was spent managing the resulting personal frustration as well as collective confusion and dysfunction. Inconsistent, disorganised management led to loss of personal control over tasks. Employees noted that high stress and considerable anger often resulted from such management behaviour.

### ***Care for Health (high pole)***

Caring for personal health was fundamental to work wellbeing, even though most employees reported enjoying a reasonable quality of physical and mental

health. Care for Health needed a mix of one's personal physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual resources to be found and used. Specific strategies included: engaging in leisure activities to keep fit and reduce stress; gaining management support during times of poor health or overload; showing personal initiative and responsibility for caring for oneself, and developing a mature perspective if adverse events like failure or ill health occurred.

#### Exercise and leisure

Employees found exercise and leisure activities enjoyable, refreshing, and satisfying. Many exercised during the day, either at the gym or walking/running outside. Exercise was clearly identified as reducing work-related physical and mental stress:

I generally go for a run and some exercises and that's when I tend to let a little bit of steam off. I do that by myself... It just gives me a chance to reflect on the day a little bit while I'm running around. (P3)

Many Property employees also had absorbing hobbies and serious passions outside work. These included playing music; home design and renovations; massage; sports including surfing, yoga, badminton, tennis, skiing, jogging, scuba diving; family activities; making furniture; travel; socialising; enjoying family pets; cooking; and family holidays. The value of leisure and health-related activities was seen in employees' physical and mental health, and this message was widely understood.

#### Management support

Many employees considered they needed high levels of physical and mental strength to handle the impact of heavy work demands on their health. If employees became sick, they occasionally needed extra assistance, in the form of understanding, help, and concessionary arrangements from managers. This also applied to being able to support a sick family member and attend work at flexible times for a period of time. Many found it confronting to ask for managers' assistance. They acknowledged it required intelligent self-responsibility and courage to ask for help:

It's a short-sighted way of thinking not to take responsibility for your own health. It's unsustainable... So I think sometimes it's your own responsibility to say, and not to feel like it means that you're incapable. But it means that you're quite brave to say, actually I don't think I can do all this stuff and if I do all this stuff I might make myself sick and it's going to make the problem even worse. (P10)

A range of measures was available to support employees in caring for their health. These were practical assistance for crises or emergencies, and included flexibility to leave early, arrive late, take time off, or work from home when ill; care for sick pets; arrange and/or attend funerals; manage difficult family situations such as divorce, or attend to personal issues in work time. As well, altered work hours were available. This included early start-early finish arrangements on a permanent basis for the purpose of meeting family needs. Notably, there was a requirement for reciprocal flexibility from employees to start early and/or work late during peak periods. Overall, managers supported reasonably well-functioning employees during life or health crises, emergencies, and in managing work life and family commitments.

Some low performing employees and those with poor personal resilience or ongoing, reduced capacity to function properly had less support. For example, a significant depression was likely to be an obstacle to continuing employment, unlike treatment for cancer. Management actively discouraged any notion of Property as a parental figure or a charity for employees.

#### Personal resources

It was apparent that employees needed reasonable overall health (and strategies to maintain it), as well as organisational support to care for their health. They also needed personal initiative, self-responsibility, and realism. Learning to be realistic about their capacities, negotiating unreasonable workload expectations, and asking for support when severe difficulties arose were important aspects of Care for Health. At a personal level, employees saw value in actively developing wisdom and an open minded, philosophical perspective on the undulations of work and life to help them handle situations. Other strategies included: maintaining optimism;

planning for the future in or outside of Property; thinking of alternative or improved ways of working; and proactively learning from failure. Many thought it was important to reflect on their work experiences to cultivate a mature, self-confident outlook. Confronting occasional disappointment, setbacks, and conflict, and putting difficulties into a wider perspective was part of caring for health:

It's only when you truly feel disappointment that you can be positive, or if you want to say happiness, positive feelings get accentuated that much more. By having been down here, the high sides are that much higher. (P7)

### ***Stress (low pole)***

Health was sometimes compromised by work induced Stress. Negative health outcomes included mental imbalance, illness, and family problems. Working in Property could be difficult due to tight deadlines; sustained, intense pressure; limited or non-existent work life balance; competing demands; interpersonal conflict; poor management; challenging projects; extended hours that precluded exercise or eating properly; and prolonged absence from families. A common experience was having “a lot of unrealistic pressure...and exhaustion”. Stressful conditions were “completely frazzling”.

### **Relationships domain**

The ‘Relationships’ domain described collective values about the nature and quality of interpersonal contact in Property. It addressed a second implicit question that participants asked themselves when reflecting on work wellbeing: ‘How do I want or prefer to relate to people in the organisation?’ The domain contained two dimensions, Socio-emotional Connectedness, and Recognition, as shown in Figure 5.3.



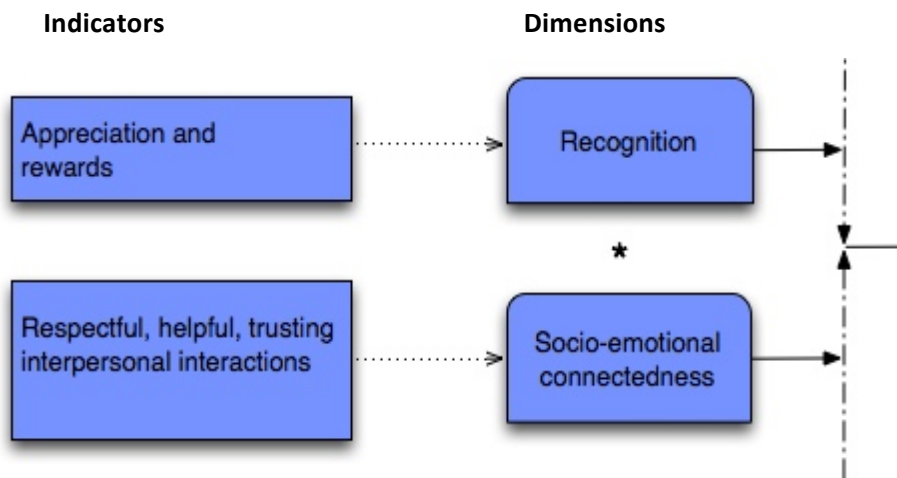


Figure 5.3: Property Relationships domain dimensions

In designing the workplace, the management team had sought to promote interaction and teamwork among employees and with the external community. A *relational human environment based on respect and trust was considered a cornerstone of wellbeing* in Property. A core belief was that if employees interacted effectively and were well looked after, work goals were more achievable. The company facilitated social contact as part of the pursuit of work objectives. Relational and other strategies met human needs in myriad ways, fostering teamwork, flexibility, efficiency, cohesiveness, and spontaneous interactions.

### ***Socio-emotional Connectedness (high pole)***

Socio-emotional Connectedness resulted from friendly interactions, low-key sociality, and giving and receiving emotional support in the course of everyday activities. Interpersonal contact at work was described as usually enjoyable and helpful. Typical office behaviour included giving and receiving encouragement, affirmation, and empathy; greeting colleagues in passing; enjoying easy camaraderie; good-natured joking; sharing ideas or a laugh; providing feedback; occasionally having lunch or a drink after work; and disclosing personal worries, successes, fears, and vulnerabilities to trusted colleagues. It was “quite easy” to initiate conversations with colleagues, resolve issues, ask for help, or share a social break. Colleagues were sometimes viewed as friends, although socialising usually

occurred at the workplace. Most people demarcated their private or social life from work.

Employees appeared to be mutually respectful, as the following quote indicated:

The way you treat people really matters... If you say one small thing to somebody or something nice or encouraging, I think that's really a positive thing to do. It makes you feel better as well. It's not just that you probably make that person feel better but it makes you feel like you've actually been able to do something nice in the day... I think quite a lot of people do have that caring nature and they do kind of look out for each other. (P10)

### Respect and trust

Respect and trust were core values. Respect was evident in showing common courtesy and consideration, making time for people, treating people equally despite differences in seniority or rank, and lending a hand if others were overloaded. The organisation also demonstrated reasonable respect for employees' family commitments and responsibilities.

Managers were reported to be quite trusting and generous in their support of employees' family needs. Trust was reciprocally evident in the shared commitment to achieving objectives. Employees who worked in effective teams felt that success was due in part to the trust among members as they pulled together to achieve project goals. Trust underpinned the mutual support and 'going the extra mile' that occurred in high functioning teams.

Team-building activities occurred in some teams on a semi-regular basis and out of the office. Employees felt team building created trust as colleagues related on more personal terms than was possible in the workplace. The activities were usually fun-filled (e.g., sailing, car racing), not too competitive, relaxing, and held outdoors. Team-building activities increased interpersonal comfort and confidence, and most likely, productivity:

[Team building] has taught me that human beings really do feel that they work better when they know the person behind the persona at work, when they have emotionally connected with and encountered the human being. (P13)

Managers who used team-building events to foster trust appeared to design and manage the events skilfully. They provided enough structure, direction, enjoyment, and freedom for interpersonal contact to unfold naturally and safely. Getting to know team members in relaxed conditions reduced interpersonal anxiety. “When you feel that people are okay you can be more open than if you are surrounded by people you are not quite happy or comfortable with.”

Property accommodated many different personality styles and personal needs in its support of gender, age, and cultural diversity. There was little overt discrimination. A wide variety of individual needs were respected, including training for elite sports, and the work setting was described as ‘family oriented’. Employees could attend major family events in work hours if necessary. Personal milestones (e.g., birth of a child, getting married, retirement, birthdays) were regularly celebrated in the office. Parents brought children to work if emergency childcare was needed in school holidays. In a family crisis (e.g., illness, relationship breakdown), allowances were usually made by temporarily lifting work pressure from affected employees.

#### Resolving interpersonal problems

Employees usually resolved conflicts resulting from social exclusion, verbal aggression, abuse, disorganisation, and self-centredness in proactive, self-protective, and constructive ways. If this failed, managers tended to respond swiftly and democratically. Interventions delivered justice as best they could, and tried to repair connections among contestants. Although interactions were “not all roses, it is generally pretty good, but there is some negative from time to time.” Conflict was mostly experienced as difficult but not derailing.

#### Community involvement

Property encouraged employees to support charities and the local community, thereby creating considerable personal satisfaction and socio-emotional connectedness in and outside the company. Many employees donated time and effort annually. Employees felt proud to work for a company that encouraged them

to support the external community by using their skills and talents (e.g., building children's play equipment).

### ***Socio-emotional Disconnectedness (low pole)***

Socio-emotional Disconnectedness was experienced in different ways, e.g., as loneliness, alienation, exhaustion, and/or being overwhelmed by work demands that left no time or emotional space to take care of oneself or relate to one's family. Two employee subgroups, having a migrant background and being a father, experienced higher Socio-emotional Disconnectedness. Conflicting work life demands and the "constant time-squeeze" affected family life quite considerably, and was partly blamed for reducing employee health (e.g., by increasing the propensity for burnout). Some employees felt Property was a "slave driver" with unrealistic expectations of what could be achieved in a normal working day. The contrasting experience of subgroups helped to refine this dimension.

### ***Recognition (high pole)***

Recognition for employees' personal effort and achievements in their work was fundamental to work wellbeing. It was assumed that being recognised or acknowledged was an employee's right: "I suppose it's normal that everyone would expect recognition after successfully completing a job". Employees knew they worked hard. They were proud of accomplishments, and were motivated to contribute to Property's commercial success. In return, being acknowledged with authentic gratitude and compliments from managers and/or colleagues boosted everyone's self-esteem and confidence. Recognition took various forms, including praise, feedback, celebrations, gifts, fun events, and time off. Rewards were so common that employees assumed it was "part of the culture... something the company does":

At the end of the process... we usually get taken out to a nice exotic place for lunch somewhere... I suppose it is a reward in some sense... I think it's just the feedback that you've achieved something and you've obviously done a good job and as a result the company has benefited and therefore, thank you very much. It's like a pat on the back. (P3)

Property employees expected to be recognised in financial terms, and as a result, morale was linked to pay. “Obviously salary is important. One has to be satisfied with the package”. A salary review was tangible recognition that the company was satisfied with individual and/or team performance.

Recognition for the indirect contribution of employees’ families and partners to Property was also expected. Employees believed that families, especially partners, played a crucial background role in supporting them to contribute to the business. They relied on their partners to pick up household duties they could not perform due to long hours on the job:

We are here and we are working, but there’s somebody at home with the kids preparing meals, cleaning, washing, shopping... while you’re in here working, and sometimes it’s not just nine to five. It could be ten, eleven o’clock, midnight sometimes. (P3)

Property recognised families’ behind-the-scenes contribution, albeit inadequately at times. Many employees wanted more acknowledgement and reward for partners, to indicate that long work hours were appreciated and behind-the-scenes family support was not taken for granted.

### ***Lack of Recognition (low pole)***

Lack of, or insufficient recognition for effort and/or achievement reduced employees’ motivation and commitment to Property. Working hard without commensurate rewards took a heavy emotional toll on employees, who reported feeling bitter, resentful, angry, demotivated, and/or stressed when their efforts and contribution were not recognised.

### **Principles domain**

The ‘Principles’ domain captured collective values in relation to a third implicit question participants asked themselves when reflecting on wellbeing: ‘How do I want/prefer Property to behave towards employees and the wider community and/or society?’ The Principles domain comprised High Quality Workplace, and

Ethical Corporate Behaviour. The two dimensions in the Principles domain are shown in Figure 5.4.

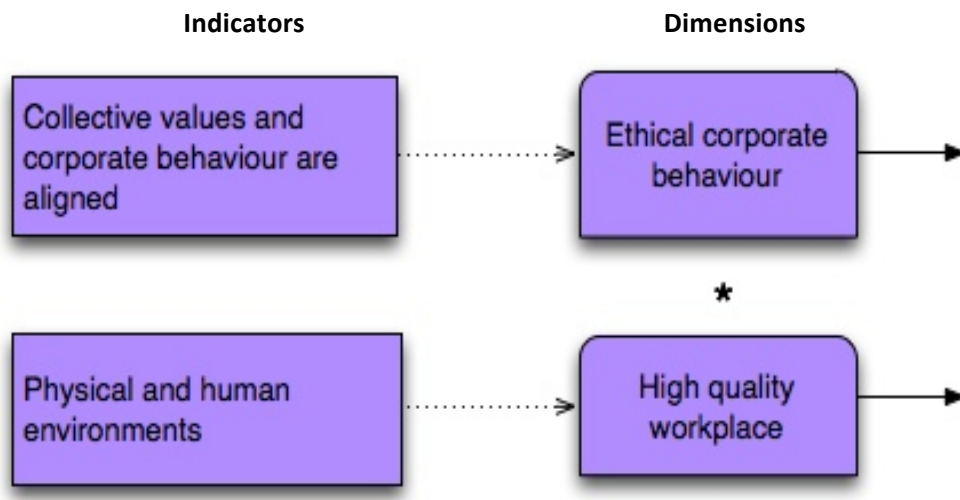


Figure 5.4: Property Principles domain dimensions

### ***High Quality Workplace (high pole)***

A High Quality Workplace referred to the physical and human environments in Property. Both environments were essential to create a sense of high quality: “having daylight, great views, working desk space, privacy, and how well you are treated by colleagues and managers”. Physical and human environment elements were inextricably linked. Employees interpreted the High Quality Workplace as a powerful message that people were valued and valuable, and that Property wanted to make the work environment as pleasant as possible. This message subtly yet decisively framed employees’ responses to how they were treated at work, with the majority feeling that employees were treated well.

#### Physical environment

The external and internal physical environments included the geographical location of the office, its furniture and equipment, technology, all amenities (kitchens, social areas, library, meeting spaces, change rooms and showers, etc.), and general ambience. The quality of these elements received consistent praise. Extensive, accessible harbour views exerted a “calming” effect on people, a

transforming emotional effect when they were “working hard and things get agitated”. Employees described the “privilege” of feeling connected to the external environment from the office, and it was appreciated that everyone (including visitors) could enjoy sharing the views. Geographically, work life was easier for many employees due to the proximity to the railway station and local gym.

The entrance to the building in which Property was located was “original, dramatic, impressive... not a typical office space... it feels like a resort, not an office building”. Internally, natural light and fresh air enlivened and refreshed the environment, supplementing an excellent air conditioning system. Employees commended the use of recycled building materials. In all, the quality of the external and internal physical environments was a major contribution to wellbeing:

Beauty on the outside was actually more than delivered on the inside, as a building, as a space... I think more than adequately your basic needs are met by this place and that’s wellbeing in and of itself. I mean, living plants, not plastic! (P14)

At an emotional level, the internal environment was experienced as “comforting”, and “a home away from home”. Facilities included attractive, modern, generous desk and meeting spaces, ergonomic furniture, up to date technology and equipment, and well-stocked kitchens with a selection of food and drinks available to employees and visitors. Exercise during the working day was possible with recently installed showers and change facilities. “I think they actually care about their staff. Luxuries make the environment nice to be in”. Employees felt “lucky” to work in Property.

#### Human environment

In a High Quality Workplace, the two necessary elements were how people interacted, and how the work environment looked and functioned. Employees believed a quality physical environment did not constitute a High Quality Workplace if human interaction was compromised.

The physical environment dignified employees, thereby contributing to the quality of interaction. For example, in the planning phase, the decision was taken to provide no separate offices for senior employees. This promoted “organisational

health, an open culture. If someone was sitting in an office in this organisation, that is everything we've tried to move away from". Senior managers were accessible and visible, indicating a "transparent", egalitarian social context. The office layout encouraged interaction, involvement, and input. Culturally, this was perceived as "quite a good thing... I like to speak to people during my day... to feel like I'm noticed and I've noticed them and there is some relationship". Democratic, participatory dynamics were evident:

I like that being in this small team that everybody kind of has a bit of input. You don't feel like there's a grand hierarchy, where there's your boss, and he says, you know, this is the way of the law and you have to follow it. It's more of... we're going to sit down; we're going to talk about it. How does everyone feel? Do you think that this is right for our group? I like that aspect of working here. (P9)

Physical safety was an emotionally laden issue in the company. Tragedies involving employee deaths from workplace incidents affected everyone. Managers strongly emphasised safe work practices and an "incident and injury free work" approach; it was not negotiable. This policy and related attitudes helped employees and families feel protected and valued. The High Quality Workplace in Property "looked after staff to an amazing degree".

### ***Low Quality Workplace (low pole)***

A Low Quality Workplace was perceived as a compromised human environment. Compromise was expressed in various ways:

For all the openness and all the wonderfulness I feel a bit of despair at times about how people communicate and the truth around communication... You just feel disconnected, and the reason is... at one level what the organisation espouses but at another level they are very inconsistent in their behaviour. I find it from an integrity perspective really problematic. They say one thing [but] they do another. Particularly in the way they treat people. (P14)

An example of compromised integrity was Property's unstated attitude to community engagement. Attending the annual community day was overtly



encouraged. However, Property's "double standards" and "behaviour [that] didn't live up to the talk" caused anger and resentment when work deadlines or managers' tacit expectations prevented employees from participating.

Occasionally, management support was unreliable or unavailable, stalling work and frustrating employees. Managers ignored emails, were unresponsive, enacted the 'old boys' network', displayed outbursts of anger, and held unrealistic performance expectations. These behaviours undermined the quality of the workplace and exposed political undercurrents. In these situations, the quality physical environment did not compensate for an environment of compromised human interaction, which created cynicism and reduced commitment.

### ***Ethical Corporate Behaviour (high pole)***

Ethical Corporate Behaviour referred to *the alignment between employees' values and corporate behaviour*. Issues on which alignment was required included the environmental impacts of the buildings designed and built by Property; congruence between corporate words and actions; and sustainable work practices. Employees expected the company to embrace and model ethical values publicly and in internally focused communications/behaviour.

Property stood for "the pursuit of noble causes, and the thing about this organisation is, the wellbeing part, whilst they are actually trying, whether it be rhetoric or whatever, they are trying". Ethical Corporate Behaviour included the impact of Property's building projects on the environment:

It is a company that sits up for excellence and I know that I can be a perfectionist in what I do, so I guess I feel that there is a mutual understanding... The values of the company to some degree reflect my own values... I feel comfortable with the values here. They're side by side, mine and the company's. (P7)

Collective ethical values also included having a "social conscience", "doing something worthwhile for people", and supporting less fortunate local communities with practical assistance. A bond of "common shared values" about corporate social responsibility, protecting the environment, and modelling examples of sustainable buildings and work practices united employees. Innovation in building design was a

way to corporately enact a social conscience and contribute to knowledge in the industry.

### ***Compromised Corporate Behaviour (low pole)***

Compromised Corporate Behaviour led employees to feel betrayed and disenfranchised. Dissonance between corporate and personal values caused unease and some guilt:

I've got concerns about the impact this company has. I mean it's pretty extreme... it's quite drastic... So to me that's a negative wellbeing issue that this company has on the environment... And you know, don't get me wrong, this company does sustainability better than any other company I've worked for or any other building company. So they are going in the right direction but you can't avoid, just in the nature of building, that's a heavy impact. (P5)

Property's behaviour was not viewed as polarised, or 'good/ethical' versus 'bad/unethical'. Employees' assessments were more nuanced and sophisticated; they understood that Compromised Corporate Behaviour contained ethical intentions, and that Property strove for excellence in sustainability. Despite this, negative environmental impacts could not be avoided. The "inheritance" of damaging environmental impacts on future generations of children, including employees' children, was a source of anxiety. It was known that Property contributed "more negatively than positively" to the future, and this was a "major wellbeing issue". Employees considered that caring for the environment and people was as important as profit. However, commercial pressures did not allow each of these values to be enacted in corporate behaviour as fully as employees desired.

### **Indicator level**

Indicator statements were developed from transcribed interviews and are shown in Appendix E. The use of indicators to develop quantitative measures is discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Subgroups**

The presence of subgroups in the data reflected variations in how specific aspects of wellbeing were experienced in the work setting. Two subgroups were evident, defined by fatherhood and migrant background.

### **Fatherhood**

Fathers of children aged from early childhood to mid-late adolescence experienced more role pressure than other employees, due to time constraints from the impact of work and family responsibilities. These employees had higher levels of fatigue. They reported feeling guilty and frustrated at being somewhat uninvolved in family life, and were resentful of excessive work hours and workloads. This subgroup was located towards the low poles on Expand Potential, Care for Health, Socio-emotional Connectedness, and High Quality Workplace.

The subgroup experienced less wellbeing than other employees, denoted by its location on the continuum between high and low poles of specific dimensions. Their health was compromised through tiredness and lack of exercise or personal downtime opportunities. The pressure of challenging work, meeting deadlines and keeping up to date were experienced as overwhelming. Fathers interacted more with their subgroup members than with other employees; co-members shared the difficulties of role overload and being time poor. They felt somewhat misunderstood by managers. Isolation, alienation, cynicism, and feeling underappreciated were dominant themes.

The fatherhood subgroup dreamt of making a 'sea/tree change' to locations where work commitments could be more favourably integrated with family needs. Members of the subgroup searched for properties for sale in coastal or rural locations and shared these with each other. This mental escape temporarily soothed the frustration of too few personal leisure opportunities (e.g., surfing or playing with their children at the beach). It was an outlet for a collective sense of personal deprivation and organisational servitude.

