

# Wellbeing and how to improve it

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A WHITE PAPER FROM CONVERGE INTERNATIONAL

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# Everyone wants to be happy.

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The Australian Productivity Commission's draft report on Mental Health (2019) estimates the loss of productivity due to mental illness at \$9.9 - \$18.1 billion per year. This does not include the loss of productivity that comes about due to reduced wellbeing which is not diagnosable as a mental illness.

A rich and satisfying life is not just good for individuals it also has incalculable positive effects for families, societies and workplaces. Lower conflict, lower health problems, less crime... it is no wonder that this is an issue at a national level. Bhutan uses as its primary measure of national success a "Gross National Happiness" metric. The UAE has a State Minister for Happiness. And New Zealand prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, unveiled a "wellbeing budget" in 2019 which aims for quality of life as its primary measure countries, have become serious about influencing the wellbeing of their people.

Workplaces too have long been aware that wellbeing is good for business. Satisfied and engaged people are less likely to jump ship, more likely to spend discretionary effort helping the organisation, are more productive and innovative and spend less time on sick leave.

But workplaces have not always been sure about how best to promote wellbeing amongst their staff. Some organisations have delegated responsibility for wellbeing to their OH&S function. This subtly suggests that, to them, wellbeing is more to do with preventing accidents or mental illness than promoting even greater flourishing amongst workers who are already functioning well.



# Workplaces can make a difference.

Providing meaningful and purposeful work, promoting good habits and helping and supporting staff to be resilient is possible and will reap dividends for organisations, with millions of dollars at stake for organisations who get it right. When workers are provided with a fulfilling career, they flourish.

As Roman Krznarich puts it:

“...a vocation is a career that not only gives you fulfillment — meaning, flow, freedom — but that also has a definitive goal or a clear purpose to strive for attached to it, which drives your life and motivates you to get up in the morning.”

At Converge we have seen workplace wellbeing programs have profoundly positive impact on the wellbeing of people in organisations. Conversely, we have also seen wellbeing programs fall short of the hopes that organisations had for them.

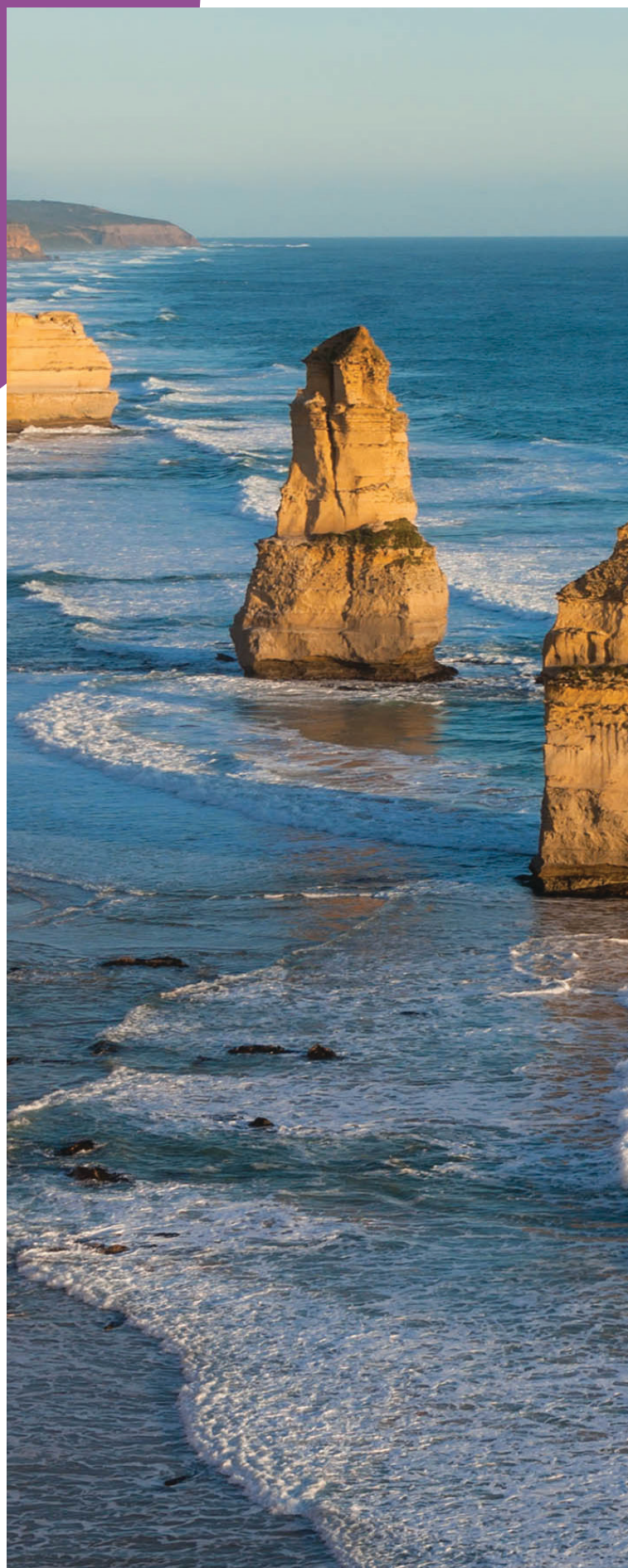
We set out to discover the current best research on maximising individual wellbeing and how organisations can harness this information to create a Wellbeing Strategy that makes a difference.