### **Migrant Background**

Migrants' cultural and linguistic backgrounds were markedly different from others in Property. While the study did not set out to inquire into cultural

background, all migrant participants raised the point that having a migrant background reduced their ability to relate to non-migrant employees. Emotional experiences associated with migration defined the subgroup. Feelings of isolation, loneliness, grief, and loss of identity resulted in a stronger sense of Socio-emotional Disconnectedness from other employees in Property.

Loss of family relations were persistent themes, e.g., "I've got no one here... We are just four of us in the family. There is no one else." Migrants felt nostalgic and yearned for contact with overseas family members. Straddling two cultures was confusing, even after long term residency in Australia. Their sense of dislocation touched on personal identity confusion and the meaning of cultural background:

Where you come from and your past, I think, is an important part of who you are. How does that relate to wellbeing? It's part of you. It's part of where you've come from. (P12)

The subgroup reported feeling uncomfortable in unfamiliar work settings with different cultural rules. Even an English speaking background did not prevent being "really uncomfortable in a different environment", or in Australia. Subgroup members were cautious about interacting with colleagues beyond a narrow focus on work activities. They rarely developed emotionally satisfying relationships at work, although team-building events gradually increased their social ease. Migrants also had difficulty integrating into local community networks unconnected with their original background.

Migrants' losses and hardship could not be communicated in the organisation. It was quite poignant that subgroup members used a study on wellbeing to describe their difficulties in adjusting to, connecting with, and defining themselves in relation to colleagues at work.

### **Feedback from work setting**

The researcher presented the wellbeing concept to two Property general managers. Initially, it was presented to the general manager who approved the research. The principal supervisor attended this meeting. Over two years later the

researcher presented the concept to a new general manager, an internal appointee who had also participated in the study.

Both managers confirmed that the concept accurately and comprehensively identified attributes of wellbeing they observed in the work setting. The incoming general manager had read the concept description (a shorter version of this chapter) before the presentation and commented: “it was an easy read, because it sounds like us. I kept thinking ‘that’s right’. You’ve come up with a story that describes the organisation. It sounds like the organisation I know”. He found the familiarity of the concept ‘story’ unnerving because it uniquely referenced Property. He reminded himself that not every organisation conformed to this concept description. Both managers agreed that the method successfully assessed and interpreted the internal experience of wellbeing in Property.

Researchers using interpretivist methods often employ member checking for their results (see Quality and significance of conclusions, Chapter 8), although the usefulness or validity of doing so depends on the circumstances (Bazeley, 2013). In this study, interpretivist methods had to generate outcomes that were meaningful and beneficial to research participants in an applied setting. This was the case, as expressed separately in the general managers’ responses when findings were presented.

## **Chapter 6: Work wellbeing in Finance**

Findings from the Finance research site are described in this chapter. As with Property findings, descriptions of the data context and the process of developing the concept are provided first, followed by a detailed outline of the concept elements.

The Finance concept revealed, as in Property, that employees experienced work wellbeing as a multidimensional feature of the work setting. A key difference was that in Finance, some dimensions of the concept were moderately conflicted, representing divergent views of the two subgroups. Overall, findings showed the research approach was an effective method of discerning the local concept of work wellbeing as well as factors affecting wellbeing in Finance.

An aim of the study was to conceptualise work wellbeing in Finance. Similarly to Property, the study did not address questions of whether work wellbeing ‘existed’, or how to ‘improve’ it in the local setting. As previously stated, these and other questions are addressed in Chapters 7 and 8, where findings from both concepts are integrated, issues relating to the concepts are discussed, and implications of the study are explored.

In line with Property, longer direct quotes are provided to illustrate core aspects of dimensions. Each indented quote is followed by an identifier, shown as F + a number ranging from 1 to 16. ‘F’ indicates the participant was from Finance, and the number indicates the person’s position in an alphabetical list of participants’ first names.

### **Data context**

Finance was a medium sized, public sector financial services organisation, accountable to the Australian Parliament. During the data-gathering period, the following observations about aspects of the internal environment were noted.

### **Work setting**

The office building was located in the central business district of a major Australian city. Internally, the environment (including furniture, colours, and other aesthetic elements) was somewhat plain and utilitarian.

The organisational structure was hierarchical. The physical layout of each floor reflected employee status. Consequently, the majority of employees were accommodated in central, open plan workstations in the middle of a floor, department or section, without direct access to natural light or views. Managers had private offices with doors, extra floor and storage space, additional seating and often a meeting table, natural light, and city views. The main staff amenity was a well-provisioned, modern, spacious, subsidised café. The café was an active social hub where employees congregated for meals, breaks, and 'time out' during the day.

Approximately half the employees held professional roles, and most had tertiary qualifications. Overall there were slightly more male than female employees, and significantly more male than female managers. Almost a quarter of employees were from a non-English speaking background.

Explicit and implicit protocols governed meeting behaviour, as evidenced in the feedback to senior management. The rules of communication were unspoken yet constraining, e.g., who the researcher could speak with/to, how to respond in meetings, and when to exit a meeting. The most senior person exercised control in meetings with signals such as barely perceptible nods, attention (or the lack of it), or by staring to indicate that a person should not continue speaking.

At the time of the research, Finance was in transition. Changes were forcing the adoption of commercial work practices (e.g., longer work hours) and a stronger focus on performance. This reflected a government directive to implement corporatist work practices in public sector organisations. Senior managers, historically promoted from within Finance, were increasingly recruited from senior roles in the private sector. The arduous process of shifting from a bureaucracy to a leaner, more flexible, inclusive, and less hierarchical culture created tension in the organisation.

### **Participants**

About 55 employees were invited to participate in the study, but their right to refuse was respected, and most declined. Ultimately, sixteen participants were interviewed and all data sets were analysed. Interviews were conducted in meeting rooms in the city office.

Seven female participants ranged in age from 24 – 57 (mean = 41.6 years, *SD* = 12.2 years). Nine male participants ranged between 24 – 55 years (mean = 39.4 years, *SD* = 10.6 years).

### ***Subgroups: Length of tenure (lifera and non-lifera)***

Length of tenure was the only significant participant variable. Participants fell into two groups defined by tenure. The groups were aptly named 'lifera' (*n* = 7) and 'non-lifera' (*n* = 9) in the work setting. Lifer participants were employed on average for 24.8 years (*SD* = 4.6 years), and non-lifer participants employed on average for 1.8 years (*SD* = 0.9 years). The bimodal distribution of length of tenure in the sample approximated its distribution in the organisation. The introduction of technology had eliminated many lifera' administrative roles.

Lifera and non-lifera viewed and experienced aspects of wellbeing asymmetrically. Attitudinal asymmetry generated experiences of unease, hostility, and tension between the subgroups. It also highlighted the structural fissures in the organisation as a result of the change process. Subgroup differences are described in conjunction with the relevant dimensions.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were limited to one hour at the request of Finance management. All participants selected and brought images as requested in the Information Letter to Participants (Appendix B). Interview questionnaire version two (Appendix A) was used with all participants. Data collection lasted five months due to the difficulty of recruiting participants.

### **Developing the concept**

The concept was derived only from participants' interview data, which identified the content and focus of the local concept. Participants nominated their significant wellbeing experiences in the work setting, and used visual metaphors and verbal description to convey personal meanings. This ensured the concept reflected a specific, contextualised view of work wellbeing in Finance.



### **Concept type**

The concept was developed via the same interpretive analytic process as used in Property. The researcher used NVivo software version 8 to record the categories developed from transcribed data. When secondary-level dimensions were finalised, the question of the type of concept was addressed using the three prototypical concept types: necessary and sufficient conditions (falling at one pole of the 'concept type' continuum), family resemblance (falling at the opposite pole), and a hybrid structure comprising elements of both (falling somewhere in the 'grey zone' of the continuum between the two poles).

Due to the asymmetry of two dimensions and the partial asymmetry of one, concept type was determined in a different way to Property. The decision about concept type was based on three factors. These were: the six dimensions were the only dimensions found, no analysable data was omitted from analysis, and contrasting subgroups (lifers and non-lifers) clearly identified the poles of some dimensions. In relation to the last factor, approximately half of the participants clustered at each pole of the contested dimensions. As a result, it was concluded that all six dimensions were necessary and sufficient to describe the concept of work wellbeing in Finance.

Consequently, the Finance concept consisted of six necessary and sufficient (i.e., non-substitutable) secondary-level dimensions. Non-substitutability is represented by AND, which is indicated by an asterisk \* in Fig 6.1. 'AND' showed that the presence of each dimension was required, and other dimensions were not required to describe the local form of work wellbeing in Finance.

### **Domains**

The same domain structure applied to the Finance concept. As previously outlined, domains reflected what was collectively liked, preferred, wanted, or valued 'for me' (Self); 'with others' (Relationships); and 'from the organisation called Finance' (Principles).

### **High and low poles**

Dimensions are bipolar. High poles, and their associated evaluations, described systemically desirable aspects of a secondary-level dimension, while low

poles depicted the undesirable aspects that contributed to constraining, reducing, or undermining wellbeing in the work setting.

However, a dimension may be asymmetrical. In Finance, the lifer and non-lifer subgroups defined opposing poles on two dimensions. Consequently, asymmetrical dimensions are labelled according to the subgroup clustered at the pole. On other dimensions where poles were partially asymmetrical, they were labelled as high and low in recognition of the *greater degree of similarity than difference* between subgroups. This is described in detail in the relevant dimensions.

### **Interpreting the concept diagram and descriptions**

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to describing the *local concept of work wellbeing*. A detailed description of the process of developing the concept was outlined in Chapter 4. The Finance concept is shown over the page in Figure 6.1.

The concept diagram is a single page schematic of the descriptive elements constituting work wellbeing in the work setting. Each element – basic level, secondary-level dimensions, and indicators – contributes to how work wellbeing is understood systemically. The basic level conceptualised the local form of work wellbeing, including how it is experienced at each pole. Secondary-level dimensions depict the necessary and sufficient constituents of the basic level, as well as how they are experienced. Indicators are the raw data from which dimensions were derived.

Therefore, when the reader shifts from a focus on the concept diagram into the detailed descriptions of the elements at each level, it is important to remember that the elements together depict the *local form of work wellbeing*. The simplicity of the concept diagram belies the detail, discerned from interview data, that constitutes the rich, complex experience of wellbeing in Finance.

# THREE-DOMAIN CONCEPTS OF WORK WELLBEING

## FINANCE: INTELLIGENT EVOLUTION

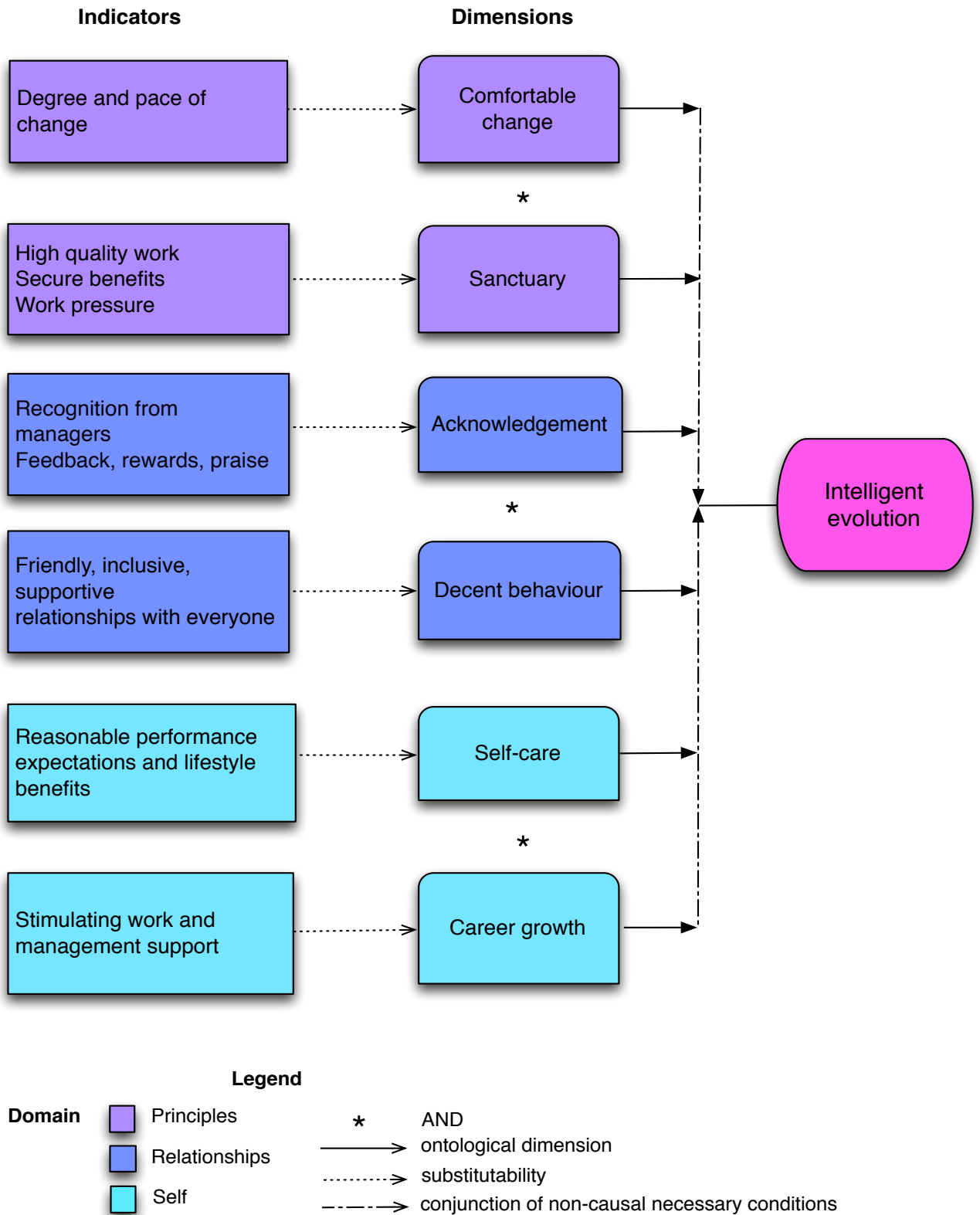


Figure 6.1

## General description of the concept

The basic level of work wellbeing in Finance was conceptualised as *Intelligent Evolution*. Six secondary-level dimensions comprised the Self, Relationships, and Principles domains. In Figure 6.1, the solid arrow linking dimensions to the basic level showed that all dimensions were ontologically sufficient to describe Intelligent Evolution. The broken arrow showed that dimensions did not cause Intelligent Evolution, although all were necessarily part of its existence.

Self domain dimensions were asymmetrical, *defined by non-lifers* as *Career Growth*, and *Self-Care*. Thus, length of tenure was the determining feature of the poles on both dimensions in this domain. The subgroups had divergent views of the meaning of Career Growth, and Self-care *for work wellbeing*, and as such, the poles reflected the views of subgroups and were labelled accordingly.

High pole dimensions in the Relationships domain included *Decent Behaviour*, and *Acknowledgement*.

The Principles domain included two dimensions, *Sanctuary*, and *Comfortable Change*, at the high pole. Length of tenure was a factor that created some asymmetry in both Principles domain dimensions. The content of both of these dimensions reflected *elements of agreement and disagreement between lifers and non-lifers at both poles*, which are labelled *high* and *low* since the asymmetry is partial.

In the concept overall, therefore, four out of six asymmetrical dimensions provided evidence of a considerable gulf between lifers and non-lifers in their views about the meaning of work wellbeing in Finance. This indicated that work wellbeing was differently constructed for lifers and non-lifers. Asymmetry also pointed to the extent of underlying systemic tensions in Finance, and how these affected collective experiences of work wellbeing. These differences are explored throughout this chapter.

Indicators were the content bases of each dimension. All indicators were substitutable as shown by the dotted arrows linking indicator boxes to secondary-level dimensions. The pool of indicators is provided in Appendix E.

## Basic level

Work wellbeing in Finance was a multifaceted experience. Contributing factors reflected the shared commitment to collaboration and creating good outcomes, as demonstrated in these comments:

[Wellbeing is] making people happy with things that you've done, or satisfied with what you've done, grateful for what you've done, and pleased that something has worked out. (F6)

So I define wellbeing as just feeling good about yourself at work. Being happy I guess. That elusive word and state of mind! (F3)

But the way I view work [wellbeing] is that if I can't impart some of my knowledge to some of the younger people who I work with, whether they report to me or not, then... to me, just being able to show younger people how things can be done in a more efficient and easier way, that makes me happy at work. It really does. (F14)

I probably learnt that wellbeing inside you is a very, very important strength and the ability to cope with situations and the ability to draw from your own inner strength, for want of a better word, is a very important aspect. I think that... through my life I've always learnt that you have to be able to draw that from yourself. That somewhere inside you, you're the person who will depict whether you're well or whether you're not well. There's the physical side of it and all that. The mental side of it, too, and the emotional side of it is just such an important aspect and you need to come to grips with that side of it. (F12)

'Intelligent Evolution' described the high pole of the basic level. The low pole was 'Stagnation'.

## High pole: Intelligent Evolution

Intelligent Evolution indicated the collective view of the optimal processes for creating work wellbeing in Finance. The organisation was tasked with generating credible, reliable, well-considered analysis, services, knowledge, opinions, and advice for public and private sector use. All activity was oriented towards these goals. Finance needed to show evidence of intellectual strength, capacity, thoughtfulness,

and refinement in the way outputs evolved. Ideally, all employees contributed from their work roles to achieve the highest possible standard. Intelligent Evolution was, therefore, a collaborative endeavour. If the process of producing quality work was effective, a collective sense of achievement and wellbeing ensued.

Intelligent Evolution was co-created by employees and the work setting. Employees contributed personal capability, effort, and willingness to achieve; quality performance; healthy mental and physical attributes; and an interpersonal style attuned to the Finance context. In turn, the work setting offered some career growth; and provided recognition, support, predictability, excellent benefits, a safe environment, and nurturing to foster optimal outcomes for employees.

### **Low pole: Stagnation**

At the low pole, Stagnation described general dissatisfaction with work wellbeing. The latter was undermined by insufficient opportunities for career and/or personal development and growth. Stagnation resulted from the lack of individual autonomy and work challenge, coupled with monotonous, routine, or mundane work. Comfortable, predictable, yet boring jobs were the downside of long-term, stable, continuous employment. Other contributing factors to reduced work wellbeing included pervasive and endemic resistance to change, paternalist attitudes, institutionalisation, and hierarchical power and politics. These factors increased mental stress and anger. Ultimately, Stagnation left nothing to strive for.

### **Secondary-level dimensions**

Secondary-level dimensions linked basic and indicator levels by providing a theoretical foundation for the basic level concept. Dimensions were more abstract than indicators, which constituted concrete examples of behaviour and intention (Goertz, 2006). Six dimensions were identified.

#### **Self domain**

The 'Self' domain captured collective values in relation to one implicit question that participants asked themselves when reflecting on work wellbeing: 'What do I want/prefer/value for myself in this organisation?' The domain

comprised Career Growth, and Self-care. Both were asymmetrical, denoted by the association of poles with lifers and non-lifers rather than high or low.

In the first dimension, Career Growth (non-lifers), the subgroups held different attitudes to careers. Muted Career Growth (lifers) described career development as steady, predictable progress on a defined corporate career path. Non-lifers viewed Career Growth through the lenses of challenge and responsibility. The subgroups also differed in their expectations of Finance in relation to career development. The resulting attitudes caused a degree of conflict in everyday interactions.

The other dimension in the Self domain was Self-care (non-lifers) and Reduced Self-care (non-lifers). It was collectively agreed that caring for one's health helped to maintain resilience at work. Finance provided various forms of health support, including an employee assistance program. Policies and practices indicated that Finance respected and supported employees' Self-care needs, e.g., corporately sponsored sport and exercise programs at lunchtime, and a staff cafeteria with subsidised food. Work hours for most employees, including senior managers, finished between 5.00 and 6.00 pm, as Finance "encouraged you to fit your work in normal working hours".

The complete asymmetry in the Self-care dimension reflected the greater difficulty lifers had in managing their health and self-care in the changing environment. They were accustomed to relatively undemanding public service conditions, e.g., defined work hours (around 7.5 hours per day, with one hour for lunch and two 15 minute tea breaks). With the steady loss of benefits, employees were expected to be more flexible and productive. This affected lifers' stress levels, and consequently they experienced greater difficulty with self-care in the changing environment. Non-lifers, in contrast, found self-care was easier in Finance than in other settings they had worked. The two Self domain dimensions are shown in Figure 6.2.

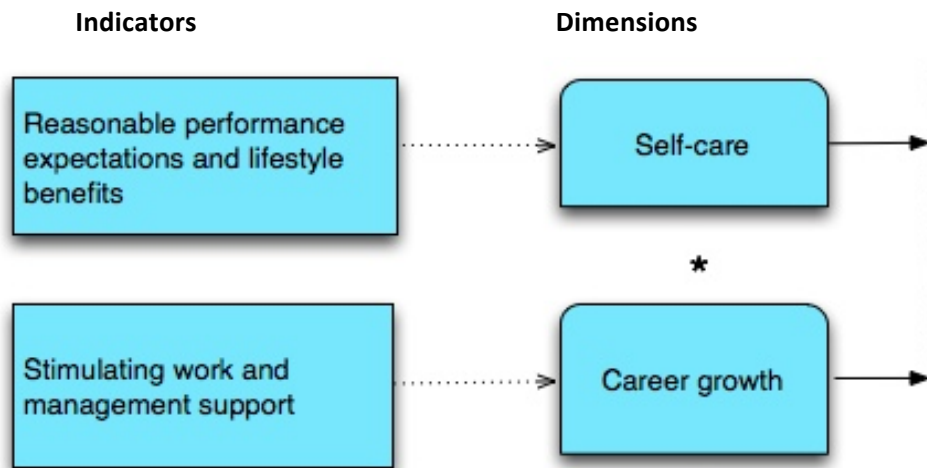


Figure 6.2: Finance Self domain dimensions

### ***Career growth (non-lifers)***

Career Growth for non-lifer managers and professionals comprised stimulating, challenging work that expanded their capacity. Non-lifers wanted to achieve, contribute to the work setting, and extend their skill base. Positive pressure e.g., accountability and hard work, was valued.

I think [developmental] experience like that is very personal. I think everyone has their own personal agenda. You're handed this life, life is there for living. You can either sit back and just observe it, you can be a part of it, you can learn by doing, experiencing, feeling, and I think from that perspective, I think personal growth is a very personal thing. (F 16)

The competitive intellectual environment often stretched younger employees to do “something that is within my reach and then succeeding... [it] is a bit uncomfortable at the time, but it’s always better afterwards”. They were proud to work in Finance’s “bright, intellectual environment”, and they strove “to keep up with it, to confirm that I really belong”.