# What is wellbeing?

At Converge we define “wellbeing” as both feeling happy and also living with energy and purpose.

Many studies equate wellbeing with emotional happiness. For example, one study<sup>2</sup> used a measure of subjective wellbeing defined by “Frequent positive affect, high life satisfaction and infrequent negative affect.” Others have taken a broader view<sup>3</sup> defining wellbeing as “people’s positive evaluations of their lives, including positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction and meaning”. Over time, two different aspects of wellbeing have emerged: which might be summarised as subjective happiness and functioning well, with subjective happiness being defined by positive emotions and satisfaction with life, while functioning well is defined by autonomy, meaning and vitality<sup>4</sup>

Researchers trying to define wellbeing have begun to use terms such as “flourishing” rather than “happiness” in recognition of these two aspects of wellbeing. In fact, some researchers prefer not to talk about happiness at all. This is because, ironically, pursuing a happy life may be less successful at achieving subjective happiness than pursuing a meaningful and satisfying life.<sup>5</sup> Feeling happy is a moment to moment sensation which people may not always be good at identifying in themselves. A meaningful and satisfying life has long lasting effects which promote feelings of happiness but doesn’t solely depend on these momentary sensations.





# Measuring Wellbeing

We believe that the World Health Organisation Wellbeing measure (the WHO-5) does a good job of capturing the full concept of wellbeing.

## **The WHO-5 is a set of five questions as follows:**

In the past two weeks...

1. I have felt cheerful and in good spirits
2. I have felt calm and relaxed
3. I have felt active and vigorous
4. I woke up feeling fresh and rested
5. My daily life has been filled with things that interest me

Answers are based on a six-point Likert scale:

- All the time (score of 5)
- Most of the time (score of 4)
- More than half the time (score of 3)
- Less than half the time (score of 2)
- Some of the time (score of 1)
- At no time (score of 0)

Answers for each question are added together giving a maximum score of 25 and a minimum score of 0. Typically, these are then multiplied by 4 to give a total out of 100.

Scores below 50 (out of 100) have been shown to be related to reduced wellbeing. Scores below 28 have been shown to be associated with high risk for mental illness, suicidality and other poor outcomes.

Large scale studies of normal populations have shown average wellbeing scores between 60 and 70.

The WHO-5 has been used in hundreds of peer-reviewed studies and is a well-established and fully tested measure of wellbeing with excellent and robust properties<sup>6</sup>.

# Where does wellbeing come from?

During early investigations into wellbeing, researchers were surprised to discover that wellbeing is remarkably stable throughout an individual's life. Even though individuals sometimes experienced a "shock" that jolted wellbeing (for example a traumatic event), people usually reverted relatively quickly to their former wellbeing level. This was also true when a major positive event happened, such as winning the lottery<sup>7</sup>. As a result of this observation, researchers developed the idea of a "set-point" for wellbeing.

However, although stable wellbeing over time is an observable phenomenon, researchers found that a set-point does not entirely explain differences in wellbeing between individuals or changes in wellbeing over the course of an individual's life. They, therefore, embarked on projects to identify different drivers of wellbeing. In doing so, they found there were three quite different types of wellbeing drivers.

## PERSONALITY

### ***The first component that drives wellbeing is an individual's personality.***

This is likely to be partly genetic (and therefore a reason why wellbeing has a hereditary quality) and partly the influence of early experiences.

Generally, normal personality types are considered to have five key traits (the "Big Five")<sup>8</sup>: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. Although some changes in personality are possible over time, personalities are relatively enduring, making this component of wellbeing fairly stable. Of the "Big Five", the personality traits generally agreed upon to affect wellbeing are:

- Extraversion (more extraverted people have somewhat higher wellbeing on average)
- Neuroticism (people with higher neuroticism have somewhat lower wellbeing on average) and;
- Openness to Experience (more open people have somewhat higher wellbeing on average)<sup>9</sup>.

Researchers believe that these personality drivers of wellbeing are what cause wellbeing to remain relatively stable.

## ACTIVITIES

### ***The second component driving wellbeing is specific actions a person takes in their daily life.***

While these are sometimes related to personality (some actions will come more naturally for people with certain personality types), the actions or activities themselves seem to have wellbeing benefits independent of personality.

## CIRCUMSTANCES

### ***The final component or driver of wellbeing is life events or circumstances.***

Stressful or tragic events can cause wellbeing to drop. Sometimes this is temporary, sometimes enduring.

However, it is important to note that there is overlap between these components. As each factor is related, they not only affect wellbeing, but also affect each other. So, any model of wellbeing contains more complex interrelationships than a simple apportionment might suggest. Figure 1 is a representation of this on page 10.



# IMPORTANCE



**50% - 80%**

Researchers tend to agree that personality is the most influential, with 50% - 80% of wellbeing variations coming from these stable factors.



**5 - 15%**

Life circumstances are generally accepted to have a small influence of around 5 - 15% on variations in wellbeing, and these circumstances often only influence wellbeing temporarily.



**15 - 40%**

Activities undertaken by individuals account for the remainder – estimated to be anywhere from 15 – 40% of the variability in wellbeing (depending on the research study).



# Can wellbeing improve?

The good news is that individuals do have some influence over their own levels of wellbeing through the activities they undertake.