Effective managers provided a blend of freedom and intellectual support for growth. High achieving employees demonstrated initiative, and managers generally trusted them to succeed. Non-lifers valued the growth that resulted from positive or negative work experiences. Even failure or negative feedback was viewed favourably



if it fostered career development. Non-lifers demonstrated reasonably high levels of achievement motivation, and those with commercial experience found it easier to achieve senior positions in Finance than did lifers. Non-lifers found the bureaucracy difficult to understand and manage, particularly the “choking” systems, hierarchy, and myriad forms, processes, and procedures, although these were described as a minor impediment.

### ***Muted Career Growth (lifers)***

Most lifers held administrative roles except for a few in senior management positions. Muted Career Growth was defined as *career development with work life balance and a manageable, realistic workload*. Lifers lacked confidence to handle work challenges on their own. Muted Career Growth offered low job challenge or intellectual stimulation, and few opportunities for innovation or creativity.

#### Emotional environment

Aspects of the emotional environment explained lifers’ attitudes and behaviour in relation to career development. Throughout their careers, lifers had expected and received a *high level of management direction, support, nurturing, and feedback* at every stage. They regarded managers’ help and involvement in their development as crucial. Most preferred familiar, predictable work accompanied by the safety valve of management support if problems arose:

They basically just delegate to me and say, you know, do what you need to do. They've got faith and trust in me to do it, and so I can basically do what I need to without really referring back to them too much. But I've also got the knowledge that I can, if something does come up, that I can struggle with, then I can approach them on any level. So that's sort of a comfort. It feels safe and I know they've got confidence in what I do. (F15)

It's a safe place. Very safe. I think it's a safe environment. A lot of people stay here for a long time so you know most people. The whole experience of this organisation is a very safe organisation. [Also] probably the routine of the job. The routine of the organisation. I mean, you know how things work, you know the hierarchal system. (F5)

## Learning

Finance policies and management practices led to a “bloated” or “congested” organisation with few available career roles for lifers who had not developed skills or acquired additional knowledge. The rigid hierarchy and insufficient suitable career roles led to the “lack of a future”:

Probably, the hardest thing to do here is be promoted. Because we have people who stay here forever and ever, so someone has to move up before, obviously, someone else can move up... That’s probably the most frustrating part! Because, I mean, I could do a different job just as well as I do this job at a different level, but because there is nowhere to go, ... and I find that quite frustrating... You've still got those skills of the higher-level position, however, the hardest part here is moving up, because there's not a lot of movement. You have sideways movement, and people get skills and that's how they cross-skill each other, but actually moving up the ranks is really difficult. (F5)

Historically, career development had been delivered via in-house, classroom-based training courses, which most lifers enjoyed. Attendance at courses was synonymous with career development in Finance, despite that learning was quite passive rather than active/on-the-job. Classroom-based training courses were being eliminated as the change process evolved.

Lifers also recognised that attending courses or improving skills was redundant. “You’re supposed to push yourself and strive to develop, although in the end there’s nothing there to go to”. They felt betrayed as Finance was no longer “interested in providing a career path and helping you with opportunities to get there. Now, the situation is, if you’re not doing it yourself, and you haven’t made it already, then you’re not the person for us”. Trust was low, as lifers had believed their jobs and career opportunities would continue throughout lifelong employment. At the time of the research, lifers in administrative positions were increasingly reporting to non-lifer managers. This change represented a further contraction in potential career positions.

## Preference for the status quo

Overall, lifers’ ambition was fairly low. Most were perceived as “just turning it

over”; they rarely applied for more senior roles, and virtually never for positions outside Finance. Staff benefits and an excellent retirement scheme reduced the motivation to move; they were tied with too much at stake financially to seek other career options. The low motivation for either change or increased workload was also ingrained in managers’ “grand-parenting approach”. Managers were typically lenient with poor performers. They provided “irrelevant feedback” to protect employees’ vulnerability, many chances to improve, and no consequences for lack of change. This had limited lifers’ ability to grow, because “people can’t hear the criticism when everything is too constructive.”

Lifers demonstrated little desire to embrace challenge, develop through personal effort, or disrupt the status quo of their work lives by taking career risks. This affected their work wellbeing. Despite their dissatisfaction, restricted development, and lost opportunities for future fulfilment, many lifers stayed. They were conflicted about the risks of leaving versus the safety of the familiar. They were conflicted by the emotional ‘pushes and pulls’ influencing career choices, as this extended quote demonstrated:

[This image] sort of sums up how I feel a bit about my career at the moment. It's a long road going off into the distance. It's wide, which I think represents it's safe, you can stay in the middle and not worry about falling off the edges. But the downside of this road is that it's straight and it's featureless on the sides. I'm not sure that I'm really going to progress too much further beyond sort of where I am now, which is a bit of a sobering thought at my age to think that I might have hit where I'm going to go. But the flip side of that is I have applied for other jobs around [Finance] and I've looked at other roles... and I really like what I do. So even though part of me thinks I do it a bit too casually now and... it comes as second nature, it comes a bit too easy, it's still rewarding and satisfying. I meet interesting people. I get to do fun things... You know, it's probably not politically correct to say I'm happy to stay in this job. You know, that's not what people expect of you, especially when the potential is that it might be another 20 years! (Laughs). Part of me is terrified by that, and that's the darkness I suppose... So yes, I guess, maybe a little bit frustrated, yes I do... You see people climbing the ladder a little bit and you think, well, that could be me, but it's not. So, why isn't it, why aren't I sort of moving on? And then I think, well

that's not entirely [Finance's] problem, that's partly me too. I've probably put a few of those roadblocks in... I'm happy being autonomous and doing what I know I'm comfortable with. Do you upset the applecart and not get apples, end up with lemons or something! It might not be such a hot idea! (F15)

### ***Self-care (non-lifers)***

Many non-lifers were attracted to jobs in Finance for health and lifestyle reasons, including shorter, more flexible work hours, and less work pressure. Although many staff benefits were being withdrawn, non-lifers considered Finance offered “really good lifestyle” and “not unreasonable” performance expectations. It was “a low stress environment” where Self-care was felt to be easier than in other workplaces.

During the workday, non-lifers found enough opportunities to maintain mental health. They took breaks that allowed them to “switch off”, enjoy “self time”, or relax and recover. Weekend work was rare. Self-care strategies included attending Finance’s wellbeing seminars; taking regular holidays, or mentally “switching off”; engaging in self-reflection to foster equanimity; dealing with conflict by seeking support from managers, friends, colleagues, and family; and taking stress leave.

### **Work life balance**

Non-lifers valued work life balance. Many drew a distinction between work and personal time: “I don’t compromise my life outside with what goes on here. I want a stable life outside, so... I have time for the things I want to do”. Non-lifers had not been able to achieve this level of balance in jobs outside of Finance. When working to deadlines, non-lifers “put in the time” but kept “the balance in mind”. Office plants reminded them of the “non-work world, that you’re working to live rather than living to work”. Some assessed whether aiming for high goals was worth it and decided against making the effort: “I don’t think I could be bothered working hard enough to get [to senior management positions]. I don’t want to work that long hours. Too much sacrifice is required.”

## Lower expectations

Non-lifers recognised that work expectations in Finance were relatively moderate compared with what they had been accustomed to. They capitalised on this by subtly reducing their level of work effort to enjoy a more favourable balance between personal and organisational needs. For example, they knew that exercise at lunchtime was “good for your mental state”, and they also knew that it compromised their productivity in the afternoon because they were tired. Non-lifers chose to exercise anyway, as the reduction in their productivity was not especially noticeable in comparison with the wider organisation. Overall, non-lifers found Self-care in Finance quite easy. Having become accustomed to the reduced expectations in Finance, some felt they would no longer be able to survive in the private sector.

## ***Reduced Self-care (lifers)***

Lifers held a concept of the “fair play” employment contract. They described themselves as consistently “very busy”, and consequently felt entitled to working conditions that balanced or reduced the perceived impact of workplace demands on health *and* wellbeing. Flexibility policies, e.g., 35-hour week, work from home, tea breaks, and attending doctors’ appointments in work hours were considered to be normal “give and take” between Finance and employees. “Every organisation should be balancing achievement with nurturing of their staff... they have a responsibility to balance the demands with what they provide to people.”

Lifers were accustomed to requesting “time out” for study, reduced hours, leave without pay, and travel. As most requests were granted, management support for work life balance was widely assumed. Employment conditions had always been “very employee friendly” and “understanding”, since employees’ personal lives were taken into account. Lifers commented:

I thought one thing that contributes significantly to wellbeing in [Finance] is that people are comfortably remunerated. And I like this image because he looks comfortable, but it didn't suggest that he was really highly, highly paid, but just comfortably paid. It also sort of reminded me, because he was retiring and lying down like that, we also even look after people after they have retired, because we have a pension scheme. (F9)

Security, a feeling of feeling safe and secure which the place certainly has provided in terms of employment and support and general conditions, and in terms of like when my husband died, I mean basically I was told just to take as much time as you want. I mean, there were some pressing deadlines or whatever, but they recognised the personal side to your life as well. (F2)

This situation had changed with the introduction of corporatist work practices. Increased performance requirements were disrupting lifers' ability to balance work and self-care needs, with "more emphasis on overachieving rather than lifestyle". Other changes included: fewer options for flexible work; pressure to increase work hours; restructuring; imposition of budgets; a "ruthless", competitive, "drier", family-unfriendly environment; discontinuance of rostered days off and other award conditions; a drive for efficiency; and a "lack of respect for personal needs". Personal wellbeing was perceived as no longer "part of [Finance's] strategy". As a result, lifers felt afraid, stressed, frustrated and angry. Extended work hours evoked an allusion to Karoshi (the Japanese word for 'death by overwork') due to "unreasonable" expectations. Lifers were "galled" at the "expectation that you will take on whatever you're given, complete it and work many extra hours if it's needed". Having less opportunity for exercise during work hours prevented "a recharge of the batteries and releasing pressure and stress". Higher workloads were "unfair". Lifers reported a rising incidence of depression, anxiety, and panic attacks:

I relate [the image] probably as the opposite of what I'm getting. And that is that, probably for the first time in my life over the last three months I've suffered anxiety attacks, usually on a Sunday night round about seven o'clock. I'm sure all of us get [to] Sunday night and think I've got to go to work tomorrow! Okay, in varying degrees we all probably think, wouldn't I like to have tomorrow off! But I've actually experienced anxiety attacks where I've... almost a panic attack, not quite. I've always been a person who's been pretty healthy through my whole life, mentally as well as physically. I can't think of any time when mentally I wasn't. And physically, always! I hardly ever get sick. I've got a very lucky immune system like that. And I found myself sometimes having to look for a quiet, calming, something to do to bring me back down to where I think I need to be. (F12)

Lifers who reported to non-lifers found it especially difficult when managers arranged meetings at lunchtime or 5.00 pm. Formerly, lifers would exercise, eat, socialise, or finish work for the day at these times. The imposition of these new arrangements triggered conflict between the subgroups.

### Relationships domain

The Relationships domain captured collective values about the desired nature and quality of interpersonal contact in Finance. It addressed a second implicit question that participants asked themselves when reflecting on work wellbeing: ‘How do I want or prefer to relate to people in this organisation?’ The domain included Decent Behaviour, and Acknowledgement, as shown in Figure 6.3.

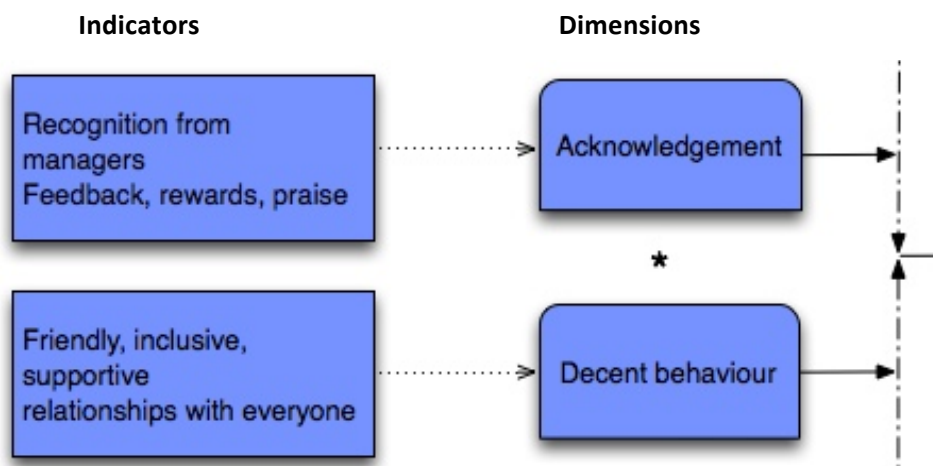


Figure 6.3: Finance Relationships domain dimensions

### ***Decent Behaviour (high pole)***

At the individual level, developing decent relationships with colleagues and managers was a priority in Finance. Decency included being friendly and warm, non-discriminatory, giving and receiving help, being “human”, and getting on with others regardless of personal differences. Relationships were completely central to work wellbeing: it was “a lot more about your interaction with other people and your support... If you were by yourself it would be a complete disaster”. The failure to make friends or develop a social network left an employee isolated, with no one “to provide guidance” or help. Trust in others, and being trustworthy, were pivotal:

It comes back to that relationship thing. If you've got a relationship with the people on the opposite side of the table, everything else can be sorted. You can resolve all the other little fiddly issues. They can just evaporate. It's about trust. It's about being held to your word. If you say, 'you can trust me on this', and they know they can trust you, then everything else is easy... If you can get the trust over the table, the rest is easy. (F14)

Communication skills, e.g., listening, sharing ideas freely, and putting "yourself in someone else's shoes" created "the right environment". Amiable colleagues were valued as a source of enjoyment, support, fun, useful information, mentoring, guidance and informal feedback: "people in most cases are very happy to help you in what you're trying to do". Congenial peers boosted low self-esteem, were comforting, empathic, understanding, and nurturing.

#### Teamwork

Team behaviour was equally important in work wellbeing: the "people you work with and how you are managed is just critical. You might as well enjoy the time you work together." Benefits of teamwork included satisfaction from achieving common goals and camaraderie from sharing personal information. Teams were usually cooperative, inclusive, and communicative, buffering members from difficulties. A supportive team was safe and known; in contrast, the broader work setting was perceived as more turbulent and less predictable. Teams also facilitated individual learning, by helping members develop flexibility and skills to deal with setbacks. Teamwork was also valued for its contribution to the "greater good" through supporting the work of senior employees.

There was a pervasive view that personal and team behaviour should be helpful, charitable, cooperative, other-oriented, and respectful. Employees judged transgressions harshly.

#### Managers

Decent management required "people skills", such as supporting employees; helping people navigate organisational politics; setting clear work goals; providing meaningful feedback and performance appraisals; resolving conflicts, problems, and questions quickly; and communicating clearly and honestly.



### ***Toxic Behaviour (low pole)***

Toxic Behaviour included personal animosity, aggression, rudeness, bullying, withdrawal, obstruction, nastiness, etc. Behaviours that undermined group cohesion, such as self-promotion, office gossip, forming cliques, lying, and boasting were “not appreciated”. Mistrust and dishonesty reduced team effectiveness. A self-focused team that lacked concern or empathy for wider organisational tasks, goals, or problems was “frustrating and disheartening”. Unhelpful or uncommitted team members generated anger:

There was more teamwork and there was more reliance on each other. It was a much more high-pressure situation as well. We had deadlines and things had to be done by eight o'clock in the morning. So you get in at seven or 6.30 am... [t]here was a lot of teamwork to get... like, you couldn't just work by yourself to get the whole show on the road by eight! So I guess that job was a lot about teamwork and people you worked with making a big effort to get along with people, even if you might not necessarily socialise with them outside of work. (F8)

### **Management Behaviour**

Both lifer and non-lifer managers were judged to display Toxic Behaviour at times. Descriptions of Toxic Behaviour indicated that this was a significant theme in Finance. Any form of toxic management behaviour took a considerable toll on employees.

#### ***Lifer managers' toxicity***

*As a group, some lifer managers attracted criticism for displaying and/or tacitly condoning Toxic Behaviour in the work setting. Both subgroups were united in their disapproval of this aspect of lifer management behaviour.*

Examples of lifer managers' Toxic Behaviour included: engaging in organisational politics e.g., favouritism or nepotism; rudeness, cruelty and punishment; failure to acknowledge employees' efforts or achievements; taking credit for junior employees' work; lack of integrity; and scape-goating employees for failed projects. Punishment included ostracising people without explanation. One example described managers' collective envy and political manoeuvring when a

senior colleague returned from a significant overseas work assignment and tried to re-enter the career hierarchy. Managers as a group closed ranks, thereby excluding their former colleague from projects that would lead to other career positions. The person waited a year before being allocated any work.

Non-lifers viewed senior lifer managers as conservative, patriarchal, and “bullet proof”. They considered that some lifer managers used status to coerce and humiliate recipients with “aggressive, bullying, threatening, intimidating, angry demeanour and words”. This caused “mental and physical degradation or pressure. It can lead to depression. There is anger and high-level mental violence here”. Significantly, the culture of Finance silenced any challenges to lifer managers’ under-performance, collusion, and abuses of position:

It would be extremely unwelcome for [senior managers] within [Finance] to field questions from the press about operational issues that just reflected poorly on their managerial ability... So I can understand why they are so super sensitive. But, conversely, if there's a problem, it's better that someone identifies the problem internally and you fix it than someone externally finds it and then you've got to fix it... But if you tend to just try and push things aside, there's only a downside to ... being so protective of your staff and the rhetoric of, oh, [Finance]! We're professional and disciplined! (F4)

Communications from some lifer managers were often inadequate or absent, causing disorganisation and friction, “a real cascading flow-on effect of negativity”. Those with a dictatorial behavioural style created an “unnecessarily stressful” environment.

### *Non-lifer managers*

Lifer employees experienced some non-lifer managers as demonstrating Toxic Behaviour. Non-lifer managers’ attitudes and actions were described as distrustful, selfish, tough-minded, and uncaring. Lifers believed the cultural fabric of Finance was being destroyed by a commercial, competitive, ambitious, self-centred, “dog eat dog” approach.

### ***Acknowledgement (high pole)***

Acknowledgement, a local term used in interviews, was crucial to work wellbeing. Acknowledging individual and team effort or success occurred in myriad ways: via feedback; financial reward; attractive working conditions; encouragement; increased responsibility or autonomy; being recognised for one's knowledge and/or opinion; having opportunities for learning; celebratory events e.g., the Christmas party; and managers' praise and/or gratitude for employees' excellent contribution. Feedback (especially positive comments) raised employees' self-confidence, motivation, comfort in interactions with managers, and willingness to take on bigger challenges.

Being acknowledged was a prime motivator for all employees, and managers appeared to understand its potency. If a manager or senior manager praised an employee, the fact of *being noticed and rewarded* carried considerable weight for the individual, and among peers and junior employees. Any comment from a manager was motivating, "an incentive to keep going", because it indicated one's work "qualified" for attention. Employees were attuned to the subtleties of management feedback. "Verbal feedback means that they actually mean it and it signals to you that you're valued", while criticism was used as a positive motivator for growth, to "make up for your poor performance...[and] do something about it and get on to it".

Personal acknowledgement is best

The most powerful form of acknowledgement was personal: "Being recognised in my job is probably *the*, or the second, most important thing for me in the job". Examples included gratitude, and public and private commendation for success. All employees were sensitive to the value of feedback from senior managers: "When senior management says that we did a great job and everybody is satisfied, that's the feedback that really works for me." Most managers were "good at acknowledging work and rewarding". Even insignificant or minor acts of acknowledgement were motivating. For example, one manager sent a quick, two-line email following an initial work meeting, praising an employee's performance and optimistically looking forward to working together. The recipient described the

wellbeing value of this small action in terms of a cost benefit analysis, indicating the benefit of the email was disproportionately high compared with the 'cost' of writing it, as shown in the following quote:

Many people or some people may have the attitude that it takes time away from you and it makes you less productive when you do things that enhance the wellbeing of the organisation. I mean you're not doing something that benefits only you. You're trying to do something that benefits a whole organisation or a team, or a section, or a department or whatever... Probably that's what many people think: 'Oh, I don't know if I can do this because I don't have enough time!' But this particular example shows me that if you do a cost benefit analysis... then you would immediately come to the conclusion that the benefit of your action outweighs the cost so much that it should not even be a question of whether or not you do [it]... and also another thought... is that people may be unsure or not aware of the huge impact that an action has. And I think I'm not the only one! I think other people feel very good about such actions too... [So] a person in a responsible position can probably assume that... small positive actions have huge positive consequences for probably the majority of people who these actions apply to. (F11)

This point was made many times in interviews. Managers' praise and respect could be quantified: "You can get a lot out of someone just by telling them they're doing well, rather than paying them more. A compliment a week is worth \$20,000.00 or \$30,000.00 a year." Personal, genuine feedback from a high status manager was probably the most valued form of acknowledgement and motivation for all employees:

The senior manager actually said: "I just want to personally thank you for all the help and assistance you've given me. It's a really good outcome. I really appreciate your help and I just wanted you to know how much it meant to me." It wasn't done in public. It was one-on-one and no one else even knows about it... And when you get that, you don't mind doing the hours. You don't mind doing whatever you need to do. Yes, that was probably the best wellbeing moment personally between the senior manager and myself. And it was only literally a two-minute conversation. (F14)

It would be hard to over-estimate the universal importance and value of

Acknowledgement to work wellbeing in Finance. The links between being acknowledged and motivation to perform were unmistakable.

***Lack of Acknowledgement (low pole)***

Lack of, or minimal Acknowledgement was very demotivating. Its absence had a negative effect, particularly if employees had worked hard and were tired. Low confidence and self-esteem resulted from excessive criticism.

**Principles domain**

The Principles domain captured collective values in relation to how employees wanted or preferred Finance to behave towards themselves as the internal community, and in the wider community and/or society. Sanctuary, and Comfortable Change were the two dimensions, as shown in Figure 6.4.

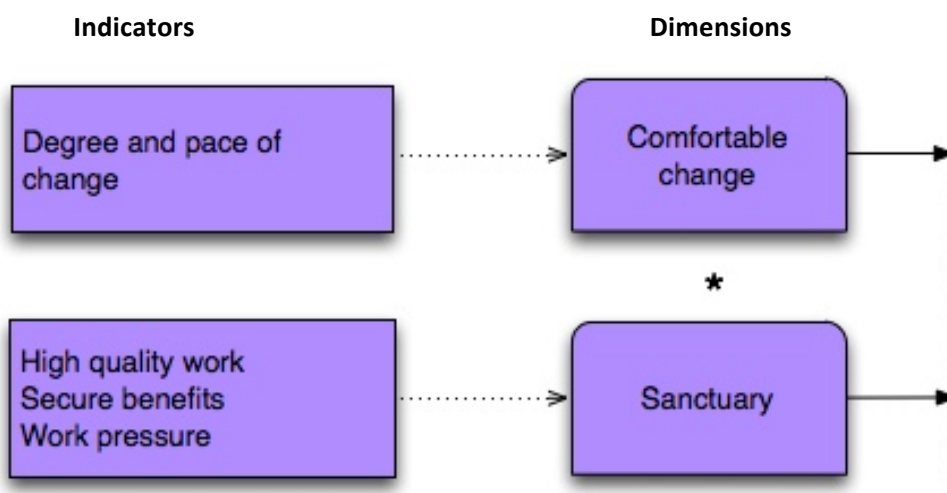


Figure 6.4: Finance Principles domain dimensions

***Sanctuary (high pole)***

Finance was viewed as a Sanctuary, or a predictable, trustworthy, solid, safe haven. Employees felt protected from some private sector corporatist features such as performance metrics and time pressure, and as a result, the work setting was experienced as nurturing. The experience of Sanctuary comprised the aspects of quality of work, and the nature of the work environment.

## Quality of work

The goal was to produce excellent, trustworthy output: “Quality is the top priority for any of our work”. Both subgroups understood and accepted this. There was enough time to meet deadlines and do a thorough job: “Managers do not want the work done quickly, they want it done well... These values are embedded in the culture.” Most work was collaboratively produced and subject to extensive review to ensure it was “accurate, and 110% bullet proof”. Employees were encouraged to improve any documents they handled. Occasionally, low quality work was produced, which “put obstacles in the way” of cooperation, and created frustration for everyone.

The goal of quality work underpinned every activity, including preparing for meetings. Employees were expected to be well prepared if they intended to speak. Meetings were deliberately short, as sufficient preparation time was provided to ensure quality input, discussion, and speedy decision-making.

## Work environment

The nature of the work environment was the second aspect of Sanctuary. Employees appreciated the safe, protective environment. Lifers had strong emotional attachments to Finance. It was like a “second home”, and they felt “love... like an old married couple” for the organisation. Most had considerable affection for co-workers who felt like “brothers and sisters”. Employees felt proud to work for an organisation that served “a social purpose”:

And maybe it hits people when they get a little bit more senior. But even the more junior people, I think they get a buzz out of thinking, well, I work for the organisation that [does notable work in Australia]! It's that sort of sense of wellbeing, yes. (F9)

I guess you're comfortable within your team, the people that you know. They can support you. And obviously financially... you're comfortable and secure, especially working within [Finance], because it's a lot more secure than other organisations, especially at this time. (F7)

However, lifers and non-lifers held different views about the preferred level of pressure that the work environment imposed on employees, and therefore, this aspect of the Sanctuary dimension was asymmetrical. Pressure was defined as the need to adapt, learn, or develop more speedily than was previously the norm. Lifers perceived pressure as negative, and did not want it. In contrast, non-lifers viewed pressure as positive, and wanted it.

The lifer subgroup enjoyed the predictable, routine, comfortable, familiar work environment, which was relatively low pressure. The “safety net built around Finance” protected them from private sector turbulence, the need to learn, or to adapt to new situations. They had typically experienced “no surprises”, as Finance stayed “pretty much the same all the time”. Certainty and structure meant the organisation had consistently provided them with alternative options if they were “not happy” with the level of pressure required of them. Lifers recognised the environment was “perhaps not as challenging as it could be” and their careers had “plateaued”. In loving an organisation that provided security yet discouraged development, most looked forward to a “bland, vanilla” future. Consequently, lifers had not been required to meet the challenge of growing up emotionally and developing mental toughness in relation to risk at work.

Although non-lifers also described Sanctuary as a safe zone with existing benefits, they wanted challenge, engaging work, plus opportunities for growth and development. In taking a role at Finance, most had settled for less demanding jobs, opting instead for increased security and employee benefits. However, non-lifers sought to prove themselves and contribute to evolving the organisation. Non-lifers considered that the pressure in Finance was a positive, manageable force for growth that nevertheless allowed work life integration. In the relatively controlled work environment where the impact of destructive forces was minimised, they could relax more than in previous work settings.

### ***Insecurity (low pole)***

Insecurity meant that subgroups’ preferred level of pressure was disrupted. While non-lifers did not appear to experience much Insecurity, lifers felt insecure

with higher work pressure and increased expectations in the work environment. The fear of self-responsibility, learning, adaptation, and growth underpinned Insecurity.

### ***Comfortable Change (high pole)***

Norms were changing in Finance and perhaps predictably, lifers and non-lifers experienced the impact of Comfortable Change on work wellbeing differently. Lifers preferred a slow, cautious, measured approach to change with enough time, nurturing, and support to adjust.

Non-lifers also wanted Comfortable Change. However, this subgroup described the nature of Comfortable Change as faster and more radical than did lifers. Non-lifers brought experience and skills to modernise work methods, and sharpen the focus of managing and processing work. They were keen to innovate and implement new approaches.

Therefore, the Comfortable Change dimension was partially asymmetrical. It demarcated subgroup preferences in relation to the degree and the pace of change introduced into the work setting. For lifers, change was equated with loss, while non-lifers saw it as potential gain.

Change had always been cautious and slow in Finance. A lifer with two long stints in Finance separated by a number of years working in several other organisations described the experience of leaving and returning:

It's a safe place... The routine of the organisation. I mean, you know how things work, you know the hierarchal system. It's that knowing and feeling a part of something... it's like a second home I would imagine... [Then] coming back here, I found it a bit annoying in the beginning. I thought, oh, you guys have just been here forever! And you don't know what life is all about, because you've just been stuck in this institution! Because I had done different things and I had different ideas. I found that a bit frustrating in the beginning. But maybe I've just become institutionalised again!  
(F5)

Innovation was haphazard, and depended on whether a manager wanted to make improvements. Many did not bother. In some areas no change had occurred for many years. These managers were described as wanting “a nice comfortable life”. New graduates “with good ideas” had occasionally made suggestions that were



rarely actioned. There were no requirements for managers to initiate change. They had a high level of autonomy to manage as they wanted, and no penalties were applied even if this impeded the development of Finance overall.

Non-lifers who introduced change to Finance received a mixed reception. Some found that new ideas, expertise, and experiences were “embraced”. Others felt their “wings were clipped” as lifers reacted negatively to, or rejected, alternative ways of working. There were many aspects non-lifers wanted to change. These included: widespread habits of blame and avoiding accountability; resistance to performance reviews and innovation; lifers’ closed, limited thinking and their denigration of non-lifers’ knowledge and experience gained outside Finance; the low levels of professional development; and critical, negative attitudes that bred conservatism and underperformance. Bringing change to Finance was a work in progress for non-lifers:

Wellbeing is high on the agenda for a lot of people, but perhaps to their own detriment, because they're happy with where they are. They're doing a reasonable job but not a great job where they are. Why would they want to put their name forward for a promotion and go and worry about having to do new things or change their friends or go to lunch at a different time? Why would anyone want to do that? It's almost the exact opposite of what wellbeing is all about. (F4)

### ***Uncomfortable Change (low pole)***

Subgroups’ contrasting preferences about the impact of the degree and the pace of change on work wellbeing were reflected at the low pole as well.

Lifers were uncomfortable about the increasing pace of change and the level of loss they associated with change. For example, they observed that Finance had shifted from “a very social” to “a stressful place to work”. Benefits had disappeared, office space contracted, performance expectations increased, and new technology had eliminated jobs. Lifers found the losses unsettling:

We anticipated that technology would be actually something that would help us but in hindsight it seems to... the staff levels have been cut to a skeleton staff almost, and most people, if you talk to anybody I'm sure they would say they are doing more than

one job! When someone goes on leave... or if someone is sick, then that really impacts on the skeleton staff level. (F13)

They also discovered the requirement for promotion had changed to include university qualifications. Most lifers had no post secondary education. In addition, a management style more consistent with the corporate sector was being introduced. With this change, they perceived the fabric or soul of the organisation was being destroyed:

So once again, there was no consideration of the people's lifestyle. There was no consideration of whether they actually had the ability to do the job, given that there was some technical aspect of it that required computers at home and things like that. So I think that there's an amount of, or a philosophy that says, we need to get this done, therefore let's do it, and if we haven't consulted the people, or if we haven't thought of them in the process, well that's bad luck! (F12)

In contrast, non-lifers expected organisations to change. They were familiar with the associated discomfort and they anticipated gains to accrue from making appropriate changes. They wanted to use their ideas and experience but had some resistance from lifers:

Sometimes I have to justify to [lifers] why we do things the way we do. And I find that a little bit annoying... Because people are busy and they kind of just want a quick answer rather than changing something to make it better... And that makes me annoyed. It's kind of like well, I've done all of this and what, are you going to say no because you're too lazy to change your way? (F1)

Introducing new values to Finance, including at senior levels, was problematic. Lifers resisted the need to adapt and felt indignant, hurt, betrayed, and overwhelmed by the pace of change. Employees in both subgroups showed signs of frustration and anger with the other subgroup. At the time of the research, employees reported episodes of conflict, resentment, and impasse. Mutual understanding and resolution about how to introduce and deal with change comfortably was still a fair way off.

## **Indicator level**

Indicators were developed from transcribed interviews and are shown in Appendix E. The use of indicators is discussed in Chapter 7.

## **Feedback from the work setting**

Results were presented twice in Finance, one year apart. The first presentation was to the divisional head of human resources accompanied by twelve HR managers and executives. Feedback following the presentation established that accurate, subtle details about the organisation had been discerned. The group expressed surprise that an outsider could effectively perceive the internal dynamics by using non-quantitative methods.

In the presentation, the group agreed that two factors determined work wellbeing in Finance: the nature of the work, and the manager in charge of a team or department. This raised the possibility that micro contexts (teams or departments with concepts of work wellbeing that varied from the whole organisation) also existed. The study did not address this possibility.

A year later, a second presentation was made to a senior equity and diversity subcommittee. The group assessed the findings as 'harsh but true'. They also described bullying and abuse of power (in Toxic Behaviour, low pole) as an accurate description of Finance. The group agreed that senior management largely ignored managers' abuses of power, explaining that the collective attitude towards employees consisted of 'if you can't take it then leave'. They stated that managers' toxic behaviour was not widespread. It was located in particular departments and practised by a minority of managers. Feedback helped to refine the concept.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, Finance has not applied the findings, and senior management has shown little interest in the results. However, both groups thought the concept could inform HR processes such as recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance appraisal, and talent management.

## Chapter 7: Integrating the Findings

### Introduction

This study used subjective experiences and interpretivist methods to conceptualise work wellbeing in two organisations. An identical, systematic approach to data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and concept building was used as outlined in Chapter 4.

Each local concept was a necessary and sufficient conditions type, as described in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Six dimensions constituted each local concept. It was discovered that dimensions were contained within a common, underlying, constant domain structure. The three domains of Self, Relationships, and Principles described the *perspectives* or vantage points of collective preferences 'for myself', 'with others', and 'from the organisation' in relation to work wellbeing. The domain structure added an unexpected feature to the concepts.

A number of other features were discerned from the sample of two foundational concepts. After concept development was completed and the findings were compared, it was clear that the four pairs of dimensions in Self and Relationships domains, while differing in detail, were parallel in their:

1. Focus on career development and achievement: Expand Potential (Property), and Career Growth (Finance), in the Self domain.
2. Focus on caring for personal health and work life balance: Care for Health (Property), and Self-Care (Finance), in the Self domain.
3. Focus on friendly work relationships: Socio-emotional Connectedness (Property), and Decent Behaviour (Finance), in the Relationships domain.
4. Focus on receiving recognition for contribution: Recognition (Property), and Acknowledgement (Finance), in the Relationships domain.

Additionally, the presence of two unique Principles domain dimensions in each concept differentiated the work settings:

5. Property: High Quality Workplace, and Ethical Corporate Behaviour
6. Finance: Sanctuary, and Comfortable Change

The basic levels, structured and defined by secondary-level dimensions, identified the conceptualisation of the local versions of work wellbeing (Goertz,

2006). Basic levels were described as Collaborative Productivity (Property), and Intelligent Evolution (Finance). The basic levels demonstrated each work wellbeing concept was contextualised to a particular work setting. Although Property and Finance shared similarities, differences in the collective experiences of work wellbeing were demonstrated.

In the remainder of this chapter, concept findings are compared and contrasted and conclusions from the data are drawn. The relevance of local subgroups is addressed first. The two sets of Self and Relationship domain dimensions are then compared and the influence of subgroups on specific dimensions is discussed. This is followed by a comparison of the differentiating dimensions in the Principles domain. The meaning and significance of basic level concepts is described. Finally, the rationale for a class of work wellbeing concepts is outlined. Evaluating the findings for organisational psychology and the practical implications of the study are reviewed in the final chapter.

A note regarding this chapter: Where relevant, references to literature drawn from Chapters 2 and 3 have been provided. Their inclusion indicates that issues raised by this study are supported by relevant research. This demonstrates that findings contribute to knowledge, as they match, reinforce, and organise scattered points from a broad spectrum of disparate literatures.

### **Relevance of subgroups**

The research specialisation, phenomenography, enabled systemic level knowledge about work wellbeing to be discovered. A determining reason for choosing phenomenography was to shift the research perspective from individuals as the 'source of variation' towards variations in the collective phenomenon of work wellbeing (Marton, 1981). Phenomenography allowed differences in how employees collectively experienced, perceived, understood, and conceptualised wellbeing in their local settings to be described. One of the benefits of this approach is the ability to detect subgroups in a human system. Two distinct subgroups were found in each work setting.

### **Property: Fatherhood and migrant background**

Subgroups defined by the different attributes of fatherhood and/or migrant background highlighted variations in some dimensions of the local concept. Subgroups were located towards the low poles on affected dimensions as described in Chapter 5.

#### ***Fatherhood***

*Fatherhood* defined a subgroup whose members had children aged from early childhood to mid-late adolescence. The presence of the subgroup highlighted the negative impact of demanding jobs and family responsibilities on aspects of work wellbeing (Basch & Fisher, 2000; Kahn, 1990). Members reported role overload, high levels of fatigue, inadequate work life balance, reduced performance, a jaded outlook on work, and feeling that they were 'just getting by' (Ganster & Rosen, 2013; McHugh, 1997; Pfeffer, 2010). They wanted interesting, challenging work, high incomes to support families, *and* more time to spend with families (Ranson, 2012). When the need for more family time and reduced work overload was not satisfied, workplace quality was perceived as reduced (Daniels, Beesley, Wimalasiri, & Cheyne, 2013; Luthans, Norman, Avolio, & Avey, 2008; O'Driscoll, Brough, & Kalliath, 2009). The subgroup varied from the wider Property experience on Expand Potential, Care for Health, Socio-emotional Connectedness, and High Quality Workplace dimensions.

The subgroup thus expressed a common dilemma felt by parents with children in the high stress/high responsibility years from early childhood until late adolescence. There was little evidence that members would downsize their jobs, nor did they expect managers to reduce their workload. Subgroup members managed the demands as best they could, satisfying the desire for freedom with innocent rebellion, while apparently still making a competent contribution to Property.

#### ***Migrant background***

The subgroup defined by *migrant background* was located near the low pole of Socio-emotional Disconnectedness. Migrants in Property felt isolated, lonely, and sad for their loss of cultural identity. They felt a sense of exclusion resulting from the disruptive impact of dislocation, loss of familiarity and custom, and emotional disconnectedness from their place and family of origin (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas,

2002; Ziller, 1964). The subgroup felt they were on the 'outside looking in' at other employees who could relate more easily and confidently with colleagues by virtue of sharing a common cultural identity. Therefore, migrants defined a local variation in Socio-emotional Disconnectedness, which was not apparent in the Fatherhood subgroup or the employee group as a whole.

This subgroup's experience raised the possibility that migration potentially deranged and/or rearranged feelings of emotional connection, self-confidence, and identity, at least for the first five to ten years following migration, and often for much longer. This is because a person's place of origin, including people, environment, and life experiences, literally 'constructs' the mind at a psychic level (Cane, 2002). Psychologically, adjustment depends on one's resilience to adapt to a new setting (Antonovsky, 1987). Beneath migrants' visible everyday behaviour, painful hidden currents of loss, exclusion, and deprivation were inexpressible in the work setting. It was apparent that the organisation did not 'cause' this sense of alienation; it was endemic in a subgroup with overseas-based birth backgrounds. Migrants demonstrated that they differed from other employees in terms of how they thought (e.g., identity confusion) and felt (e.g., isolated, excluded, lonely, and grieving) (Bion, 1961; Frost, 2003; Gilbreath, 2004; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp, & Gilson, 2008).

Identifying this subgroup raised questions about other subgroups that may unknowingly be excluded within an organisational system because of personal factors or circumstances (e.g., religious background, physical disability, skin colour, mental illness). Migrants revealed that the social pain of exclusion would remain invisible unless efforts were made to identify, locate, and include 'outsiders' in the work setting (Eisenberger, 2012).

### **Finance: Lifers and non-lifers**

The presence of two subgroups of approximately equal size, demarcated by length of tenure in Finance, introduced a significant layer of complexity to the local concept. Subgroups had contrasting mental maps of the organisation-in-the-mind (Reed, 1976; Shapiro & Carr, 1991). Their asymmetrical attitudes generated undercurrents of tension and animosity across the work setting.

### ***Lifers***

Lifers' views were shaped by lengthy periods of employment in Finance's public sector context. Features of the work setting included limited change, a male dominated hierarchy, and highly politicised internal relations (Hoggett, 2006; McHugh, 1997). A dependency culture resulted from the differential power and status of administrative employees with little or no tertiary education, and professional/senior management employees with tertiary education (Hinshelwood, 2001; Kemper, 2004; Miller, 1993).

The subgroup preferred work roles, organisation structure, processes, and management characterised by predictability. Lifers sought limited work pressure; manageable performance expectations; known tasks; and nurturing, supportive managers (Parker, Baltes, Young, Huff, Altmann, Lacost, & Roberts, 2003). The subgroup relied on managers to provide Muted Career Growth opportunities, and on the collegiate social network for support. Disruptions to familiar patterns challenged lifers' ability to adapt. As a result, their physical and mental health suffered during workplace changes (Cummins, 2010; Loughlin & Murray, 2013). Lifers felt betrayed by the organisation.

Lifers had been caught off guard by organisational change initiatives (Winship, 2005). Their future employability was in doubt due to the difficulty of meeting increased performance requirements, as evidenced in the Principles domain low poles of Insecurity and Uncomfortable Change.

### ***Non-lifers***

Non-lifers' experiences of work wellbeing were gained in prior commercial roles outside Finance. Non-lifers shared lifers' preferences for relatively low pressure in the work setting, although the subgroups attached different meanings to 'low pressure'. In contrast with their previous positions, non-lifers gained reduced work pressure, and increased work life integration, employment security, and benefits when they joined Finance. Their work roles were sometimes less stimulating, although this was not problematic since the gains overall were valued. They had improved personal health and lifestyle from the moderately paced Finance work environment.



### **Significance of subgroups**

Subgroups in a concept provide comparative views on, and clarify the significance of, particular dimensions by identifying variations between a subgroup and the broader system. Therefore, any subgroups indicate core features of a local concept.

Two Property subgroups described difficulties arising from extenuating work and life conditions, placing them towards the low poles of some dimensions compared with the wider system. The subgroups appeared to perform effectively. It could be concluded that Property subgroups indicated relatively minor variations in relevant dimensions of the concept. If supportive management action was needed, it is likely that minor, targeted, time-limited interventions would suffice to improve the subjective sense of increased work wellbeing as expressed in capacity to perform or in interpersonal/social self-confidence.

The situation was different in Finance as fundamental aspects of work wellbeing were contested. Contrasting attitudes, preferences, and experiences differentiated lifers and non-lifers in four out of six dimensions. This disjunction of values and opinions generated tension, anger, and fear that affected the entire system. Subgroups highlighted the existence of toxic processes associated with organisational change in the organisational system (Campbell, Caldicott, & Kinsella, 1994; Frost, 2003; Hoyle, 2004; Stapely, 1996). Management action would require extended, targeted support as well as a range of strategic initiatives across the entire system to address the impact of change (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

### **Comparing the concepts**

Property and Finance concepts revealed the presence of three implicit domains (Self, Relationships, Principles) that were integral to the structure of each local concept of work wellbeing. This discovery contributed to extending knowledge, with implications beyond the individual concepts, as discussed later.

Another unexpected finding was that the four dimensions in Self and Relationships domains had parallel content, while dimensions in the Principles domains did not. Dimensions in the two concepts are compared and contrasted.

### **Self domain: Dimensional differences and similarities**

The 'Self' domain contained systemic values about an implicit question that participants considered when reflecting on wellbeing in the work setting. This was: 'What do I want, prefer, and/or value for *myself* in this organisation?'

Both sites revealed that career development and achievement, and caring for health and work life balance, were essential components in the local concepts of work wellbeing. These parallel dimensions are reviewed.

### ***Expand Potential (Property) and Career Growth (non-lifers, Finance)***

#### High/non-lifer poles

Expand Potential identified that personal and career growth, achievement, challenge, and realising employee potential were regarded as essential in Property. The low pole, Constrict Potential, signalled that work wellbeing could not exist without opportunities for expanding human potential in the work setting. The presence of the fatherhood subgroup, located towards the low pole on Expand Potential, highlighted the deleterious effects of fatigue, lack of time, role overload, and work family demands on growth and achievement in work wellbeing.

In Finance, the parallel dimension was defined by subgroups rather than high or low poles. Non-lifers (clustered at the Career Growth pole) expressed preferences for career development similar to the high pole, Expand Potential, in Property. This was unsurprising, as non-lifers' views on Career Growth were developed in private sector work settings prior to employment in Finance. Lifers, in contrast, were clustered at the Muted Career Growth pole. This demonstrated that Career Growth was an asymmetrical dimension, with non-lifers and lifers holding differentiated mental maps of this aspect of the organisation-in-the-mind (Reed & Bazalgette, 2006).

#### Low/lifer poles

Muted Career Growth (lifers, Finance) differed markedly from Constrict Potential, the low pole in Property. There were two contributing factors to Muted Career Growth: being a lifer, and holding an administrative role with few career opportunities. These two factors were confounded, since almost all lifers in the

sample held administrative roles and had limited post secondary level education. (Lifers with tertiary education and professional or policy roles were markedly under-represented in the sample as they chose not to participate.) A more representative spread of lifer roles would be needed to discern how length of tenure, type of work role, and education were related in Muted Career Growth. Therefore, findings on this aspect are partial. Resolution would require an improved balance of senior lifer participants, and a mixed methods approach to demographic data.

Nevertheless, the findings in relation to lifers' Muted Career Growth were interpreted based on available data. Evidence indicated that lifers preferred comfortable, familiar jobs with consistent, manageable workloads. They prioritised predictable work, benefits (such as retirement pensions), and social engagement with colleagues over career development that created personal discomfort. The preference for relatively low levels of challenge, stimulation, change, and self-responsibility reflected a longstanding cultural attitude of dependency in relation to career development. While this had formerly been acceptable, consequences at the time the research was conducted included dissatisfaction with limited personal development and career achievement. Lifers' ambivalence was expressed in Muted Career Growth. As the organisation changed to require employees to demonstrate greater self-responsibility and personal initiative, many lifers could not adjust, leaving them trapped in dissatisfaction, disappointment, and fear.