There have been many attempts to show which activities lead to increased wellbeing, including very carefully designed controlled experiments. Many activities offer temporary improvement while the interventions are occurring, as even “set-point” theory would predict. But while some effects do not persist, a number of activities do appear to lead to enhanced wellbeing that is sustained over a longer time period.

This longer-term effect may well happen because the activities trigger an “upward spiral of greater wellbeing”.<sup>15</sup>

This is in line with Broaden-and-Build theory, predicting that positive emotions equip individuals with the cognitive resources to discover new ideas and actions.<sup>16</sup> This in turn, releases dopamine in the brain, continuing the likelihood an individual will further engage in activities that enhance their wellbeing. See Figure 3.

As seen in Figure 2, while personality and other very stable long-term factors defines a range in which wellbeing will lie most of the time, individual activities to improve wellbeing can still see wellbeing shift from lower in this range to higher in this range.

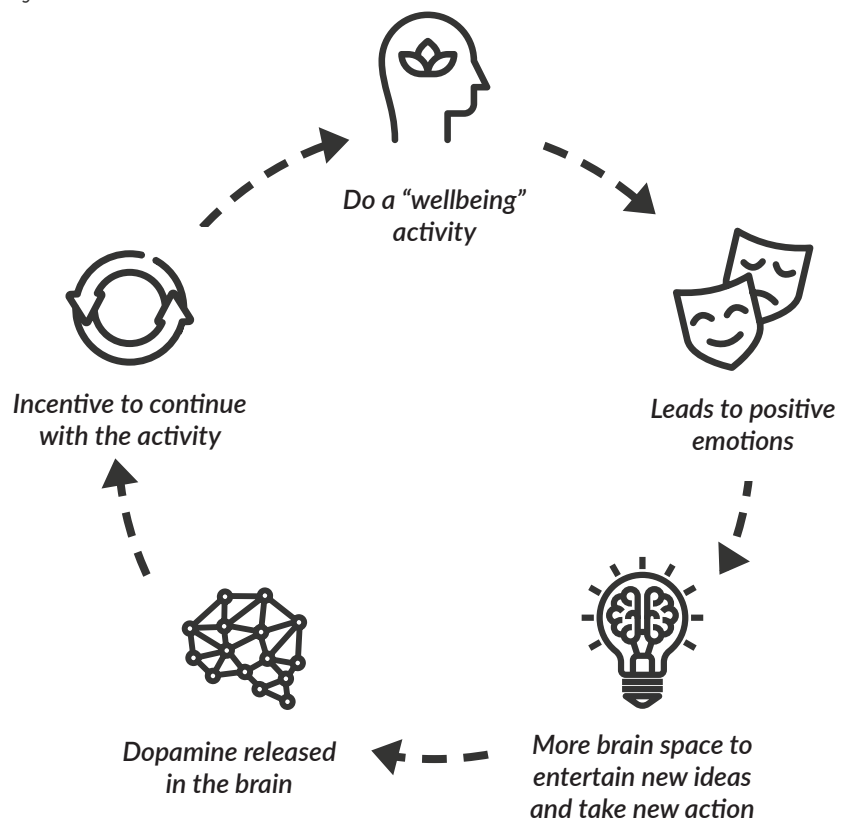


Figure 3 Upward spiral of wellbeing

# Can the wellbeing set-point be shifted?

Although the evidence points to a very stable “set-point” for wellbeing, this set-point can and does shift over time for some people.

Some negative events have been shown to be so damaging that they not only affect wellbeing immediately and substantially, but on average wellbeing never transitions back to the level it was before. Examples of this include the death of a child<sup>10</sup> and repeated spells of unemployment<sup>11</sup>.

However, it is unlikely that a change in life circumstances will produce a persistent positive effect on wellbeing.

For example, more wealth, changes in accommodation<sup>12</sup> and marital status<sup>13</sup> have all been shown to only temporarily change wellbeing. Over time, people seem to adapt to these changes and revert to their original wellbeing ‘set-point’. Interestingly, one of the very few changes that was shown in one study to lead to higher sustainable wellbeing, was cosmetic surgery<sup>14</sup>.



# What improves wellbeing?



## IMPROVING SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

(in the literature this is called “pro-social behaviour”) has been shown to enhance wellbeing. It activates the brain’s reward system, increases feelings of connectedness and highlights to the person being pro-social that they have the competence and autonomy to do so.<sup>17</sup> Improving social relationships is particularly effective when family related goals<sup>11</sup> are pursued or when the person participates in social activities<sup>18</sup>.

## ACTS OF KINDNESS

positively affect wellbeing as they can feel intrinsically rewarding (as shown through neural brain responses), through fostering social cooperation.<sup>19</sup> This includes thanking someone, smiling, volunteering for organisations/church,<sup>20</sup> feeding a friend’s pet and/or donating blood<sup>21</sup>.

## PURSUING MEANING AND PURPOSE

seems to positively enhance wellbeing, as it provides a sense of guidance and personal identity. These activities can include becoming involved in a philosophy, religion or meaningful causes<sup>3</sup> and self-spending on experiences.

## CONNECTING WITH NATURE

also positively affects wellbeing, as it engages our attention effortlessly, with no need for humans to monitor their behaviour, which reduces stress.<sup>5</sup> These activities include brief walks outside, exercising in nature, simple contact/time spent with nature, leisure activities outside.

## DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

are generally unhelpful for wellbeing. While most drugs, including alcohol, may give a temporary effect of feeling happier, being able to take risks, even feelings of euphoria, generally this is more than outweighed by the negative longer-term effects after this temporary “high” wears off. This is true of tobacco<sup>26</sup> as well as alcohol<sup>27</sup>, prescription and illegal drugs. There is an increasing consensus that there is no ideal or “safe” amount of any of these substances and that wellbeing is generally maximised by avoiding them altogether.<sup>28</sup> However, in practice it is unlikely that everyone may choose to give up them up entirely and so it is also important to note that lower usage is better and that avoiding problem or compulsive use of drugs and alcohol is vital for wellbeing.

## ADOPTING NEW INTENTIONAL GOALS

can enhance wellbeing, as it provides a sense of purpose and fosters three basic human needs of competence, autonomy and connectedness<sup>29</sup>. This includes making an effort to try something new that aligns with personal values such as taking on new responsibilities, learning an instrument or cooking<sup>3</sup>.

## PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

enhances wellbeing, as it aids self-awareness and understanding, helping people make choices that align with their values. An example of what is meant by mindfulness is taking notice of the environment around you e.g., training awareness of sensations, thoughts and feelings<sup>30</sup>.

## PRACTICING GRATITUDE

enhances wellbeing through feelings of social connection and promoting the regulation of stress.<sup>31 32</sup> Examples of how this can be done are writing down things you are grateful for or writing a gratitude letter to someone<sup>33</sup>.

## PRACTICING SELF-COMPASSION

enhances wellbeing, as it can buffer against bad reactions toward negative life events.<sup>34</sup> An activity that enables this can be writing a self-compassion letter to yourself from the perspective of an unconditional friend.<sup>35</sup>

## PHYSICAL EXERCISE

can positively affect wellbeing, as it produces endorphins – which are ‘feel-good’ chemicals<sup>22</sup>. Even though endorphins are short lived, physical exercise also promotes wellbeing long-term through building resilience against stress, improved sleep and enhanced self-esteem<sup>23</sup>. Activities can include walking, running, dancing etc. Exercise doesn’t have to be aerobic (i.e. it doesn’t have to be particularly energetic) to have benefits for wellbeing.

## NUTRITION

has been shown to have positive effects on wellbeing. For example, a Mediterranean diet has been shown to reduce depression risks<sup>24</sup>.

## SLEEP

is one of the most critical elements in maintaining wellbeing. Feeling rested and refreshed in the morning is, in fact, one of the five questions in the WHO-5 wellbeing measure. Sleep is an interesting and difficult thing to study in relation to wellbeing because it is bi-directional: more sleep leads to higher wellbeing and conversely wellbeing levels affect the quality and quantity of sleep. However, experts do agree that, where it is possible, improving sleep can be one of the most effective ways to improve wellbeing and is likely to lead to an upward spiral as the positive feedback loop of getting better sleep kicks in<sup>25</sup>.



## Tip for wellbeing activities:

Make the activity a habit or make it easy to remember (for example, set up regular reminders on your phone to do something or set a time of day when you will do it). Change it up – try to vary something about the activity every one or two times you do it. If you are recording what you are thankful for, try thinking about what you are thankful for about other people one week and then what you are thankful for about where you live another week (for example).





## “How” is important too

This is all about improving wellbeing.  
So there’s no such thing as failure.

Activities that become habitual in the sense that they are no longer consciously chosen or undertaken with a goal in mind to improve wellbeing, seem to have less effect than activities that remain fresh. It is likely that some ways of undertaking activities eventually incorporate them into the wellbeing setpoint. Activities that involve some variety seem to have a bigger effect. For example, studies have shown that practicing acts of kindness and gratitude had a larger effect on wellbeing when completed once a week compared to three times.<sup>36</sup>



## So how can activities become habits and yet still have a positive effect?

This conundrum has led researchers to propose that there are two aspects to an activity becoming habitual. The first is that an activity is regularly undertaken. The other is that the activity is undertaken in a routine and unvarying way. It is helpful for ongoing wellbeing if an activity is habitual in the first sense. If less willpower needs to be exerted to initiate an activity, it is more likely to occur. However, it seems to be unhelpful for an activity to be undertaken in a routine or habitual way in the second sense.

There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that people have to actually enjoy the activities they do. This means that different people may choose to do different things depending on their personality and values. Deciding to implement a habit of “getting out into nature” may involve running through a national park for one person but this kind of activity might be so unappealing to another person that they wouldn't have the willpower to implement this activity in a sustainable way.

They should instead think of a different way of getting out into nature – possibly picnicking or walking on the beach would work for them.<sup>37</sup>

In general, activities are most effective if they involve sustained effort and motivation, if the activities are varied somewhat and if they are in line with a person's values.

## Setting a goal is the first step to improving wellbeing.

The act of setting a wellbeing goal is an important part of raising wellbeing – and the effort and intentionality involved in setting a goal also has a positive effect on whatever a person is trying to do to improve<sup>38</sup>.

After setting a goal, there are ways to implement change that affect the chance of success. The following steps are recommended:<sup>39</sup>



### Own the goal

Make sure it's your own choice. Make sure you truly want to achieve the goal and are motivated by it.

### Keep a balance

It will be more sustainable if you don't try to do everything all at once. Start small, and as you accomplish small things (having fun along the way) you will find you can incorporate more activities.