## Summary

Property's Expand Potential and Finance's Career Growth poles demonstrated that career growth and achievement were essential for wellbeing in these professional work settings (Campbell Quick, Little, & Nelson, 2009). The opposite poles showed that frustration and resentment increased when employees were unable or unwilling to accept the risks and challenges of development (Callan, 2007; Ibarra, 2002). The lifer pole also highlighted that paternalistic management did not necessarily facilitate employee growth and development. Lifers unaccustomed to self-responsibility lacked the 'emotional muscle' to learn and adapt. Ultimately, this disadvantaged subgroup members and the organisation (Armstrong, 2005).

### ***Care for Health (Property) and Self-care (non-lifers, Finance)***

The second pair of parallel dimensions in the Self domain focused on caring for personal health and work life balance. All employees in Property and Finance considered that caring for physical and mental health was an essential component of work wellbeing. The two dimensions were given similar (but not identical) names at the high/non-lifer poles. This reflected a common focus on adequately caring for health at work. Lifer and non-lifer subgroups defined each pole in Finance. Care for Health (Property) was an “indigenous term” (Bazeley, 2013) taken from interview transcripts. The term was relevant in the work setting and used to denote the high pole in Property.

#### High/non-lifer poles

Property employees and non-lifers in Finance considered that caring for personal health was supported, within limits, in the respective work settings. Care for Health, and Self-care, involved activities such as exercise, stress reduction (e.g., meditation), leisure pursuits, holidays and rest breaks, working flexible hours when necessary, and seeking management support during emergencies. Personal initiative, time, manageable workloads, self-responsibility, and organisational support were important ingredients for maintaining health and wellbeing.

It was easier for non-lifers in Finance to care for their health than for employees in Property, due to the apparently lower level of work pressure in Finance. Non-lifers thought Finance required only moderate work effort in comparison with other private sector work settings. They protected themselves from compromised health through strategies such as subtly reducing their level of effort and proactively implementing other Self-care actions.

#### Low/lifer poles

Property was a high-pressure workplace. Stress, the low pole, indicated that poorer physical and mental health resulted from unrealistic work pressure, interpersonal difficulties, extended hours, lack of exercise, non-nutritious food, and limited contact with family members. Although the work environment occasionally affected personal health, most employees were self-responsible and able to limit the effects of stressful conditions. The fatherhood subgroup described the results of

overload and inadequate work life balance in caring for health (Weston, Gray, Qu, & Stanton, 2004).

Lifers in Finance experienced Reduced Self-care. They held a mental map (Hutton, 2000) of a work setting that provided relatively low-pressure work and nurturing, supportive managers. This expectation was challenged as change processes were implemented, and lifers found caring for their health increasingly difficult (Cynkar, 2007). The impact of corporatist conditions (e.g., longer hours, self-responsibility, more competition, higher workload) compromised the lifer subgroup's mental and physical health as well as perceptions of work life balance.

### Summary

Care for Health and Self-care dimensions highlighted the impact of management decisions on health. An organisation represents itself to employees through managers' thoughts, words, and actions (Maitlis & Ozcelik, 2004).

Property managers, and lifer managers in Finance, treated their employees somewhat differently. Employees in Property appeared to have a relatively adult relationship with management, while a dependency culture appeared to prevail in Finance (Miller, 1993). The two health care dimensions highlighted that employees could more effectively care for their health when they were treated as adults. Health promoting environments are based on mutual reciprocity, respect, flexibility, support, growth, appropriate managerial expectations, and performance. These environments encourage employees to develop the ability to change, adapt, fail, tolerate pressure, and learn and, consequently, to better care for themselves at work (Callan, 2007; Rock & Garavan, 2006). Health negating environments with entrenched bureaucracy allow toxic processes to develop (Rees, 1995c; Winship, 2005). Dependency cultures are one form of toxicity (Miller, 1993).

### **Relationships domain: Dimensional differences and similarities**

The Relationships domain contained collective values in relation to the implicit question, 'How do I want/prefer to relate with people in this organisation?' Two pairs of almost parallel dimensions comprised the domain. The dimensions addressed how employees preferred to relate with others and the desire for individual and group recognition in the work setting.

### ***Socio-emotional Connectedness (Property) and Decent Behaviour (Finance)***

#### High poles

The content of Property and Finance dimensions was similar at the high poles, indicating system-wide preferences for respectful, trustworthy relationships. In both work settings, employees sought friendly, sociable, helpful, like-minded colleagues who were easy to get along with, were supportive, and had a sense of humour. Communicating honestly, empathically, and authentically were valued attributes in individuals and teams.

Based on interview data (and subsequently corroborated by feedback from managers), maintaining Socio-emotional Connectedness was a priority in Property. Team building activities fostered effective work relationships, and the physical environment promoted interaction and social cohesion (Alexander, 2002). Managers cared about employees' personal needs, responded quickly to crises (e.g., health, family), and provided egalitarian, balanced facilitation if conflict occurred. Managers also maintained an unobtrusively helpful stance that engendered gratitude and trust.

Decent Behaviour in Finance was evidenced in pleasant, supportive, warm collegiate relationships at all levels, plus effective teamwork and camaraderie. Managers provided advice and help for work tasks, personal matters, navigating politics, and feedback.

#### Low poles

The two dimensions were differentiated at the low poles.

In Property, Socio-emotional Disconnectedness was a subgroup feature (fatherhood and migrant background). The low pole was also related to tightly controlled, or unpredictable and chaotic, management behaviour that decreased systemic productivity and mood. Loneliness, alienation, anger, and exhaustion were hallmarks of personal experience at this pole, resulting in compromised work relationships and reduced mental and physical health in the two subgroups.

Toxic Behaviour, the low pole in Finance, highlighted the buffering role of positive relationships. Strong interpersonal relationships helped employees weather the effects of change, and tolerate work harms or negative behaviours (e.g.,

obstacles, anger, politics, or criticism). Employees without social networks were disadvantaged.

The prevailing management style, a “grand-parenting approach”, suggested that Finance employees sought, and were collectively drawn into, more dependent (parent-child) relationships with lifer managers. The low pole indicated relational difficulties were associated with this mode of interaction. Power differences meant employees were unable to place limits on toxic management behaviour. Employees bearing the brunt of toxic behaviour experienced reduced subjective wellbeing, with depression a likely outcome in extreme circumstances (Cummins, 2010). Observers of managers’ anger, verbal abuse, humiliation, coercion, scapegoating, threats, autocratic behaviour, and punishment also experienced a level of distress. The low pole indicated that some lifer managers’ interpersonal behaviour was detrimental to the whole system. Ultimately, some managers’ unwillingness and/or inability to relate to employees in a considerate, self-aware, authoritative (as opposed to coercive or humiliating) manner probably limited the capacity of the organisational system to learn and mature.

Toxic Behaviour also contained another aspect of relational dysfunction in Finance. Lifers reporting to *non-lifer* managers found their trust in a stable, caring, predictable organisation was undermined due to the imposition of change. Consequently, lifers considered non-lifer managers’ behaviour was distrustful, selfish, tough-minded, and uncaring. Lifers felt less valued as employees than formerly.

### Summary

These dimensions drew attention to the importance of respectful, humane, emotionally healthy work relationships in work wellbeing. Employees’ maturity and self-control, regardless of their position, had a significant impact on interaction dynamics in work settings (Hinshelwood, 2001; Porath & Pearson, 2010). When Socio-emotional Connectedness and Decent Behaviour prevailed, employees created mutually sustaining, productive work settings where problems were resolved without undue difficulty.

Destructive flow-on effects resulted from toxic interaction dynamics, including passivity, aggression, change reluctance, and limited development. Personality aspects (e.g., egotism, anger, bullying, self-interest) or systemic impediments (e.g., lack of interest, inertia, concentration of power, resistance to change) that were not addressed affected the entire system.

Experience of the change process in Finance suggested that reversing the effects of toxicity might be time-consuming.

### ***Recognition (Property) and Acknowledgement (Finance)***

High and low poles

Recognition and Acknowledgement referred to the ubiquitous need for approval, appreciation, praise, feedback, and other forms of reward in Property and Finance. These dimensions were quite straightforward, clear, and oriented to the high poles in both concepts, reflecting the value and effectiveness of employee recognition and acknowledgement processes in the work settings. The different names on the dimensions arose from local indigenous terms used in interviews. Property employees specifically referred to other forms of Recognition in addition to verbal or written feedback. Various rewards (financial, celebrations, fun activities, time off/away from the office) were part of the Property culture of recognising successful performance and effort.

Acknowledgement was just as crucial in Finance. It was usually provided in verbal or written forms. Acknowledgements included: references to individual or group achievements in internal newsletters or emails, and verbal comments from senior managers at organisation-wide events (e.g., the Christmas party) or in private conversations. Employees were consistently motivated by the desire for positive or constructively critical feedback, praise, and appreciation. They expected achievement and effort to be rewarded by managers and/or the organisation.

Lack of Recognition and Lack of Acknowledgement significantly affected motivation, mood, energy, confidence, and commitment; work suffered, and negativity increased. Employees in both organisations described negative outcomes when their efforts and successes were ignored.



## Summary

Recognition and Acknowledgement are essential dimensions of work wellbeing, expressing deep human needs to be noticed and valued as contributing members undertaking meaningful work in the organisation (Amabile & Kramer, 2011). Even critical feedback motivated employees. Financial rewards emerged as less important than other indicators of approval (Deckop, Jurkiewicz, & Giacalone, 2010; Scollon & King, 2004; Swift, 2007) in these concepts.

### **Principles domain: Differentiating the concepts**

The third domain, Principles, emerged from another implicit question participants asked themselves when reflecting on work wellbeing: 'How do I want/prefer [the organisation] to behave towards employees and the wider community and/or society?' The domain comprised collective preferences for the organisations' desired behaviour towards employees (the internal community), the local external community, or in society. Dimensions in the Principles domains clearly differentiated the concepts.

The Principles domain in Property contained High Quality Workplace and Ethical Corporate Behaviour. Sanctuary and Comfortable Change comprised the Principles domain in Finance.

### ***High Quality Workplace (Property)***

This dimension in Property reflected several factors about the organisation, its work, and the value of aesthetics and amenity to employees. Most employees were highly educated and intellectually engaged by work-related issues like sustainability and innovative technologies. Property offices were state of the art, designed for employees; they functioned partly as a statement of how the organisation wanted to relate to its members, i.e., with support, generosity, and respect. Employees understood this. The High Quality Workplace dimension reflected employees' responses to the company's intentions, the building, and management. Employees differentiated between a magnificent physical environment and the quality of human interaction facilitated by management.

The High Quality Workplace dimension demonstrated that a quality physical environment was not sufficient if the quality of the collective emotional and

interactional environment was compromised. Employees assessed the quality of human interaction in the work setting as more important than the physical environment (Dutton & Workman, 2011; Krznaric, 2013). The presence of the fatherhood subgroup helped to identify this variation in the dimension, revealing destructive or unsupportive interactions undermined a high quality work setting and, consequently, work wellbeing.

### ***Ethical Corporate Behaviour (Property)***

Ethical Corporate Behaviour described the importance of consistency between Property's espoused values and its behaviour in the wider social context. Employees wanted to identify with, and be proud of, Property's ethics and behaviour as a corporate citizen. However, this was sometimes difficult due to the destructive environmental impacts of its building activities. Collectively, this was perceived as incongruence between corporate values and behaviour.

The dissonance was compounded when employees looked at their complicity in co-creating incongruence between values and actions. They realised future generations could inherit a degraded, damaged environment due in part to their actions. This caused discomfort and guilt. Although employees believed that Property intended to do the right thing and everyone was trying their best, they felt it was not always enough.

The high and low poles on this dimension demonstrated competing, complex values dilemmas in Property. Ethics, corporate, and personal needs cannot always be reconciled. As employees with relevant skills and knowledge, they wanted to work in the property development industry; they also needed to earn a living, and using their skills was a pragmatic choice. The dimension expressed the intricate crosscurrents of ethics, choices, decisions, and actions that were irreconcilable to a certain extent.

### ***Sanctuary (Finance)***

Sanctuary described two universally desired aspects of the work setting: achieving high quality work, and being in a comfortable, secure, protected environment. Lifers and non-lifers were united in the goal to produce quality work, and both subgroups agreed on the merits of working in the benefits-rich Finance environment.

The subgroups held different views on the constitution of 'manageable' work. Manageability referred to a subgroup's desired levels of work pressure, effort, and challenge. Lifers and non-lifers differed on preferred manageability, and were consequently able to tolerate more or less learning anxiety, effort, and challenge (Callan, 2007). Lifers wanted limited pressure, effort, and challenge. Non-lifers wanted more challenging work that was inevitably associated with greater learning, pressure, and effort. Prior career experiences had equipped each subgroup with a different capacity to manage high workload, adapt to increased expectations, take risks, and improve productivity.

This dilemma suggested that work wellbeing depended partly on a mix of two opposing forces. One force would 'push' employees to confront different activities, work hard, and consider challenges as stimulating and necessary for growth. The other force would 'cushion' employees from excessive pressure or threat by providing relatively high levels of support, security, and safety. This dimension indicated that, occasionally, a degree of cushioning could improve work wellbeing by reducing the impact of potentially overwhelming developmental experiences. However, lifers demonstrated that excessive cushioning made work too manageable. This became a growth-limiting factor for employees as well as the work setting.

### ***Comfortable Change (Finance)***

This dimension was originally included as an aspect of Sanctuary. The decision to separate it was based on the polarised views of lifers and non-lifers on the specific issue of *how Comfortable Change was constituted*. The level of disturbance arising from this issue unduly skewed the Sanctuary dimension when it was included. Although in some respects Comfortable Change could be seen as an aspect of Sanctuary, the Principles domain dimensions are more clearly differentiated with Comfortable Change as a separate dimension. The separation allows work manageability and change to be viewed as two relatively discrete issues, reflecting the way participants referred to them.

Lifers and non-lifers held opposite views about the constitution of Comfortable Change in the work setting. Change was a highly charged issue in

Finance. Its impact disturbed and unsettled both subgroups, triggering angry, frustrated exchanges between them.

Lifers defined Comfortable Change as *minimally traumatic*. They preferred to avoid change; if it needed to happen, they wanted it to be measured and cautious, as they experienced change as *personal loss*. For lifers, change was uncomfortable. The subgroup perceived non-lifers as the instigators and promoters of change.

Non-lifers wanted a proactive approach to change in order to improve work processes and management. This subgroup regarded change as potential gain for Finance and themselves. Non-lifers believed that cultural features such as blame, change reluctance, conservatism, and underperformance were destructive and ought to be replaced by corporatist/private sector work practices. Non-lifers disagreed with lifers' notion of Comfortable Change, viewing it as slow and ineffectual.

Finance's senior managers (lifers) were driving organisational change. However, the process appeared to be ad hoc. At the time of the research, a project or steering committee had not been delegated responsibility for overall design and implementation of change. No overarching framework guided the implementation of change initiatives in the organisation, and the reasons for change had not been communicated. Instead, private sector managers were hired to initiate performance-based processes in individual teams or departments. Non-lifer managers appeared to make decisions as independent agents rather than in a coordinated, structured manner. Consequently, lifers experienced the changes as profoundly inconsistent with prevailing Finance's values, beliefs, structures and processes (Gammelsaeter, 2002).

The global trend to cut public sector funding and improve efficiency and effectiveness in public service organisations was noted more than 15 years ago (McHugh, 1997). Corporatist values underlie these changes, which do not appear to have been sufficiently questioned for their relevance to public sector settings such as Finance (Korten, 1998; Lefkowitz, 2013b). In public organisations, the negative impacts of major change processes on psychological wellbeing include stress, high anxiety, and being 'worn out'. Therefore, change management in public sector workplaces must address stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue as a priority

(Lefkowitz, 2013a). Finance leaders overlooked the potential for damage caused by inadequately conceived and managed change processes, which could be regarded as a failure of moral leadership (Basch & Fisher, 2000; Lefkowitz, 2006).

### **Summary**

The Property Principles domain included High Quality Workplace, which defined the importance of the emotional and interactional environment in the work setting. Ethical Corporate Behaviour, in contrast, described the complex values dilemmas to be negotiated when striving to act ethically as an organisation or an employee. This dimension highlighted the thorny interplay of creative and destructive corporate activity in the social environment. Principles domain dimensions indicated employees were thoughtful about interpersonal and task-related matters. Values such as corporate social responsibility (Gray, Owen, & Adams, 1996; Roberts, 1984) and meaning and purpose in jobs (Hamilton, 2008) were collectively significant, and employees did not appear to avoid taking responsibility for ethical issues.

Dimensions in Finance's Principles domain focused on collective experiences of contentment or distress in the work setting. There were areas of subgroup agreement as well as conflict in Sanctuary and Comfortable Change. Disagreements centred on subgroups' perceptions of manageable work and preferred ways for change to occur. Arguably, the corporatist shift to a performance/accountability-based environment was poorly planned and executed. As a result, the lack of change, or conversely too much change, created turmoil and collective distress (Van Buskirk & McGrath, 1999). The Principles domain provided unexpected insights (at a moment in time) into the disruptive effects of corporate change on two deeply divided employee groups.

### **Basic level: Comparing the concepts**

The basic level conceptualised the situated, or local, form of work wellbeing. In work settings, purposeful activity is the primary goal and reason for the organisation's existence. The basic level names the *form* of purposeful activity that generates wellbeing in a particular workplace. Without a focus on situated purposeful activity at the basic level, work wellbeing would be ambiguous or diffuse.

### ***Property: Collaborative Productivity***

In Property, collaboration and productivity were the essential components of purposeful activity. The basic level expressed this as Collaborative Productivity. When employees worked collaboratively and productively, work wellbeing was high.

The dimensions that constituted the basic level described how to enact collaboration and productivity on a day-to-day basis. Collaboration and productivity were enhanced when employees were supported to care for personal and health needs at work; when work challenged, developed, and stretched their skills; when relationships with colleagues were helpful, cooperative, and relaxed; and the work setting recognised and rewarded effort and achievement. Collaborative Productivity increased when employees paid attention to creating a high quality emotional and interactional environment in Property, and collective ethical values were enacted at the organisational level.

The low pole of the basic level, Self-interested Isolation, described the defining elements of the opposite experience, i.e., non-work wellbeing. Low poles on the secondary-level dimensions articulated the constitution of Self-interested Isolation. Therefore, the basic level demonstrated that the local version of work wellbeing was grounded in very specific inputs and outputs. Inputs included collaborative interpersonal and task processes. Outputs were defined as productivity, or put differently, achieving desired tasks and collective objectives.

### ***Finance: Intelligent Evolution***

The basic level conceptualised the situated form of work wellbeing in Finance as Intelligent Evolution. The opposite was Stagnation at the low pole. *Intelligent* specified the requisite inputs, such as the thoughtful application of useful, intellectually sophisticated knowledge and professional experience to Finance-relevant problems or questions. *Evolution* described the process of developing outputs, i.e., in a controlled and careful (not rushed) manner, with collective effort leading to the creation of credible, reliable reports, advice, and data.

Dimensions constituting the basic level described how to enact intelligence and evolution on a day-to-day basis. Work wellbeing was enhanced when each subgroup was *appropriately* challenged to develop and achieve, and *adequately*

supported to care for their personal and health needs at work. Intelligent Evolution was facilitated when employees enjoyed friendly, supportive, and warm relationships with colleagues; when managers treated employees with respect and empathy; and management acknowledged employees' effort and achievements verbally or in writing.

Principles domain dimensions suggested that Intelligent Evolution was somewhat compromised at the time of the research. In particular, the pace and nature of systemic change affected the ability of both subgroups to work comfortably towards work wellbeing.

### ***Summary***

Property's work was high energy, deadline focused, and demanding. Finance's work required careful, close attention to detail and wide intellectual knowledge of relevant material. Both organisations produced excellent work and quality outcomes. Intuitively, it seemed unlikely that Property employees could change places with Finance employees, or vice versa. Finance needed careful, thorough, researched work. Property required accountability, speed, and adaptability to manage a constant stream of novel projects. Differences in the basic levels of the concepts emphasised that work wellbeing was completely contextualised, although the work settings shared features in common.

### **Proposal for a Class of Work Wellbeing Concepts**

The study used interpretivist methodology to conceptualise work wellbeing from subjective accounts of situated experience. Although identical methods were used in both sites, there was no prior expectation that concepts would share common elements, including: overlapping content in four out of six dimensions, the presence of subgroups, and concept type (necessary and sufficient conditions).

Domains revealed that participants had consistently, and apparently without awareness (Lambie & Marcel, 2002), described wellbeing from three superordinate perspectives: Self, Relationships, and Principles. Parallel dimensions in the Self and Relationships domains demarcated four requisite or necessary components of work wellbeing. Self and Relationships domains revealed the following knowledge about work wellbeing:

1. There was collective agreement that the two most important *personal* (Self) components of work wellbeing were *career growth and achievement in preferred jobs* and *caring for one's health*.
  - i) Career- and job-related professional and personal growth, learning, and achievement were fundamental to work wellbeing. Subgroups differentiated this dimension. They found career development more or less accessible, and more or less possible.
  - ii) Managing the potentially negative impacts of work on personal health and/or family life was fundamental to work wellbeing. Subgroups differentiated this dimension. Managing the impacts of work on health and/or family life was more or less challenging for subgroups.
2. There was collective agreement that the two most important components of *work relationships* (Relationships) were the *ways people related to each other*, and *recognition* for individual and/or team effort and successful outcomes.
  - i) Supportive, helpful, congenial, enjoyable, reliable, conflict-free interpersonal relations were fundamental to work wellbeing. Different subgroups found it more or less challenging to engage or interact with employees on these terms.
  - ii) Recognition, acknowledgement, and rewards for individual or team effort, contribution, and achievement were fundamental to work wellbeing.

The underlying domain structure, with parallel content in the dimensions of two domains, implied that the concepts could be related. In addition, knowledge derived from the third domain, Principles, convincingly separated the concepts. The Principles domains in Property and Finance conveyed the following about *situated* work wellbeing:

3. There was collective agreement that the two most important *systemic* Principles components of work wellbeing in Property were *a high quality workplace* and *ethical corporate behaviour*.
  - a) A high quality Property workplace depended on physical and interpersonal environments. Collectively, the quality of the



emotional/interpersonal environment was ultimately valued more highly than the quality of the physical environment in work wellbeing.

- b) There was a collective preference for Property to maintain congruence between words (e.g., 'sustainability') and actions (e.g., 'caring for the environment/communities') in corporate projects and activities in the wider social environment.
4. There was collective agreement that the two most important *systemic* Principles components of work wellbeing in Finance were *the workplace as a sanctuary* and *comfortable change*.
- a) Sanctuary referred to quality work and a protected environment. The contested element of *manageability* referred to preferences for desired levels of work pressure, effort, and challenge. Subgroups defined 'manageability' differently, and consequently were more or less able to manage work pressure, effort, and challenge as they encountered it.
  - b) *Comfortable change* referred to preferences for how corporate change was managed. Subgroups defined '*comfortable change*' differently, and consequently were more or less able to handle changes they encountered.