### Make it fun

Make sure it's your own choice. Make sure you truly want to achieve the goal and are motivated by it.



### Remember the big picture

This is all about improving wellbeing. So there's no such thing as failure. The only measure is whether you are enjoying an activity and want to keep going with it. Enjoying the activity is what improves wellbeing, after all, and it should be self-sustaining because you will want to keep going with something that is bringing you happiness. If something isn't working – it's just not right for you. Try something else.



# What role do circumstances (or life events) play in wellbeing?

The links between circumstances and wellbeing are likely to be bi-directional. Life events affect wellbeing, but wellbeing also influences the ability for certain life events to arise. Thus, for example, people with lower wellbeing might make poor choices, such as gambling that lead to more financial stress. If this is true, even in a limited sense, then we would expect to see both vicious cycles occurring for individuals where once things are bad, they become even worse and also virtuous cycles where, good things lead to higher wellbeing and things continue to spiral upwards. And this, in fact, is seen as we have previously noted in Figure 3.

However, life events play a surprisingly small role in general in wellbeing. They are much less influential on wellbeing levels than personality and even less than activities that an individual chooses to undertake. The common picture of the person who is unhappy because many bad things have happened to them, and the person who is happy because life has treated them well is a myth, not supported by evidence. Wellbeing seems much more related to the attitude and choices someone brings to bear on their circumstances. Nevertheless, the persistence of this myth is interesting and is demonstrated by the number of people who continue to buy lottery tickets despite the low probability of winning or being any better off, in the unlikelihood they do win.



# How do we make use of the evidence at Converge?

We have four main ways in which we implement best practice wellbeing strategies for our clients.

1

## ASSESSMENT

When mental health and wellbeing are poor across any group of employees, we know certain metrics shift. Absenteeism and unplanned leave generally rise, engagement deteriorates, conflict often festers, and interpersonal relationships invariably suffer. Trust in leadership also usually declines.

Organisations understandably try all sorts of changes and measures to try to turn this negative dynamic around but sometimes, the problem is either too big, too complex or there's such a lack of trust in leadership that inhouse efforts fail. That is often the trigger for organisational leaders to seek out help from external experts.

When we are asked by organisations to help improve health and wellbeing in any team of any scale, we take the time to ensure we understand the dynamic that is being experienced in the workplace first before planning any remedial efforts. We understand there are legal and regulatory requirements (OH&S, WHS, employment law etc), as well as nuanced behavioural and relational perspectives that are important to grasp to form an accurate picture of what is going on in a team.

The first step in our process is an assessment. It often involves gathering existing health, safety and wellbeing data as well as the related policies and procedures held by the organisation. This is typically backed up by our own data gathering through surveys or interviews directly with staff. We use high quality and proven assessments that explore psychosocial risk and other factors driving stress or impacting wellbeing at an individual level, that aggregate to provide a whole team perspective.

More recently, we are in a position to add an assessment of the mental fitness, wellbeing and life stress of a team to gain a far more complete understanding about the overall wellbeing of the team at a level of detail previously not possible. Today we use Converge's own MyMentalFitness App to do this in an engaging and fun way for staff, that naturally leads on to improvement of wellbeing precisely where each person needs to focus their energies. This is explored further below under the heading "Advancing the agenda".





*"The important thing for long term improvement in wellbeing at an individual or team level is sustained effort to build positive habits and routines to improve wellbeing".*

2

## STRATEGIES

Given the broad range of factors, themes, risks, life circumstances, behavioural drivers and motivators that are identified during our assessment phase, the strategies for wellbeing improvement and remediation may also be as broad and varied. Rarely do we find two organisations needing exactly the same solution.

Teams working directly with the public or in environments with high media exposure are often most at risk. This includes emergency services staff, health workers, teachers, call centre staff, government employees such as child protection workers to name just some of them. Sometimes, we work with teams vicariously impacted by their exposure to stressful information or images (such as courts, government employees exposed to confronting material arising from investigations, Royal Commissions or the like). In these cases, whole-of-team wellbeing and support strategies may be required to mitigate and manage risk over time.

Usually, we suggest improvements to tidy up the existing policies and procedures to support improved health and wellbeing. Many organisations have an existing focus on safety and physical wellbeing that needs to be extended to include psychological factors and wellbeing in general. Beyond this, things can become broader and more diverse as each organisation and team's needs will vary. Our research around wellbeing always informs our response, with an understanding that helping individuals take control of their own wellbeing will contribute positively towards the overall people risk profile and performance of the organisation.

3

## SUPPORT

With sensitive mental health and psychological wellbeing matters, people often prefer privacy and the independence an arm's length party can provide to implement whatever necessary supports may be required.

The challenge is addressing the immediate risk while putting in place longer term strategies that will continue to promote positive wellbeing in the longer term. In the short term, usually EAP support is a great fillip for individuals who can quickly gain practical strategies to address the issues impacting their health and wellbeing. Sometimes, conflict resolution is required between team members. Other times broader capability building may be needed such as relational or behavioural training or coaching for managers. Leadership development is also frequently necessary.

So, we set processes in motion to get things back on track. The great challenge remains how to sustain the improvements and embed better habits and practices to support positive wellbeing over time. This is where we recognised we needed something extra that supported teams at an individual level to shape culture and ensure durable improvement long after we are directly involved.