Self and Relationships domains indicated four necessary components of work wellbeing. From the universe of potential contenders (see Chapters 2 and 3 for a wide range of possibilities from the literature), this study showed that *development and achievement, caring for personal health, how employees related to each other, and recognition* were *essential* components of work wellbeing. Dimensions in each concept demonstrated that each component was contextualised to a work setting.

However, the study also demonstrated that while these four components were essential, they were not sufficient for work wellbeing to exist in the work setting. The Principles domain, in differentiating Property and Finance, revealed that work wellbeing was not a universal or generalised concept. Principles demonstrated local values preferences for systemic behaviour. Therefore, two overlapping domains and one differentiating domain accounted for all dimensions in both local concepts.

This implied that not only were the concepts potentially related, they were also non-random.

These findings lead to the proposition that a new class of concepts has been identified. It is proposed that the underlying domain structure unites Property and Finance concepts as members of a superordinate class of work wellbeing concepts. The notion of a 'class' of work wellbeing concepts flags that work settings will differ at the dimensional level in the experience of wellbeing. However, the proposal of a class registers that the domain structure maintains although local dimensions might vary. For instance, member concepts may have more or less dimensions in each domain, and dimensions are likely to have different names from those already used. Furthermore, any subgroups would reflect local variations in how work wellbeing was experienced.

A *class* of work wellbeing concepts is a higher order conceptual category of the family resemblance type (Goertz, 2006). The class is defined by the presence of the Self, Relationships, and Principles domain structure. Property and Finance would be members of the class of work wellbeing concepts because all dimensions were accommodated by the common domain structure. Family resemblance concepts allow dimensional variation at the local level. Despite variation, concepts have enough similarity (satisfying the condition of 'sufficiency', not 'necessity') to be identified as members of the 'family'. As a superordinate conceptual class, dimensions of a local concept are required to fit the domain structure. If this occurs, a local concept would be a member of the class of work wellbeing concepts.

### **Using indicators to develop quantitative instruments**

Indicator statements derived from interviews in Property and Finance are located in Appendix E. Indicators were drawn from interview transcripts after the abstract conceptual structure was developed. Once the process of thematic categorising (assisted by the use of NVivo) was completed, representative statements were taken directly from chunks of interview text that had been allocated to each dimension. These statements indicated the content and emphasis of dimensions using participants' words from transcripts.

Indicators may be used to develop quantitative instruments to assess wellbeing *in the work setting from which they were derived*. This study argued for developing a local concept as a first step, since any survey of wellbeing is only meaningful when it is used in conjunction with a locally derived concept. Quantitative data without a pre-existing local concept are decontextualised; there is no information about the content of dimensions in any domain, or knowledge about possible subgroups, or how unique subgroup experience influences variations in dimensions (Saylor, 2013). A baseline of situated conceptual knowledge is necessary for comparative purposes. Indeed, contextualising this kind of organisational research was encouraged to indicate the inter-connections within the larger whole more than a decade ago. Rousseau and Fried pointed out, “Contextualizing entails linking observations to a set of relevant facts, events, or points of view that make possible research and theory that form part of a larger whole” (2001, p 1).

### **Feedback from research sites**

Presenting the final concepts to Property and Finance managers provided valuable feedback about accuracy and contextualised explanations of unusual features e.g., subgroups. The latter issue is addressed first.

An important issue raised in the Finance concept was the prevalence of toxic management behaviour. According to participants, lifer managers displayed, and/or appeared to condone toxic behaviour that included many aggressive, destructive attitudes and actions.

Providing this feedback to two senior Finance manager groups was awkward, as the groups were comprised mostly of lifers. The first group responded to the issue of toxic management behaviour with a long silence followed by a brief, slightly dismissive, explanation from the most senior manager. Other members endorsed the explanation and discussion was concluded. The second group of mostly female lifer managers engaged in a free-ranging, open conversation about toxicity in Finance. Group members acknowledged the problem. They explained that toxic behaviour was related to the type of work carried out in a department, as well as the individual management style of the person in charge of a team or department. This

feedback located toxicity in specific areas and/or functions. It was not seen to be a universal feature of the workplace.

This feedback needed to be integrated. The researcher reviewed the contents of Toxic Behaviour, Career Growth, Self-care, and Acknowledgement dimensions. Employees had praised managers' willingness to acknowledge their effort, achievement, and contribution, and noted their support and nurturing. This led to the conclusion that the extent of toxic behaviour was likely to be relatively limited, and as a result, the final concept was adjusted. That senior management did not appear to address toxic behaviour was a separate, systemic issue. Toxicity had genuinely hurt some participants, and their strong negative experiences (Cummins, 2010) had led to a degree of distortion in the concept. Negative events are remembered and reported more readily than positive ones (Forgas, 2008). This feedback from the work setting was invaluable. It highlighted limitations of a mostly administrative lifer sample, led to refinements in the concept, and indicated the need for caution in future projects.

Feedback also helped to assess the potential utility of the concept as a management tool. General managers in Property were unanimous that the concept reflected the company they knew. Confidence in the findings was demonstrated by their independent decisions to use the concept as a practical tool in strategy and business planning. The first manager used it to inform his executive team's strategy development in the annual business planning process. Two years later, the second manager used it in human resource management planning.

Although Finance managers largely agreed with the findings, they were unable to interest senior management in practical applications of the concept.

### **Significance of the study**

This chapter began by noting that findings from this study matched and reinforced various ideas from a broad spectrum of disparate multidisciplinary literature. Findings from this study were not only supported by existing research, however; they expanded and elaborated knowledge.

This study has contributed the following foundational knowledge to organisational psychology:

1. Identification of a meta-concept of a *class of work wellbeing concepts* with a constant domain structure (Self, Relationships, Principles) that defines the class.
2. The domains potentially structure diverse theory and research under a *single conceptual umbrella of work wellbeing concepts*. In linking the idea of situated work experience with wellbeing, a distinct perspective on wellbeing was conceptualised. Concepts highlight research relevant to work wellbeing, as well as how this knowledge is structured. The robustness of this proposition needs to be researched further. However, the study raises the possibility that apparently unrelated research in other knowledge areas could potentially be integrated through a process of foundational concept development, thereby contributing to higher order knowledge.
3. The study demonstrated a way to use interpretivist, multidisciplinary, innovative methods to develop concepts. Concept development and foundational research, with or without multidisciplinary approaches, are rare in organisational psychology.
4. The study used subjective data to conceptualise work wellbeing. This shifted the focus on wellbeing from an individual to group level, indicating that work wellbeing was an identifiable systemic attribute.
5. Feedback confirmed the concepts were accurate, comprehensive representations of the local experience of work wellbeing.
6. The concepts are theoretically defensible and practice-friendly. Based on a relatively modest investment of 16 interviews per organisation, the concept is a valuable tool to identify and address organisational issues related to wellbeing, such as the needs of subgroups, and developing change interventions. Concepts have high potential utility.

In the final chapter, the proposal for a class of wellbeing concepts is grounded in the theoretical and methodological propositions from Chapter 1. This is followed by a critique of literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 in light of the findings from this study. It argues that concept development provides a refined view of work wellbeing by dimensionalising and describing the situated systemic feature at three levels (basic, secondary-level dimensions, indicators). This is a strong

theoretical basis from which to investigate the connection between wellbeing and other variables at work. Without a foundational concept, quantitative measurement is at best premature and, at worst, meaningless.

## Chapter 8

### **A Class of Work Wellbeing Concepts: Evaluating the evidence**

This study of work wellbeing began with the observation that theory and methods in organisational psychology are constrained by prevailing social and disciplinary values. The current restricted methodological range favours experimental science (experiments, quasi experiments, and quantitative surveys) over interpretivist science. A disciplinary approach to researching subjective experience at work has not been developed, nor have appropriate interdisciplinary methods been incorporated. As a result, organisational psychology has a rather limited set of practice-relevant theory. This combination of factors has contributed to the situation where foundational concept development is neither seen as necessary nor rarely attempted. Chapter 1 argued this was a cause for concern given its core focus on human behaviour in work settings. Three additions to the theoretical and methodological repertoire were proposed to redress this:

1. Proactively investigate employee subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings.
2. Incorporate and value interpretivist methods in the research toolkit, particularly in applied settings.
3. Ensure tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised before embarking on quantitative measurement.

Part 1 of this chapter reviews the evidence gained from this study on work wellbeing in relation to the three proposals. If accepted, the proposals could help to better align future research and practice, so disciplinary theory would have greater applicability to practice environments.

The evaluation of the proposals draws largely on data presented in Chapters 4 to 7 inclusive. These chapters set up, described, and discussed results from the study of work wellbeing. The proposals were implemented in the study. To recap, Methodology was outlined in Chapter 4, where the proposals from Chapter 1 were amplified and operationalised. These included using interpretivist methodology and methods, focusing on subjectivity, and describing the approach to developing the

concept of work wellbeing. Chapters 5 and 6 described findings from the two sites, Property and Finance, in detail. Chapter 7 integrated the two sets of findings to generate new understanding about concepts of work wellbeing. Comparing and contrasting dimensions in the concepts revealed an unexpected, constant, tri level domain structure (Self, Relationships, and Principles). Parallel dimensional content in the Self and Relationships domains suggested the local concepts could be related, while the Principles domain unambiguously differentiated the concepts. The presence of subgroups in each work setting demonstrated variance in how particular dimensions were experienced locally. Chapter 7 concluded that the domain structure was a non-random result of the concept development process, implying a new class of concepts defined by the domain structure was identified. Referred to as a class of work wellbeing concepts, 'class' indicates that local variation among secondary-level dimensions in member concepts is expected, although domains remain constant. A benefit of the domain structure is its potential to integrate site specific member concepts into an overarching, cohering framework denoting a particular type of wellbeing, i.e., work wellbeing.

In Part 2, findings from this study are compared with literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. Multidisciplinary, experimental and interpretivist science research grounded the wellbeing study and provided a comparative context for the findings. One cause for concern was the assumption that 'wellbeing' is a common sense, global term with agreed meaning. Its status in the literature as a generalised single dimension was rarely questioned, clarified, or subjected to prior analysis. This study showed these assumptions could be challenged. It demonstrated wellbeing is a situated feature of work settings: a multidimensional, systemic attribute that varies in its dimensional components according to local conditions and subgroup experience. Findings revealed work wellbeing comprised a limited dimensional range in two domains, with highly differentiated and unpredictable dimensions in the other domain. Therefore, correlations between wellbeing and other variables must be viewed with caution when wellbeing is assumed to be a single dimensional attribute identical in all workplaces.

Part 3 outlines learnings from the study. Taking a macro perspective, and drawing on philosophical literature about wellbeing, it proposes work wellbeing is a



form of meaningful integration that results from active participation with others in the work environment. This parallels the recognition in early Greek philosophy that participating in the social or political community provided an essential forum for character development to occur. Work wellbeing, it is argued, is a form of eudaimonic or meaning-based wellbeing that is specific to work settings.

Part 4 describes practical implications of the study, particularly in relation to the significance of subgroups, and people and/or profit oriented values in organisations.

In Part 5, the quality and significance of conclusions from the work wellbeing study are described. Part 6 assesses the limitations of the study and future directions.

## **Part 1: The proposals**

### **Subjectivity**

*Proposal 1: Proactively investigate employee subjectivity as a primary data source in work settings.*

History is always an invention; it is a fairy tale built upon certain clues. The clues are not the problem... [t]hese clues are pretty well established; most of them can literally be laid on the desktop for anyone to handle. But these, unfortunately do not constitute history. History consists of the links between them, and it is this that presents the problem. And the link is especially opaque... because the only thing that anyone – and that includes me – can use to fill in the gaps between history's clues is themselves. (Peter Hoeg, *The History of Danish Dreams*)

It has been said that a story is 'truer than the truth'. Stories not only contain the facts and descriptions of events, people, and places that experimental science provides; they also contain fragments of truth as seen by the storyteller (Cloeke & Goldsmith, 2000). The fragments of truth are entirely subjective.

This study invited participants to share their stories about situated work wellbeing in a particular way: as subjectively experienced in their work setting, using metaphoric devices and personal experiences of their own choosing, in a one to one relation of story teller to researcher-listener, and with the protection of complete

confidentiality. These parameters created a safe environment in which participants freely communicated personal meaning, affect, and thoughts. They directed the researcher-listener's attention to aspects that needed to be heard, such as the dark side of work wellbeing in the local setting and other personally significant themes.

Subjective experience was the basis of the concepts. The concepts were grounded in the meaning of employees' work wellbeing experiences *for themselves*, and these perspectives are never reducible to objective analysis (Neisser, 2006). This personal frame of reference revealed data containing explicit and implicit attitudes, intentions, beliefs, feelings, desires, preferences, and behaviour that participants considered valuable. The result was a set of fertile systemic-level data describing the most relevant experiences of work wellbeing. When data were analysed, the basic levels (Collaborative Productivity in Property; Intelligent Evolution in Finance) clearly conceptualised the local versions of work wellbeing. It would have been difficult to express the essence of wellbeing in either work setting in just two words using experimental methods, as nuances provided by subjective experience would be absent.

Secondary-level dimensions were further evidence of the vibrant conceptual knowledge derived from subjective data. They illustrated how the necessary and sufficient dimensions of local work wellbeing formed a collective image of the organisation-in-the-mind (Hutton, 2000; see Chapter 2). At the individual level, the organisation-in-the-mind contained an employee's subjective experience of situated wellbeing. At the organisation level, dimensions and subgroup variations indicated the presence of multiple experiences of wellbeing in the collective mental map. In Finance, lifers' and non-lifers' collective internal maps differentiated subgroups on dimensions of Career Growth and Self-care (Self domain). Lifers' subjectivity defined one pole of each dimension, viz., Muted Career Growth, and Reduced Self-care, while non-lifers' experience defined the opposite poles. In contrast, the Sanctuary dimension showed that subgroups shared similar maps of the organisation-in-the-mind at each pole. Subjective accounts also revealed *how* work settings differentially influenced wellbeing experience, e.g., as shown in Decent Behaviour and Toxic Behaviour poles (Finance, Relationships domain). This dimension described the multifaceted emotional experience resulting from supportive and/or dependency

relationships, entrenched values expectations, abusive behaviour, and organisational change.

Chapter 1 pointed out that human experience is *intersubjectively constituted*. Interview accounts of wellbeing experience confirmed this reality. Intersubjectivity recognises that human minds continuously co-create subjective experience through processes of interaction in every context including work settings. An intersubjective orientation views other employees as human beings with their own subjectivities or 'for me' perspectives, rather than as 'objects' without the capacity for an individual-centric focus. Where an awareness of others' subjectivity prevails, employees are likely to experience relatively healthy interpersonal relations. This was evident in the parallel secondary-level dimensions of Recognition (Property) and Acknowledgement (Finance), which revealed the value of approval, recognition, appreciation, praise, feedback, and other forms of reward for employees. These experiences are constituted intersubjectively (Huppert, 2009).

Quantitative measurement of tropes and/or common sense terms that are not conceptualised is problematic for reasons outlined in Chapter 1. In this study useful, applicable, substantive systemic knowledge was gained solely from subjective data. This was additional to individual level data that the study did not explore. It is evident that subjectivity (including values, history, emotions, and attitudes) influences how personal worlds are shaped, constructed, and perceived. Work wellbeing (a values- and affect-laden feature of work life) is a subjective experience. Findings suggest organisational psychologists could make more use of employee subjectivity as a primary data source. The study demonstrated its utility in foundational concept development. Using subjective experience as a primary data source in work settings is a valuable addition to the theoretical repertoire in organisational psychology.

### **Interpretivist methods**

*Proposal 2: Incorporate and value interpretivist methods  
in the research toolkit, particularly in applied settings.*

An integral link exists between subjectivity and locally constituted social processes, as previously outlined. Subjective experience and social processes need

holistic research methods to accommodate and respect the nature of the data. Otherwise experience must be split into artificial categories of operationally defined constituents to suit experimental methods. The second proposal claimed interpretivist science is more appropriate than experimental science for investigating social epistemology (Fuller, 2002). As outlined in Chapter 1, causal *description* from interpretivist methods (rather than causal *explanation* from experimental science) is better oriented to understanding the constitution of experiential worlds in work settings (Breen & Darlaston-Jones, 2010; Locke & Golden-Biddle, 2002; Maxwell, 201; Orange, 2009). Evidence from this study supports the proposal.

Phenomenography, an interpretivist research specialisation, was appropriate for developing systemic level knowledge since the analytic focus was on the *phenomenon* of interest i.e., work wellbeing. Interpretivist methods provided the latitude to explore questions such as how a *set of participants* conceived of a systemic phenomenon. These methods are suited to studying phenomena that have not previously been conceptualised. In this way similar yet distinctively different conceptual knowledge was developed from local experience. Differences were sometimes subtle. The parallel dimensions of Care for Health (Property) and Self-care (non-lifers, Finance), and Recognition (Property) and Acknowledgement (Finance) reflected nuanced local variations. Pre-defined survey questions exclude these minor variations, especially when a researcher is not familiar with a work setting.

The study used proven image- and metaphor-based projective techniques (Grady, 2008; Hurworth, 2003; Knoblauch, Baer, Laurier, Petschke, & Schnettler, 2008; Zaltman, 1996) and action learning approaches (Argyris, 1996; Friedman, Razer, & Sykes, 2004; Reason & Torbert, 2001; Sykes, Rosenfeld, & Weiss, 2005; van Manen, 1990). When combined into a semi-structured interview questionnaire, these methods comprehensively probed subjective experience from the vantage points of affect and cognition. This produced expansive data that were deeply entangled in local experiences of work wellbeing. By drawing on metaphor, stories, and lessons learned from meaningful personal experiences, well-rounded accounts of work wellbeing were gained. Participants communicated thoughts, feelings, and

experiences in ways that suited them. The methods also allowed ongoing changes to the research process to include emerging issues from feedback and interim analyses.

Evidence from the study indicates solid support for the second proposal: to *incorporate and value interpretivist methods in the research toolkit*, particularly in applied settings.

### **Concept development**

*Proposal 3: Ensure that tropes or common sense terms such as wellbeing are conceptualised before embarking on quantitative measurement.*

Two concepts of situated work wellbeing emerged from, and were verified within, the present study (Armstrong, 2000). A concept is academically defensible and contributes to disciplinary knowledge. It is also a practical tool that specifies the constituents of a phenomenon; it is not intended to be the end point, but rather a starting point for discussion in work settings. For example, a useful concept of work wellbeing enables people to make decisions about how, when, and where to take action for the mutual benefit of the organisation and employees with confidence, since the basis of the concept is solidly evidentiary. Several intellectual steps were involved in identifying the need for concept development. These steps summarise the main points in Chapters 2 to 7 inclusive.

1. Wellbeing is in the category of phenomena that are theoretically undeveloped. In work settings this is a practical problem. Reviews of literature demonstrated that work wellbeing was not adequately defined, conceptualised, or described at a foundational level in organisational psychology. However, the term is regularly used in quantitative studies as a dependent and/or independent variable, as shown in Chapters 2 and 3. This has resulted in confusion about the meaning and/or nature of work wellbeing, with flow on effects to selecting or implementing strategies for change based on research data. Proper conceptual analysis needs to come before measurement or intervention (Goertz, 2006; Saylor, 2013). Otherwise, professional practice is based on generalised data that may be untrustworthy or irrelevant in context.

2. Practice experience suggested that an approach to concept development was needed to assess work wellbeing. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 4, non-experimental methods of data collection were most suitable since wellbeing is subjectively determined (Howe, 2009; Love, 2002). This led to the decision to use constructionism (Crotty, 1998) and interpretivist approaches that support emergent research. A method of concept development suited to the social sciences and utilising subjective data was crucial (Goertz, 2006). These decisions reflected the study's orientation towards practice as well as research.
3. Therefore, the third proposal emerged from the needs of professional practice as well as academic rigour. In work settings, there is a need for relevant, trustworthy, conceptualised research data to guide aspects of practice. 'Relevance' places holistic subjective experience at the centre of research, simply because subjectivity is central to work settings. 'Trustworthy' indicates that data needs to be demonstrably accurate in situ, rather than generalised or quantified, unless the latter makes sense in an applied setting. 'Conceptualised' indicates, first, that data have been analysed to specify the essential constituents of the specific phenomenon and second, that all content elements in the concept are organised and structured. Goertz' (2006) approach met these requirements with a multilevel, multidimensional structure consisting of basic level, secondary-level dimensions, and indicator level. Although phenomenography also described how to develop concepts from raw data, the process was less specific. The phenomenographic structure would have been harder to apply in professional practice, as not all concept elements were included in the final diagram.
4. A concept is confirmed as a useful diagnostic tool for practice when organisation members have ratified it through member checking processes (Bazeley, 2013; Lindlof & Taylor, 2011). Property managers agreed that the concept effectively described and accounted for wellbeing in their work setting, as did managers in Finance. Finance employees' feedback refined the Toxic Behaviour pole of the secondary-level dimension. Without this input,

the concept would have overestimated the extent of toxic behaviour in the work setting.

5. With these requirements fulfilled, quantitative measurement can be undertaken in Property and Finance. Some constraints are worth noting, however. Surveys or questionnaires can be based on indicator data derived directly from transcripts of interviews carried out in the work setting. Therefore, the survey instrument is relevant to a *particular* work setting, because this study unequivocally demonstrated that work wellbeing is a context-specific attribute. For context-dependent, ongoing research based on a previously developed foundational concept, it is not a justifiable decision to develop a databank of wellbeing indicators from multiple work settings to use in a generalised instrument. This would defeat the purpose of quantitative measurement within the local setting, for the following reasons. There would be no comparative concept data against which to assess survey results; the questions would not necessarily be applicable to different work settings; and the wording of questions (which are derived from non-local indicators) may not be as clear to employees in different sites. A concept is the baseline depiction of situated work wellbeing. Quantitative measurement is useful when local indicators are developed into a questionnaire to track the implementation of change and/or indicate areas for action.

Consistent with Chapter 1, this section has argued, using findings from the study, that wellbeing is merely a common sense term until it is foundationally conceptualised. Concept development needs to be based in subjective data and investigated using interpretivist methods in a local context (to retain local meaning) before it can be considered to be a scientific term.

## **Part 2: Wellbeing theory revisited**

Grounded in proposals from the previous section, this study identified:

1. Two local concepts of wellbeing were developed in separate professional services work settings using only subjective data and interpretivist methods. Comparative analysis of these concepts led to new knowledge about a form of wellbeing not previously identified in its own right, i.e., work wellbeing.

2. A constant domain structure uniting the concepts was discovered. Self, Relationships, and Principles domains reflected implicit perspectives from which employees considered the meaning of local work wellbeing for themselves.
3. Arising from the constant domain structure, a superordinate class of work wellbeing concepts was proposed. A class of concepts recognises that constitutive dimensions could vary across work settings, although the domain structure is maintained. The proposed class of work wellbeing concepts was described as a family resemblance concept, to register the dimensional variability in local concepts. The two local work wellbeing concepts were defined by necessary and sufficient conditions.

Practical implications of these findings are discussed in Part 4 of this chapter. From a practice perspective, concepts of work wellbeing appear to have considerable utility. Findings indicate the power of, and necessity for, concept development and an extended theoretical and methodological range for informed practice and measurement in organisational psychology. A dimensionalised view of situated work wellbeing adds a level of clarity that is missing when wellbeing has not been conceptualised.

This section considers the literature from Chapters 2 and 3 in relation to the findings from this study. A non-normative approach to the review was adopted in order to select literature from an extensive range of potentially relevant topics, e.g., leadership, managing organisational change, workplace diversity, prosocial and deviant behaviour, job satisfaction, training and skill acquisition, motivation and performance, group dynamics and teamwork, emotions, decision making, job attitudes, communication, work life balance/integration, work stress, and organisational justice. (Notably, wellbeing at work was not listed as a significant theoretical area in organisational psychology literature.) The review was intended to clarify specific issues raised by this study (Maxwell, 2006). This approach potentially framed and enabled a new way of seeing existing knowledge rather than trying to fit the new findings into pre-existing theory.

Viewed through the work wellbeing lens, the literature review appeared incoherent and fragmented. This highlighted difficulties practitioners encounter in



applying theory when practice issues do not fit neatly into discrete knowledge domains. However, the non-normatively structured review demonstrated that work wellbeing could be used as a meta-theoretical domain subsuming extant literature from diverse knowledge areas. It indicated that focusing on situated work wellbeing could enliven understanding about relevant wellbeing-related theory in organisational psychology.

### **A generalised, undifferentiated trope**

Chapter 2 noted wellbeing is multi-perspectival, partly dependent on the originating discipline. In colloquial use, 'wellbeing' is a generalised, undefined term, which is not very different from how it is used in psychology. Ryan and Deci (2001) described it as an individual's optimal functioning, while Rath and Harter (2010, p 137) referred to wellbeing as "all the things that are important to how we think about and experience our lives". A more differentiated description of wellbeing as the "intellectual, physical and emotional pleasure which is induced by one's own activity and which harms no one else. This... arises in part from contributions made to the pleasure of others through one's cooperative activity" (Herrick, 1981, p 613) was, however, not a conceptual analysis. Kahn and Juster (2002) indicated wellbeing would require more research to 'unpack' its conceptual components.

The majority of reviewed literature did not question the meaning of wellbeing. Researchers drew conclusions about relationships between variables of interest and wellbeing without indicating how wellbeing was operationalised. A lack of conceptual analysis was evident in the many lists of components. Warr (2007) used wellbeing as a generalised, non-specific outcome variable influenced by multiple factors, but did not indicate how increases in wellbeing were measured or how the factors were organised conceptually. The meaning of wellbeing was rarely explicit, localised, or differentiated by domains of human activity such as work.

Remarkably few parsimonious accounts of the structural dimensions of wellbeing, or a clear description of its local character, were found. With the exception of Kahn's (1990) qualitative study of engagement, Ryff's (1989) study of the meaning of psychological wellbeing, and Fyhr's (2002) theory generating study of the barriers to the development of destructive psychological processes in care

organisations, conceptualisation was either not referred to and/or absent. Organisational case study research providing in-depth situated accounts of psychological experience is rare, although Frost (2003) grounded his quasi-conceptualised account of toxic emotions in his own and others' organisational experience. Given these few studies are a minority within a broad field, it is reasonable to assume that wellbeing is used as a trope in scientific studies. In some literature (e.g., Ganster & Rosen, 2013; Stokols, 1992) the elision of wellbeing and health further distorted understanding of these two distinct concepts (Seedhouse, 2001).

### **Duplication, overlap, and level issues**

Duplication was apparent across disparate research streams. Relational variables such as social support, affiliation, and leader behaviour were linked to wellbeing, but investigated in different streams using a variety of terms (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fineman, 1993; Martin, Thomas, Charles, Epitropaki, & Mcnamara, 2005; Mathieu, Maynard, Rapp and Gilson, 2008).

Proxies for 'work wellbeing' were used to identify relevant research. 'Satisfaction with workspace' described the experience of employees when they worked in enclosed private offices rather than open-plan layouts (Kim & de Dear, 2013). Therefore, 'satisfaction with workspace' was considered a proxy for an aspect of work wellbeing and was cited in this literature review. 'Job related happiness' referred to employees' positive feelings, moods, and emotions about their jobs and work lives, so this was incorporated into the review. Extrapolating meaning was required for many terms, such as extrinsic and intrinsic job satisfaction, health, organisational commitment, engagement, flourishing, sense of purpose, decent work, and meaning. These variables were interpreted as having a bearing on wellbeing for the purpose of this study, despite that duplication and fragmentation was an unwanted side effect in the literature review.

Many studies focused on work characteristics that promoted individual level wellbeing. Basch and Fisher (2000), for example, reported three work features (managers' behaviour, workload and task problems, and corporate policies) that caused negative emotions at the individual level. These results were consistent with

issues raised by the work wellbeing study in subgroups' experience at the low/lifer poles in the Property and Finance concepts. Basch and Fisher used individual level negative emotions as the outcome variable. Extrapolation of such results to the group level justified including many studies in the review.

The review highlighted the absence of any integrative framework for literature relevant to work wellbeing. Local concepts developed in this study showed how dimensions led to a meta-concept of work wellbeing. Issues raised by this study were used to integrate and reframe diverse literature in relation to the larger conceptual perspective of work wellbeing.

In summary, there were significant gaps between findings from this study and how wellbeing has been researched or theorised in work settings:

1. Wellbeing as a local, situated, conceptualised attribute of a work setting is barely evident in the literature, although there is considerable support for this idea in the wider theoretical literature (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Wierzbicka, 2009).
2. Literature is quite fragmented if the perspective of work wellbeing is used as the frame. No integrative theory about wellbeing in work settings is available at present.
3. Wellbeing is mostly used as a generalised, broad, one-dimensional, or undifferentiated term that overlaps with other constructs in the literature.
4. Little evidence of foundational research investigating employees' knowledge of the meaning of wellbeing in a local work setting was found.

These gaps can be explained by differences between academics and practitioners (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). Research agendas, less attuned to the needs and features of practice environments, have overlooked significant practical questions (such as the nature of work wellbeing) that could contribute to knowledge development in organisational psychology. The present study demonstrated:

1. Work wellbeing is differentiated and many different variables are incorporated into a local concept.
2. Wellbeing is a contextualised feature of a work setting.
3. Employees can describe the meaning of situated work wellbeing.
4. Subjective knowledge can be developed into a local systemic concept.

5. A local concept may provide the framework to integrate relevant research about wellbeing for a work setting.

### **Part 3: Work wellbeing as meaningful personal integration**

Findings suggest work wellbeing is unlikely to be the same as wellbeing experienced in other contexts. For example, 'relationship wellbeing' is used to describe wellbeing in marriage (McNulty & Fincham, 2012).

The dimensions of work wellbeing foreshadow that workplaces are a context in which employees implicitly strive towards meaningful personal integration and wholeness by contributing to a larger community purpose. Wholeness is fostered when a person integrates daily experience and applies effort to collective goals. Working with others includes difficulties and comfort, mistakes and mastery, struggle and achievement, conflict and affection, paradox and simplicity. Greek philosophy considered striving to be universal. Work wellbeing concepts indicate dimensions and values are based in meaningful personal and community goals.

The idea of work wellbeing as meaningful personal integration derives from the dimensional similarity in Self and Relationships domains and differences in the Principles domains.

Similarities between the two concepts are distinctive and specific:

1. An emphasis on human growth, meaning, and achievement *through involvement in work activities*.
2. Managing personal health and balance *while devoting oneself to work activities*.
3. Developing and maintaining appropriate, respectful, satisfying interpersonal relations *in the work context*.
4. Receiving recognition for one's efforts and contribution to *collective goals or tasks*.

It is evident that the work context defines the boundaries of Self domain dimensions that associate wellbeing with individual growth and achievement, and personal health/balance. The same applies to Relationships domain dimensions that associate wellbeing with the quality of social relations, and recognition for

personal/team value and/or contribution, in the collective activities of the work setting.

Dimensions in the Principles domains identified systemic preferences for how the organisation should behave towards its employees and externally towards the wider community or society. Local Principles dimensions influenced whether employees aligned themselves with, committed to, and produced effort for, an organisation, since these dimensions were an important factor in a continuing constructive engagement between the organisation and employees. Principles revealed the ongoing cognitive and affective adjustments that employees made while working for the organisation. In addition, values-based dialogue among employees and with the organisation suggested employees actively participated and were emotionally invested in the life of their workplace. The workplace was a forum for meaningful interaction, participation in social and political processes of exchange, and mutual creation of the enterprise. Arguably, work wellbeing is a form of meaning-oriented Eudaimonic wellbeing.

#### **Part 4: Practical implications**

The most practical implication of a local concept is that the core constituents of work wellbeing are specified and described in a structured manner. Constituent dimensions cannot be determined from the literature.

A situated concept may be used as a diagnostic instrument. Its value lies in accurately representing local work wellbeing to inform understanding and action (Argyris, 1996; Friedman, Razer, & Sykes, 2004; Heron & Reason, 2001; Hoshmand & O'Byrne, 1996; Reason & Torbert, 2001). The constituents of a concept are central to developing hypotheses about, and explanations of mechanisms in the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2004). If employees attest to the theoretical accuracy of the concept, it can be used to guide the design of interventions for systemic change.

While a concept might suggest how to be, to think, and to act in order to change workplace dynamics, it cannot prescribe (de Vos van Steenwijk, 2000). Nielsen (2013) considered action research should involve employees as co-researchers in the entire research, design, implementation, and evaluation framework. This is because employees have a role in shaping how interventions are

received at the organisational, leader, group, and individual levels. If a local concept is the basis of a participatory process from design to evaluation, interventions are more likely to gain traction because disagreements can be addressed when they occur. Put differently, interventions need to be grounded in ideas that come from a shared understanding of work life, out of processes of reciprocity, deliberation, and consultation, rather than theory (Rosenfeld & Tardieu, 2000). Local concepts are tools to help managers, practitioners and employees work together in the activities of social re-invention based on local knowledge (Rosenfeld, 2000). A participatory process from beginning to end highlights the “complex and heterogenous micro-organisational processes involved in the ongoing enactment of social reality” (Chia, 1996, p 50). Participation allows people to deeply understand the natural disorder of organisations and the effort needed to render order and structure out of chaos. Assessing the conditions under which activities promote or threaten local wellbeing and tracking this over a significant time period is necessary (McNulty & Fincham, 2012).

Other practical implications to emerge from local concepts include the significance of subgroups and the potential to reassess an organisation’s emphasis on people and profit.

### **Subgroups**

Interpretivist methods provided usable information about Property subgroups based on migrant background and fatherhood. In Finance, subgroup information about lifers and non-lifers signalled the disruptive impact of organisational change. The quality and descriptive precision of local subgroups’ experiences were high. The final concept, a form of causal description, described situated work wellbeing consistent with employees’ intimate knowledge of local, dynamic social processes in each work setting.

Subgroups indicate that members experience dimension/s differently to the broader system. Their presence tests the idea that the dimension/s on which they differ are important and how this matters. For example, having a migrant background in Property highlighted the importance of relationships at work. The absence of strong work relationships degraded migrants’ wellbeing experience. In

Finance, two subgroups varied on several dimensions. To some extent, both experienced compromised mental health, wellbeing, and performance.

Subgroups inevitably raise the question of whether a work setting 'has wellbeing'. This was not addressed directly in the study. Practice needs to be based on knowledge of local wellbeing; therefore, concept development must precede measurement and intervention. Subgroups demonstrated the method for deriving the concepts were successful since local dimensional variations were found.

Does increasing subgroup wellbeing improve productivity? All subgroups indicated the presence of micro contexts (e.g., in functional teams or groups of workers defined by age, career stage, cultural background) where work wellbeing was somewhat compromised. It is likely that interventions could improve subgroup productivity, although this study emphasises the need for tailored approaches given the aetiology and nature of reduced subgroup experience.

The benefits of a rigorous approach to concept development before undertaking surveys are clear. With a robust local concept, quantitative instruments based on indicator data can track the progress of change over time. The concept and quantitative instruments may be used to consider practical questions such as "which groups experience 'less/more' wellbeing, and why?"

### **People and profit**

Work wellbeing is not high on the agenda of most organisations. Corporatist values emphasise performance and profit rather than wellbeing. Property's expressed goals and efforts to promote wellbeing, such as quality inclusions in the physical environment and positive interaction with employees and the wider community, were unusual.

Both concepts from this study as well as the literature indicate that emphasising profit over people might be a shortsighted perspective, however. Amabile & Kramer (2011; see Chapter 2, Engagement) demonstrated that making progress on meaningful work is crucial to employees' engagement, and has a positive impact on health, wellbeing, and organisational success. Adequate supervisor support (to enable work to progress and employees to succeed) is an investment in corporate goals and employees. Work wellbeing concepts

corroborated this conclusion in the Expand Potential (Property) and Career Growth (non-lifers, Finance) dimensions. Helping employees learn and grow in meaningful ways, both personally and professionally, ensures human potential is released and may be capitalised in a work setting.

Another example from the literature highlighted the dangers of putting profit ahead of people. The Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis demonstrated that negative work wellbeing experiences could overwhelm people to the potential detriment of their health and productivity. Work wellbeing concepts revealed that management support to deal with stressors is necessary, valued, and functional in protecting employees from poor mental and physical health outcomes, and possible claims against the organisation (LaMontagne, Keegel, & Vallance, 2007). Social support also functions as a protective device against stress. Managers' recognition was shown to increase work motivation and employees' sense of value. Therefore, the work wellbeing concepts and relevant literature highlight investments in the human system lead to increased motivation, wellbeing, and organisational performance.

Chapter 1 briefly critiqued the influence of corporatist values in psychology and work settings. In pointing to some ideological inconsistencies, the intention was to raise awareness of assumptions underlying corporatism and its impact on human behaviour. An overwhelming drive for efficient, pragmatic, profitable workplaces is antithetical to a more people oriented form of capitalism.

The following speculative comments are motivated by the need for professional practice to make a difference in organisations. Work wellbeing concepts offer organisations the potential to develop situated, alternative perspectives on the nexus of people and profit. As concepts are grounded in subjectivity, they do not prescriptively argue for or against particular norms or techniques. Instead, the concepts may contribute new perspectives to a work setting (Fyke & Buzzanell, 2013). The explicit perspective focuses on macro or surface activities that are visible and evident in the life of the organisation, e.g., 'best practice' procedures. The implicit perspective interprets micro or deeper, meaning-based aspects, such as the tensions, complexities, challenges, conflicts, ambiguities, contradictions, and organisational 'neuroses' underlying surface activities (Hirschhorn, 1990). Together,



surface and meaning-based attributes constitute, and are constituted by, organisational life.

To reiterate, work wellbeing concepts are not a paradigm for positive or normative change. Instead, a diagnostic concept could provide the basis for employees to engage in collaborative dialogue about the implications and consequences of macro and micro concept elements. With prior education about these elements, it is potentially possible for employees to identify very complex issues as well as areas of particular strength in the organisation. Thus, a local concept may be a trigger for dialogue that penetrates the rationality and order at the surface of corporate activity, to recognise the messy cross currents of tensions and contradictions constituting everyday reality. This might also lead employees to examine their own beliefs, values, and worldviews, and reflect on how these individually and collectively influence local wellbeing. A work wellbeing concept might enable employees to counter the insidious influence of corporatism by helping to replace it with a more humane form of capitalism with social values at the centre of profit-oriented corporate life.

A process like this could facilitate employees developing a critical perspective on proposed major organisational transformation initiatives including structural change, implementing new technology or systems, or downsizing (Stein, 1997). The process could also help employees assess the level of individual and collective readiness for change (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013). Typically, management sells the expected, positive, visible benefits of transformational programs. However, it is rare that mysterious, unexpected, incoherent, complex aspects of programs are explored or confronted, although they might be the unintended consequences of normative perspectives and best practice. Complex issues in work settings are deeply embedded and often based in ideology. Employees may be unaware of the impact of everyday habits of behaviour and ways of thinking that perpetuate tensions (Fyke & Buzzanell, 2013), yet these could be investigated in dialogue that uses a local concept to highlight local issues.

The potential value of work wellbeing concepts to psychologists and employees is considerable. Employees can relate to a concept more easily when local linguistic terms describe elements such as secondary-level dimensions (Patton,

2002; Zelger, 2000). When a concept has a high acceptance rate among employees, it can be used as a reference point to design change interventions. Measurement instruments (surveys, questionnaires) can be created based on indicator data to track progress and outcomes.

## **Part 5: Quality and significance of conclusions**

### **Trustworthiness**

Interpretive research yields a different kind of data compared with experimental science. Interpretivist findings are not 'correct' in an objective sense, as raw data is filtered through participants' and researchers' subjectivity, limitations, and ways of being in the world. Trustworthiness of the work wellbeing concepts was determined in the following ways.

### ***Member checking***

A concept can be said to be 'correct' or trustworthy if it enables employees to recognise and make sense of their situated experience (Bazeley, 2013; Charmaz, 2002). Ensuring a concept is trustworthy relies in part on member checks to provide feedback about its accuracy and effectiveness as a sense-making tool. Member checking was undertaken in Property and Finance (see Chapters 5, 6, and 7). Employee feedback improved the accuracy of the Toxic Behaviour pole in the Finance concept and in doing so, highlighted and accounted for a distortion that resulted from the lifer sample being restricted to mainly administrative employees. Member checking can encourage a researcher to remain sceptical about conclusions and insights, and to acknowledge that an outsider's conclusions are often limited in comparison with insiders' experience.

### ***Quality of product***

Members in both work settings provided feedback about the potential utility of the local concept as a management tool. This was assessed as 'high' in Property, and 'potentially useful, but unsure if it will be taken up' in Finance, due largely to the prevailing culture.

### ***Quality of outcome***

The concepts provided original insights and extended knowledge about wellbeing in work settings, as outlined in Part 1 of this chapter and in Chapter 7. As diagnostic tools, the local concepts can be used in Property and Finance to design necessary change initiatives and to facilitate employee empowerment. This may be particularly useful for subgroups.

In addition, the work wellbeing concepts contributed more broadly to scientific knowledge by stimulating ideas for further research. This could include replicating the research process in other work organisations to determine the robustness of the constant domain structure and the proposed class of work wellbeing concepts.

### **Generalisability**

Generalisability refers to whether the local concepts and associated conclusions from this study have wider relevance to other settings, and if so, how and under what conditions this could occur (Bazeley, 2013). Questions about what can be transferred or applied more broadly from the study are addressed below.

### ***Context dependence***

A distinguishing characteristic of interpretivist research is its situated nature or context dependence. Each concept of work wellbeing was site specific. This is the essence of its value. A situated concept is not intended to describe every work setting. It highlights the dimensions, subgroups, idiosyncratic processes and qualities, ways of working, and obstacles to wellbeing in a *particular* site. Context dependence is necessary for exploration (e.g., listening to under-represented subgroups) or transformation (e.g., advocating for change at the surface/macro and meaning/micro levels).

The potential transferability of a local concept may be considered as a process of 'naturalistic generalisability' (Stake, 2010). This puts the responsibility on potential users of a non-local concept to decide the extent to which transferability from the other setting is reasonable. Potential users need to assess the degree of similarity of processes, principles, and theory, rather than facts about the setting (Bazeley, 2013).

### ***Comparative cases***

Using two work settings to conceptualise local wellbeing was a form of replication of the study. Findings indicated that the degree of overlap and differentiation between the concepts was likely to be non-random (described in Chapter 7), and therefore a class of work wellbeing concepts could be proposed. As a result, conclusions from the study are likely to be more broadly applicable (Bazeley, 2013). The process of comparing and contrasting the concepts (see Chapter 7) highlighted local processes and conditions that helped to explain findings. Work wellbeing concepts could potentially contribute to understanding the social processes underlying experiences of wellbeing in other work organisations as well.

### ***Theoretical extension***

Methods used in the study effectively handled complex subjective data gained in the real-world context of work settings. This suggests that the methodological approach is potentially relevant to investigating practical problems or other concepts in organisational psychology as outlined in Part 1 of this chapter.

## **Part 6: Limitations and future directions**

Using two research sites to develop local concepts provided an in-depth view of the work wellbeing phenomenon in independent organisations. Studying aspects of work settings in depth has rarely occurred in organisational psychology. A narrow focus on contextualised wellbeing was the only way to develop foundational conceptual knowledge, clarify the boundaries of each concept, compare and contrast findings, and elucidate further knowledge in the form of a superordinate class structure.

Notwithstanding the benefits gained from studying just two sites, it is recommended that concept development be carried out in additional sites using the same approach, in order to generate comparative data for the existing concepts. Having other researchers conduct data gathering and analysis would provide a check on data gained in this study. There are many questions to consider. These include whether Self, Relationships, and Principles domains maintain in concepts developed by other researchers, and whether future concepts could satisfy the conditions for membership of a superordinate class of work wellbeing concepts. It is possible that

the criteria for membership of a class of concepts might need to change in light of differences in future concepts. Evaluating the outcomes/findings of the present study (see Part 2 of this chapter) is not a short-term exercise, however. McNulty and Fincham (2012, p 107) note,

Only by examining the short- and long-term contextual implications of psychological processes for wellbeing in diverse samples can psychologists develop a complete understanding of wellbeing.

This advice implies the need to include a wider range of work settings, have a time frame for research and repetitive validation that spans years rather than months, and accurately observe the impacts of contextual factors.

If the domain structure is found to persist, a shorter method of researching work wellbeing could be to ask participants the implicit questions associated with the Self, Relationships, and Principles orientations. Employees could be asked to reflect on situated experiences of wellbeing from one of three vantage points: what they liked, preferred, wanted, or valued 'for me' (Self); 'with others' (Relationships); and 'from the organisation' (Principles). This might bypass the need to use images, although this assumption would need to be tested. The interview questionnaire would need to be adapted, integrating domain-related questions with the learning from experience section, to generate a reasonable range of data.

Goertz (2006, p 65) recommended that researchers identify the "theoretical relationship that links the indicator/data level to the secondary level". This step would show whether indicators were causal (i.e., the cues that signalled the presence of wellbeing), or substitutable (i.e., the effects of wellbeing). Identifying this degree of detail at the indicator level could add power to a local concept by specifying the local processes and conditions that facilitated wellbeing, or alternatively, that simply demonstrate the presence of wellbeing. Although this recommendation was not carried out as part of the present study, it is considered an important extension to be addressed in future research.

Goertz also recommended that quantitative analysis to validate a conceptual model should be undertaken. This is a logical next direction for the Property and

Finance concepts. In future concept development, using indicator level data to validate a concept could be built into the initial contract, so that work settings participate in both the data gathering for concept development and the validation phase of the process.

Implementing change as a result of a participative process of organisational diagnosis (using the concept as a tool to stimulate dialogue; see Part 4 of this chapter) is potentially a useful, practical outcome. However, change processes need to be designed using validated principles of change management and in reference to a local concept. The latter indicates local sensitivities and strengths to be taken into account. Developing an approach to change based on a work wellbeing concept is a major future research challenge. It could include concept development, validation, practical application for change in the work setting, and evaluation of the entire process.