4

## ADVANCING THE AGENDA

Today, we are able to offer the MyMentalFitness App to employees at a team, department, site or whole organisation level. The deployment of the App builds resilience and wellbeing for all, incrementally and collectively over time. The App includes a rigorous self-assessment that each individual completes. This shapes the development plan each team member experiences – therefore no two people having the exact same improvement journey. Each wellbeing improvement journey focuses on whichever of the eleven relevant factors need improvement. For some it might be forming new habits to improve sleep, reduce alcohol consumption, practise mindfulness. For others, their focus might be entirely different such as intentionally engaging with nature, or including more social networking in their life, for others it might be exploring gratitude more creatively.

We want to remain ahead of the curve and continue to deepen our understanding about the drivers and determinants for shaping and improving wellbeing. We are committed to continue our research as the data arising from use of the App builds. We will partner with hand-chosen universities and business partners to achieve our broader ambitions and will ensure we invest in future iterations of the App while shaping knowledge of theory related to wellbeing in powerful ways yet to come.

# What is the Converge Mental Fitness Model?



Figure 4 Converge Mental Fitness Measure

It's important to assess Life Stress, Mental Fitness and Wellbeing to get an accurate picture of what is happening, but, as outlined in the research in this paper, only Mental Fitness is readily capable of being changed. To impact wellbeing, workplaces – and individuals – need to focus on Mental Fitness while also assessing each part of the wellbeing model to gain an accurate picture of their current state of wellbeing.



Figure 5 Converge Mental Fitness Model

The Converge Mental Fitness Measure is a measure of the Activities that a person undertakes which have been shown to affect wellbeing.

We ask questions that encompass each area of activity to build a picture of the level of Mental Fitness at which an individual is currently operating.

The Converge Mental Fitness Model is our view about how Mental Fitness, Life Stress and Wellbeing interact.

# We use the WHO-5 to measure Wellbeing.

This allows us to gauge someone's wellbeing compared with a globally recognised assessment and to recommend actions and interventions if a person's wellbeing is of concern.

We also use a series of questions about the activities that someone incorporates into their life to measure Mental Fitness, drawing from the categories in the Converge Mental Fitness Model.

Finally, we use a series of questions, adapted from the Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Scale<sup>40</sup> that asks participants whether they have experienced particular events in the past year known to be associated with psychological stress.

We ask about objective events as well a person's subjective experience of stress. However, we only use the objective data in measuring Life Stress, as someone's perception of their stress is likely to reflect their wellbeing. For example, two people might have identical events (e.g., both have had a baby or moved to a new house). However, one may have low wellbeing and the other high wellbeing prior to those events. Therefore, their subjective experience of stress derived from these life events may be very different. By measuring events objectively, we avoid confounding Life Events with Wellbeing. Additionally, the extra information we get from their perception of stress can also be reported, and provide us with a useful snapshot into how they are feeling.

## BODY

- **Exercise** – Does the person incorporate regular exercise into their life?
- **Sleep** – Does the person get a good quality and quantity of sleep?
- **Nutrition** – Does the person eat a “Mediterranean diet”?
- **Drug and Alcohol Use** – Does the person misuse drugs or alcohol?

## MIND

- **Positive mindset** – Does the person practice being grateful, do they have a positive and constructive approach to situations?
- **Growth mindset** – Does the person believe that they can change and improve? Does the person regularly set themselves goals?
- **Mindfulness** – Does the person regularly pay attention, in the moment, to what is happening? Do they get easily distracted (including by “always on” technology?)

## SPIRIT

- **Nature** – Does the person connect with the natural world on a regular basis?
- **Purpose** – Does the person find meaning and purpose in the work they do?

## COMMUNITY

- **Social** – How extensive is the person's social network? What “social capital” do they have?
- **Giving** – Does the person regularly engage in giving time and money? To what extent do they practice acts of kindness and generosity in their daily life?



# What is the Converge Mental Fitness App?

Our app provides a convenient and comprehensive way to measure Mental Fitness, Life Stress and Wellbeing. It also provides tools for individuals to manage their own wellbeing.

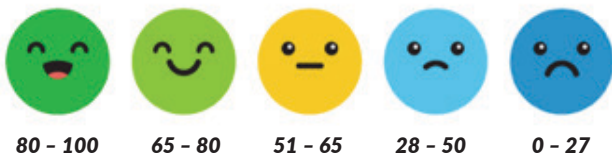
After the comprehensive set of questions that makes up the Converge Mental Fitness Model, we are able to report back to individuals on their own Wellbeing. We use a weather metaphor to present this information to users.