Data from several concepts could also form the basis for an inclusive theoretical and research framework for work wellbeing concepts. Similar fragmentation and overlap have occurred with other constructs such as destructive leadership (Krasikova, Green, & LeBreton, 2013). Developing more concepts from subjective data could lead to an overarching theoretical model that clarifies how work wellbeing manifests, and its antecedents and consequences. This could integrate and extend existing research from different traditions in new directions, as well as facilitate the application of academic research to practice.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRES**

### **Version 1**

- a) First name & company
- b) Preferred alias
- c) Date, time & location of interview
- d) Age
- e) Education
- f) Status / no. & ages of children
- g) Position title
- h) Length of employment in company
- i) Number of direct reports

### Outline interview

### Confidentiality

### Consent forms

### **Describe images** (Put dots on each picture and number).

1. Can you describe how each of your images captures your feelings and thoughts about the meaning of wellbeing in this organisation? What deeper meanings are hidden in each image? (Explore additional thoughts and feelings; probe for deeper meanings of visual metaphors connected to images)

(Images 1-8 or more if brought)

### **Absent & opposite images**

2. Was there an image (or two) that you would have liked to bring, but couldn't find, that captures something else about wellbeing? Describe. (Probe for deeper meanings of absent images.)
3. Can you imagine a picture that depicts the opposite of wellbeing in the organisation? Describe.

### **Elicit constructs**

(Randomly select three of participant's images & ask Q4. Ladder on elicited constructs until constructs surfaced become redundant.)

4. If you think about these three images of wellbeing, in what ways are any two similar, and different from the third?

### **Sensory images** (Remove pictures from table.)

5. If wellbeing were a sound, what would it be?

6. What sound would it not be?
7. What is the taste of wellbeing?
8. What is not the taste?
9. What is the smell of wellbeing?
10. What is not the smell?
11. How does wellbeing feel?
12. How does it not feel?
13. What is the texture of wellbeing?
14. What is not the texture?
15. What is the colour?
16. What is not the colour?
17. How do you experience wellbeing in your body? What bodily sensations do you have in the state of wellbeing?

**Vignette of personal wellbeing experience**

18. Can you identify a significant personal experience of wellbeing you have had in this organisation? Describe it briefly.
19. Tell me who was involved in this experience?
20. How was the experience of wellbeing generated? (Probe for: people, roles, actions taken, beneficiaries, context, location, time, and other information.)
21. What changes and / or outcomes occurred (in you, the situation, &/or the organisation) as a result of the experience?
22. Were there any negative consequences or costs of the experience?
23. In your opinion, what were the most important actions that contributed to the wellbeing experience?
24. What did you learn about wellbeing from this experience?
25. Is there anything others can learn from this experience about creating wellbeing in the organisation?
26. What words would you use to describe your understanding of wellbeing in the organisation now?

**Questions and close**

27. Do you have any questions about the research process?

28. Any additional comments?

Thank you for participating



## Version 2

- a) First name & company
- b) Preferred alias
- c) Date, time & location of interview
- d) Age
- e) Education
- f) Status / no. & ages of children
- g) Position title
- h) Length of employment in company
- i) Number of direct reports

### Outline interview

### Confidentiality

### Consent forms

### **Describe images** (Put dots on each picture and number).

1. Can you describe how each of your images captures your feelings and thoughts about the meaning of wellbeing in this organisation? What deeper meanings are hidden in each image? (Explore additional thoughts and feelings; probe for deeper meanings of visual metaphors connected to images)

(Images 1-8 or more if brought)

#### **Absent & opposite images**

2. Was there an image (or two) that you would have liked to bring, but couldn't find, that captures something else about wellbeing? Describe. (Probe for deeper meanings of absent images.)
3. Can you imagine a picture that depicts the opposite of wellbeing in the organisation? Describe.

#### **Dark side**

4. Wellbeing could include the planned, structured, visible, nurturing aspects of an organisation. An opposite or 'darker' side may contain hidden, upsetting, and unplanned aspects of organising.
  - a. What is your experience of the darker side of Property/Finance?

- b. What makes you feel bad, angry or sad here?
- c. How do you deal with the darker side?

**Vignette of personal wellbeing experience**

- 5. Can you identify a significant personal experience of wellbeing you have had in this organisation? Describe it briefly.
- 6. Tell me who was involved in this experience?
- 7. How was the experience of wellbeing generated? (Probe for: people, roles, actions taken, beneficiaries, context, location, time, and other information.)
- 8. What changes and / or outcomes occurred (in you, the situation, &/or the organisation) as a result of the experience?
- 9. Were there any negative consequences or costs of the experience?  
In your opinion, what were the most important actions that contributed to the wellbeing experience?
- 10. What did you learn about wellbeing from this experience?
- 11. Is there anything others can learn from this experience about creating wellbeing in the organisation?
- 12. What words would you use to describe your understanding of wellbeing in the organisation now?

**Questions and close**

- 13. Do you have any questions about the research process?
- 14. Any additional comments?

Thank you for participating

**Appendix B: INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

PROPERTY and FINANCE

## INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUALISED CONCEPT OF WELLBEING

**NAME OF SUPERVISOR:** DR PATRICIA BAZELEY

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER :** JOANNE ABBEY

**PROGRAMME:** PhD

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for expressing interest in participating in a research project being undertaken as part of a PhD program. The purpose of the project is to develop an understanding of what wellbeing means, specifically in this organisation.

This project has senior management approval.

This letter contains important instructions to prepare you for your interview, if you choose to participate.

You will need to allocate up to two hours for the interview, which will be conducted at your worksite during working hours. The exact date and time can be arranged to fit in with your workload. Data will be collected at an interview with the student researcher, Joanne Abbey.

Some preparation for the interview will be needed. The interview will focus on your thoughts, feelings and experiences about what wellbeing means to you in this organisation. When you think or hear about wellbeing in your organisation, what thoughts, feelings, memories, needs, or preferences come to mind?

Your preparation is to find and bring with you to the interview *eight* pictures or images that express your feelings and thoughts about the meaning of wellbeing for you in this organisation. Please note that each picture should represent a different feeling or thought about wellbeing at work. The pictures may come from any source such as a newspaper, catalogue, magazine, or they could be pictures you take with a camera especially for this project. The researcher will collect the pictures at the end of the interview so please don't include the originals of any pictures you wish to keep.

Some examples of pictures that people have used in unrelated projects include a child sleeping in a grandparent's arms to show trust; a butterfly to show the freedom of being on holidays; and a steaming kettle to show rage. The pictures need to be meaningful to you only, not to anyone else. It's best to let your imagination guide your choice of images.

Please try not to discuss this project with anyone until after the interview, if at all.

Your interview will be audio-recorded, and written notes will also be made. However, interviews are completely confidential, even from management. There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

It is anticipated that findings from this research may be used to improve the effectiveness of learning and development programs. Research data is a first step towards clarifying the meaning of wellbeing specifically in the private sector, and as such, the project is innovative. It is anticipated that results from the project will be disseminated widely in the media, published in academic journals, and presented at conferences.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your name will not be connected with any data, and all data will be securely stored, and archived at Australian Catholic University in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Any quotes cited as examples to clarify meaning in published reports will not be able to be attributed to a particular person. There are no limits to confidentiality in this project.

Feedback to the organisation will be via a presentation and report to senior management outlining a framework of wellbeing in the company. As a participant, you will not receive individual feedback.

Participation is voluntary and you can choose not to participate, or to withdraw, at any time during the project, without having to supply a reason or justify your decision. Management will not know of your participation or withdrawal during the project, or afterwards. Neither participation nor withdrawal will have any impact on your future career.

*Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor or Joanne Abbey.*

Dr Patricia Bazeley  
Research Support P/L  
PO Box 2005 Bowral NSW 2576 Australia  
(02) 4862 3026  
[pat@researchsupport.com.au](mailto:pat@researchsupport.com.au)

Joanne Abbey

PO Box 201 Haberfield NSW 2045 Australia  
(02) 9745 5583  
[joanne@corporatewellbeing.com.au](mailto:joanne@corporatewellbeing.com.au)

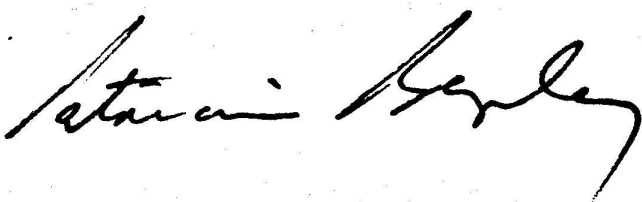
The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the address below:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

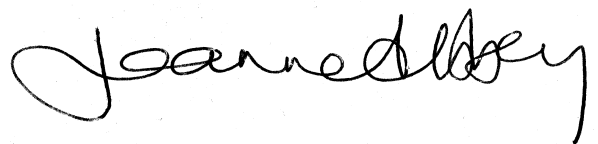
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form (attached), retain the Participant copy for your records and return the other copy to the Student Researcher.

Thank you for your interest.



.....  
Supervisor



.....  
Student Researcher



## INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUALISED CONCEPT OF WELLBEING

**NAME OF SUPERVISOR:** DR PATRICIA BAZELEY

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER :** JOANNE ABBEY

**PROGRAMME:** PhD

Dear Research Collaborator

This letter outlines a research project being undertaken as part of a PhD program. The purpose of the project is to develop an understanding of the nature of wellbeing specifically in [the organisation]. We are seeking your agreement to participate in the research.

This project has senior management approval.

This letter contains important instructions to prepare you for your interview, if you choose to participate.

You will need to allocate up to one hour for the interview, which will be conducted at your worksite during working hours. The exact date and time can be arranged to fit in with your schedule; however, interviews will take place during January - February 2009. Data will be collected in an interview with the student researcher, Joanne Abbey.

Some preparation for the interview will be needed. The interview will focus on your thoughts, feelings and experiences about what wellbeing means to you in **this** organisation. When you think or hear about wellbeing in [the

organisation], what thoughts, feelings, memories, needs, or preferences come to mind?

Your preparation is to find and bring with you to the interview **eight** pictures or images that express your feelings and thoughts about the meaning of wellbeing for you in [the organisation]. Please note that each picture should represent a **different** feeling or thought about what wellbeing means to you here. The pictures may come from any source such as a newspaper, catalogue, magazine, or they could be pictures you take with a camera especially for this project. The researcher will collect and retain the pictures at the end of the interview so please don't include the originals of any pictures you wish to keep.

Some examples of pictures that people have used in unrelated projects include a child sleeping in a grandparent's arms to show trust; a butterfly to show the freedom of being on holidays; and a steaming kettle to show rage. The pictures need to be meaningful to you only, not to anyone else. It's best to let your imagination guide your choice of images.

Please try not to discuss this project with anyone until after the interview, if at all.

Your interview will be audio-recorded, and written notes will also be made. However, interviews are completely confidential, even from management. There are no risks beyond normal day-to-day living associated with your participation in this project.

It is anticipated that findings from this research may be used in the business planning process, and implemented in areas such as professional development programs, team building, and other management initiatives. Research data is a first step towards clarifying the meaning of wellbeing, and as such, the project is innovative. It is anticipated that results from the project will be disseminated widely in the media, published in academic journals, and presented at conferences, without at any time identifying [the organisation] or other participating organisations.

Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Your name will not be connected with any data, and all data will be securely stored, and archived at the Australian Catholic University in Fitzroy, Melbourne. Any quotes cited as examples to clarify meaning in published reports will not be able to be attributed to a particular person. There are no limits to confidentiality in this project.

Feedback to the organisation will be via a presentation and report to senior management outlining a framework of wellbeing in the organisation. As a participant, you will not receive individual feedback.

Participation is voluntary and you can choose not to participate, or to withdraw, at any time during the project, without having to supply a reason or justify your decision. Management will not know of your participation or



withdrawal during the project, or afterwards. Neither participation nor withdrawal will have any impact on your future career.

*Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Supervisor or Joanne Abbey.*

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[joanne@corporatewellbeing.com.au](mailto:joanne@corporatewellbeing.com.au)

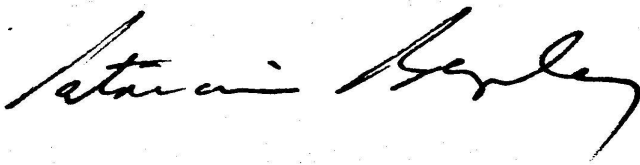
The Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University has approved this study. In the event that you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or if you have any query that the Supervisor and Student Researcher have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the address below:

Chair, HREC  
C/o Research Services  
Australian Catholic University  
Melbourne Campus  
Locked Bag 4115  
FITZROY VIC 3065  
Tel: 03 9953 3158  
Fax: 03 9953 3315

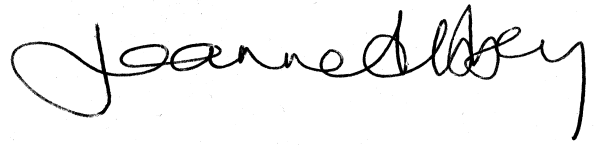
Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, you should sign both copies of the Consent Form (attached), retain the Participant copy for your records and bring the other copy, with your images/pictures, to your interview with the Student Researcher.

Thank you for your interest and we look forward to working with you in this project.



Supervisor



.....  
Student Researcher

**Appendix C: PROPERTY EMAIL TO EMPLOYEES**

DRAFTED BY RESEARCHER INVITING EMPLOYEES TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

**From:** BBB  
**Sent:** Thursday, 27 September 2007 5:52 PM  
**To:** Property Interstate; Property NSW  
**Subject:** PhD research on wellbeing

Team

Joanne Abbey, a PhD candidate from The Quality of Life & Social Justice Research Centre at Australian Catholic University in Melbourne, has approached me requesting the opportunity to undertake her PhD research in Property. The research project aims **to develop a concept of wellbeing in a private sector organisation**. Following discussions with Joanne, I have given in principle approval for Property to be involved in the research.

This project has my full commitment, and there are likely to be considerable benefits to the organisation from our participation. We will gain specific, relevant knowledge about the meaning, nature and constitution of wellbeing to employees of Property. Importantly, individual participant's comments will not be able to be identified.

Data from the research project will be available to us as **dimensions of a concept of wellbeing**. This data may be used to guide interventions, such as learning and development initiatives, to promote employee wellbeing. A substantiated, local, working concept of wellbeing provides a solid basis for useful interventions.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and confidential. I do not want to know whether you participate. Shortly, Joanne will email everyone in Property seeking in-principle expressions of interest. Please reply to her directly.

By way of background, Joanne is a registered organisational psychologist with extensive practical experience. Her research topic developed from her work with managers.

Regards

| **General Manager** | [Property](#)  
T 61 2 12345 | F 61 2 67890 | M xxx  
A Sydney NSW 2000

## **Appendix D: CONSENT FORMS**

THESE WERE THE SAME FOR PROPERTY AND FINANCE. ONLY THE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM IS SHOWN. THE RESEARCHER'S CONSENT FORM WAS IDENTICAL EXCEPT FOR THE WORD 'RESEARCHER' INSTEAD OF 'PARTICIPANT'

**CONSENT FORM – Copy for Participant**

**TITLE OF PROJECT:** DEVELOPING A CONTEXTUALISED CONCEPT OF WELLBEING

**NAME OF SUPERVISOR:** DR PATRICIA BAZELEY

**NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** JOANNE ABBEY

I ..... (*participant name*) have read and understood the information provided in the Information Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in a two-hour interview, to undertake the required preparation (including identifying and bringing eight pictures to the interview), and I understand that the interview will be audiotaped and written notes taken. I realise that I can withdraw my consent at any time and that no comment or implications for my future career in the organisation will ensue. I understand that my participation is completely confidential and no one other than the researcher will know that I have participated unless I inform them. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other parties in a form that does not identify me in any way.

**NAME OF PARTICIPANT:** .....

**SIGNATURE** .....

**DATE** .....

**SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:** .....

**DATE:**.....

## **Appendix E: INDICATORS for Property & Finance**

Sample indicator statements for all secondary-level dimensions are provided for Property and Finance. Indicators are substitutable and non-causal at the secondary level, and specific enough to guide the acquisition of empirical data in quantitative instruments.

## **Property**

### **Expand Potential**

#### **Positively valued**

The company provides opportunities for my skill development.

My manager trusts me to be successful.

My manager gives clear work instructions.

I know what I have to achieve because my supervisor's expectations are clear.

I have enough freedom to solve problems and make decisions in my job.

My manager supports my professional development.

I enjoy the challenge of my job.

I learn a lot working here.

#### **Negatively valued**

My manager's reactions and behaviour can be unpredictable.

I am frustrated with the lack of challenge in my job.

I do not have enough time to learn new skills.

I don't have adequate freedom to make decisions in my job.

Our manager over-controls the team.

### **Care for Health**

#### **Positively valued**

The company supports me to care for my physical and mental health.

I exercise to stay fit and healthy, even though I work hard.

I enjoy my leisure time because it refreshes me.

I can deal with the pressure of my job reasonably well.

When I am under a lot of work pressure, my manager cuts me some slack until I get on top of work.

The company provides resources to help us eat well and look after ourselves.



**Negatively valued**

I can't manage my stress at work well enough.

I don't have enough balance between work and leisure.

My manager has unrealistic expectations of how much I can achieve in a day.

Extended hours are exhausting and frazzling.

The work pressure in Property affects my health.

**Socio-emotional Connectedness****Positively valued**

Our manager cares about our personal needs.

Working in my team is enjoyable.

People care for each another in this company.

Members of our team get on well together.

Employees in this company support one another when work or life is difficult.

People cooperate with each other here.

People trust each other here.

My colleagues help me when I need it.

If my children are sick, I sometimes arrange work around helping to care for them.

I am able to get involved in community and charity work.

If there's a crisis at home, I can take time off to resolve things.

Diversity is respected in this company.

**Negatively valued**

I do not feel included in my work team.

My manager does not support me when I need help for a personal situation.

Being a migrant in Property means you don't quite fit in.

It's hard to resolve conflicts in this company.

It's very difficult to balance my commitments to the job and my family.

**Recognition****Positively valued**

I receive compliments from my manager when I succeed at work.

My manager recognises my contribution.

The company appreciates my work.

The company rewards us for success.

I consider I am well paid for what I do.

Our manager is grateful for the team's hard work.

**Negatively valued**

I am not paid well enough for what I do here.

I don't feel that my effort at work is valued.

My manager does not understand how much my partner and/or family contribute to making me effective at work.

I expect more acknowledgements for my successes.

My motivation to achieve is low because my manager couldn't care less.

**High Quality Workplace**

**Positively valued**

My manager usually treats everyone with respect.

Employees in this company follow safe work practices.

Our workplace provides generous amenities.

This is a very comfortable work environment.

My manager and I communicate well.

I feel privileged to work in such an attractive office.

In some ways this office feels like a 'home away from home'.

I feel that people treat each other with dignity here.

**Negatively valued**

Managers are not always fair in how they treat people.

Managers can be quite unsupportive.

The 'old boys' network' is alive and well in Property.

**Ethical Corporate Behaviour**

**Positively valued**

I like working here because I am involved in helping communities.

My values and the company's values are almost the same.

The company's actions support my values.

My manager's words and actions are consistent.

Property does the best it can in relation to sustainable work practices.

The company cares about the environment.

**Negatively valued**

The company's actions show it does not really care about the environment.

I feel uncomfortable working here because I don't agree with the company's values.

The company says it cares about the local community, but behave doesn't match up.

Profit means more to this company than people or sustainability.

## **Finance**

### **Career Growth**

#### **Positively valued**

I enjoy tackling difficult projects.

My manager supports me to learn new skills.

I like being pushed to develop myself.

I receive useful, relevant feedback from my manager.

I am supported to study and attend in-house programs.

I enjoy having responsibility for stimulating, challenging work.

I have the freedom I need to do my work.

#### **Negatively valued**

I am bored in my job now.

Most employees in Finance will not be promoted.

There is nowhere for my career to go here.

I do not receive mentoring.

### **Self-care**

#### **Positively valued**

It is important to me to be able to care for my health at work.

Finance takes very good care of employees' mental and physical health.

My work hours are manageable.

I have a reasonable balance between my work and personal life.

I can stay balanced and refreshed.

When things upset me at work, I put them in perspective so they hardly affect me.

If there is conflict at work, usually it resolves fairly quickly.

#### **Negatively valued**

Finance's faster pace has a negative effect on me.

I do not want a more senior position in Finance.

I need exercise to help me to de-stress.

Finance does not care about my wellbeing.

## **Decent Behaviour**

### **Positively valued**

People nurture me at work.

I trust the people I work with.

It's important to be civil and friendly to everyone at work.

Most people here are happy to help me if I need support.

Our manager communicates honestly and clearly with our team.

I feel proud to work in Finance.

I am comfortable to approach my manager when I need help or clarification.

You have to work together to achieve objectives.

My colleagues and I help each other out.

There is give-and-take in our team.

### **Negatively valued**

Some managers are verbally aggressive towards people.

My manager has been known to bully employees.

We are rarely consulted when senior managers decide on future directions affecting our department.

I don't think managers from the private sector know how to treat people well.

## **Acknowledgement**

### **Positively valued**

Being acknowledged for my work is important to me.

Mostly I am motivated by money.

I appreciate personal feedback, positive or negative, about my work.

When my manager praises my work, it means a great deal to me.

Our manager often acknowledges the team for doing a 'great job'.

Sincere feedback is better than money as a motivator.

I believe that good performance deserves compliments.

### **Negatively valued**

I lose motivation when my effort or achievement are not recognised.

Work experience gained outside doesn't count much in Finance.

Some managers don't respect employees.

We are rarely thanked for our work.

### **Sanctuary**

#### **Positively valued**

My manager trusts me to do high quality work.

Finance values quality work over speed.

Finance looks after employees well.

#### **Negatively valued**

I need the safety of Finance to feel comfortable and supported.

My managers sometimes do not explain what they want me to do.

I don't think managers from outside Finance care about the values here.

### **Comfortable Change**

#### **Positively valued**

I feel contented and safe in this work setting.

I like trying new ways of doing things.

It is good to be challenged by other ideas.

I am pleased that the organisation is changing in some ways.

#### **Negatively valued**

My manager does not want to change how we work.

There is little innovation or change here.

This is a stressful place to work.

**Appendix F: ETHICS APPROVAL from the Human Research Ethics Committee**

Human Research Ethics Committee

Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Dr Patricia Bazeley Melbourne Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Melbourne Campus

**Student Researcher:** Joanne Abbey Melbourne Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

Developing a contextualised concept of wellbeing.

**for the period:** 1<sup>st</sup> September 2007 to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2008

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** V200708 2

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans* (1999) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - security of records
  - compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - proposed changes to the protocol
  - unforeseen circumstances or events
  - adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a *Final Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an *Annual Progress Report Form* and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: .....

*Jay Hajduk*  
(Research Services Officer, Melbourne Campus)

Date: .....

*29/8/07*