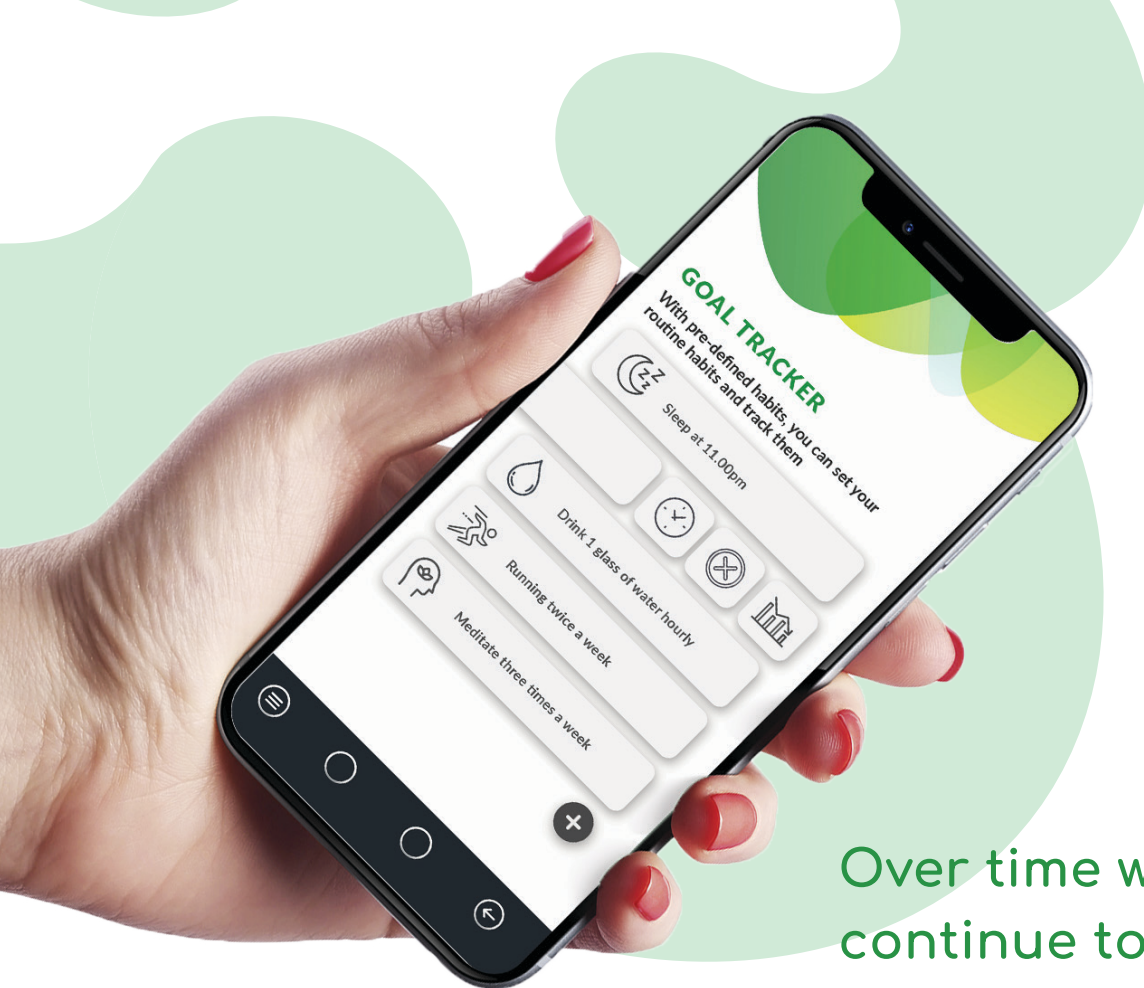
Life Stress is presented as weather:



Wellbeing is shown using a set of commonly understood facial expressions:

WHO-5 score:





Over time we intend to continue to monitor research to evolve and update the app.

In addition to the weather and the facial icon, we use an umbrella to show the level of Mental Fitness that has been assessed through our tool. This shows an umbrella which is larger or smaller depending on the levels achieved in each of the 11 different areas we measure within the Body, Mind, Spirit and Community categories.

We use this metaphor for a number of reasons:

1. We want to emphasise that Life Stress can happen to anyone and can't easily be controlled
2. However, people do have some measure of control over their protection from the weather (the umbrella) through setting goals and changing the activities they incorporate into their daily life
3. But no-one can expect an umbrella to be their sole protection from a huge storm – in those cases they need to seek help beyond their own resources.

The Converge Mental Fitness App provides individuals with an evidence-based assessment of their wellbeing and a snapshot of how effectively they use activities to boost wellbeing. Additionally, the app then also provides users with the opportunity to:

- a) **Learn more** about the drivers of wellbeing (through tips, articles and videos)
- b) **Set goals** for undertaking new activities to boost wellbeing
- c) **Engage with regular quizzes** that encourage check-ins on activities
- d) **Set reminders** to do particular activities and track progress towards goals
- e) **Undertake the full Wellbeing Assessment** more than once (ideally about every three months) and see progress over time
- f) **Use a mood tracker** to gauge how their subjective experience of wellbeing changes on a regular basis
- g) **Get support and help from a professional** with any aspect of their wellbeing – including immediate and/or critical support when wellbeing is very low. Alternatively, when wellbeing is normal, we can provide coaching resources/activities to help to change habits and mindsets.

**We are committed to complete privacy and confidentiality of all individuals' data with nothing being sold to third parties.**

We are equally committed, as part of our corporate social responsibility, to using the information we gather through aggregated and anonymous data to continue to do our own research that aims to improve the wellbeing of all people, by understanding how activities, life stress, workplace factors and wellbeing interact.

## **Recommendations for organisations**

Assessing wellbeing and mental fitness is a valuable first step in any organisation's Wellbeing Strategy.

It is difficult to target effective interventions without knowing what your people are struggling with.

Rather than a "one-size-fits-all" resilience training approach, decomposing the elements of mental fitness allows organisations to understand whether low wellbeing is coming from lack of quality sleep, social disengagement and loneliness, financial stress, a negative mindset, poor nutrition or the lack of a sense of purpose.

Armed with this information, organisations have a much better chance of seeing real impact and change flowing from their Wellbeing Strategy.

We recommend implementing a Wellbeing Strategy with the following elements:

## **PRIORITISE WELLBEING**

with executive endorsement, appropriate investment and make sure that it is part of a compelling employer value proposition to employees.

## **ASSESS THE CURRENT LEVELS OF STRESS**

of your workforce, the wellbeing of your people and the most fruitful areas in which you can support your people to improve their wellbeing. Ensure that this assessment is completed by as many people as possible within your organisation to maximise the chance of getting balanced and accurate information.

## **PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT FOR YOUR PEOPLE**

to manage their own levels of wellbeing including:

- a. Simple everyday activities shown to enhance wellbeing – both physical and mental
- b. Education and training in the way to manage wellbeing and promote resilience – particularly aimed at those areas shown by assessments to be of highest need to your people.
- c. Professional advice and counselling for those who are shown to be at risk (assessed with low wellbeing) and for those who want to take action to improve their wellbeing. This could be an EAP program.
- d. Proactive professional interventions for teams that are at high risk. This could include regular wellbeing checks by a professional for teams exposed to traumatic situations, an on-site counsellor who “walks the floor” and is able to reach out to support workers without them having to make a decision to seek help – plus team assessments and interventions, including mediation, for teams with significant conflict.

## **REASSESS STRESS, WELLBEING AND POSSIBLE INTERVENTIONS**

on a regular basis. This should be at least annually but not so often that staff become “survey-fatigued”.

## **AN ANNUAL CALENDAR FOCUSING ON DIFFERENT AREAS OF WELLBEING**

can be a useful method of promoting wellbeing activities without overloading your people with too much information all at once.

## **IDENTIFY TEAMS OR AREAS OF THE ORGANISATION**

with particular wellbeing risks (for example, workers involved in shift work, people exposed to traumatic situations, teams with significant conflict).

## **ONGOING “LIGHT” COMMUNICATION**

emphasising the importance of wellbeing and providing ongoing tips and support for your people.

It is essential that employee data is collected and disseminated in a way that your people feel comfortable with. Unless staff are confident that a neutral third-party will keep their information confidential, it is unlikely that the data they provide about their stress or mental resilience levels will be truthful.



## FURTHER HELP

Converge International is happy to offer you a free consultation with one of our trained and experienced team to help you plan your Wellbeing Strategy and to demonstrate our Mental Fitness App. Please contact our Chief Customer Officer, John Ballenger, for more information at 1300 687 327.

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## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Krznarich (2012)

<sup>2</sup>Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005)

<sup>3</sup>Seligman (2002)

<sup>4</sup>“Hedonic Wellbeing” is the term given to subjective or emotional wellbeing while “Eudaimonic Wellbeing” is the term given to “functioning well” as expressed in finding meaning, having autonomy and exhibiting vitality; Capaldi, Passmore, Nisbet, Zelenski & Dopko (2015)

<sup>5</sup>Martin (2008)

<sup>6</sup>Topp, Ostergaard, Sondergaard and Bech (2015)

<sup>7</sup>Brickman, Coates and Janoff-Bulman (1978)

<sup>8</sup>Costa and McCrae (1990)

<sup>9</sup>Headey (2006)

<sup>10</sup>Headey (2008)

<sup>11</sup>Lucas (2007)

<sup>12</sup>Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006)

<sup>13</sup>Lucas, Clark, Georgellis & Diener (2003)

<sup>14</sup>Frederick & Loewenstein (1999)

<sup>15</sup>Nelson, Layous, Cole & Lyubomirsky (2016)

<sup>16</sup>Fredrickson & Joiner (2002)

<sup>17</sup>Revord, Walsh & Lyubomirsky (2018)

<sup>18</sup>Diener & Seligman (2004)

<sup>19</sup>NEF (2008)

<sup>20</sup>Thoits & Hewitt (2001)

<sup>21</sup>Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm & Sheldon (2011)

<sup>22</sup>Scully, Kremer, Meade, Graham & Dudgeon (1998)

<sup>23</sup>Fox (1999)

<sup>24</sup>Jacka et al (2017)

<sup>25</sup>Bartel, Richardson & Graditar (2018)

<sup>26</sup>A summary of the research on tobacco and mental health can be found at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/a-to-z/s/smoking-and-mental-health>

<sup>27</sup>Boden & Fergusson (2011)

<sup>28</sup>Some highly publicised research studies suggested that moderate drinkers enjoyed slightly better longevity than teetotalers, however this result has recently been revised and rejected in a review of those studies – see Stockwell et al (2016)

<sup>29</sup>Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2019)

<sup>30</sup>Brown & Ryan (2003)

<sup>31</sup>Emmons & Mishra (2011)

<sup>32</sup>McCraty & Childre (2004)

<sup>33</sup>Boehm, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon (2011)

<sup>34</sup>Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts Allen & Hancock (2007)

<sup>35</sup>Smeets, Neff, Albers & Peters (2014)

<sup>36</sup>Emmons & McCullough (2003), Lyubomirsky, Tkach & Sheldon (2004)

<sup>37</sup>Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005)

<sup>38</sup>Lyubomirsky et al (2011)

<sup>39</sup>Sheldon, Kasser, Smith and Share (2002)

<sup>40</sup>Crandall (1992)

