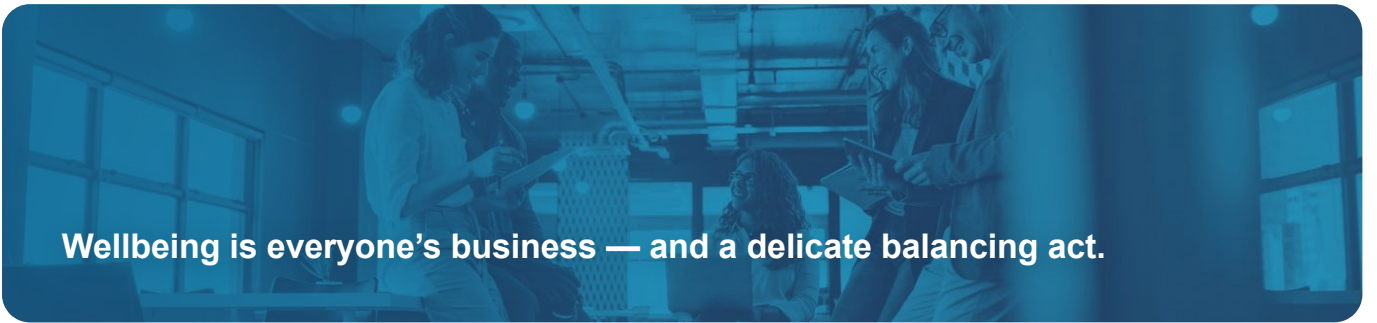


GLWS® INSIGHTS · ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS

What is wellbeing?

Essential concepts and insights from GLWS — a plain-language primer on what wellbeing really is, why it is so often misunderstood, and how to see it whole.



Wellbeing is everyone's business — and a delicate balancing act.

Many organisations struggle to improve wellbeing because of its complex and nuanced nature. This paper clarifies the multifaceted concept by breaking it down into the key elements that drive the demands and resources shaping a professional's wellbeing — and offers a shared, evidence-based language for talking about it.

THE GLWS DEFINITION OF WELLBEING

“Wellbeing is a delicate balancing act between all of the demands and challenges we experience in our lives and work, and all of the protective and energising resources we have available to draw upon to help us thrive at any given time.”

Audrey McGibbon, 2025

SECTION 01

The forces at play

Four ideas that make an elusive concept concrete: how demands and resources balance, where each of us sits on the wellbeing continuum, the macro forces acting on us from the outside, and the six fundamental characteristics of wellbeing itself.

THE DEMANDS & RESOURCES MODEL

Wellbeing is a delicate balancing act between demands and resources.

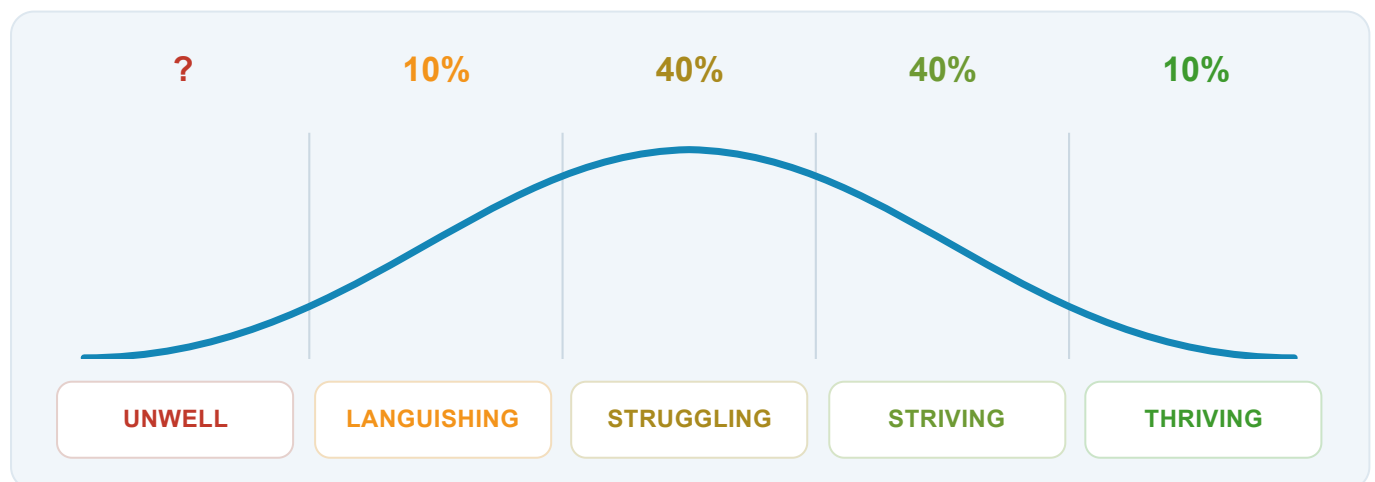
Balancing the demands of work and life with our resources is key to thriving; imbalance harms wellbeing. Demands like high workload, difficult stakeholders and health issues can dip wellbeing. Resources such as supportive teams, flexible work arrangements and healthy eating habits can protect and sustain it.



THE WELLBEING CONTINUUM

Everyone sits somewhere on the continuum.

The Wellbeing Continuum illustrates the dynamic and inclusive nature of wellbeing. Everyone has wellbeing needs and will find themselves somewhere on this spectrum, influenced by the changing demands and resources of work and personal life. Recognising that some degree of struggle is normal helps set realistic expectations to protect and support wellbeing.

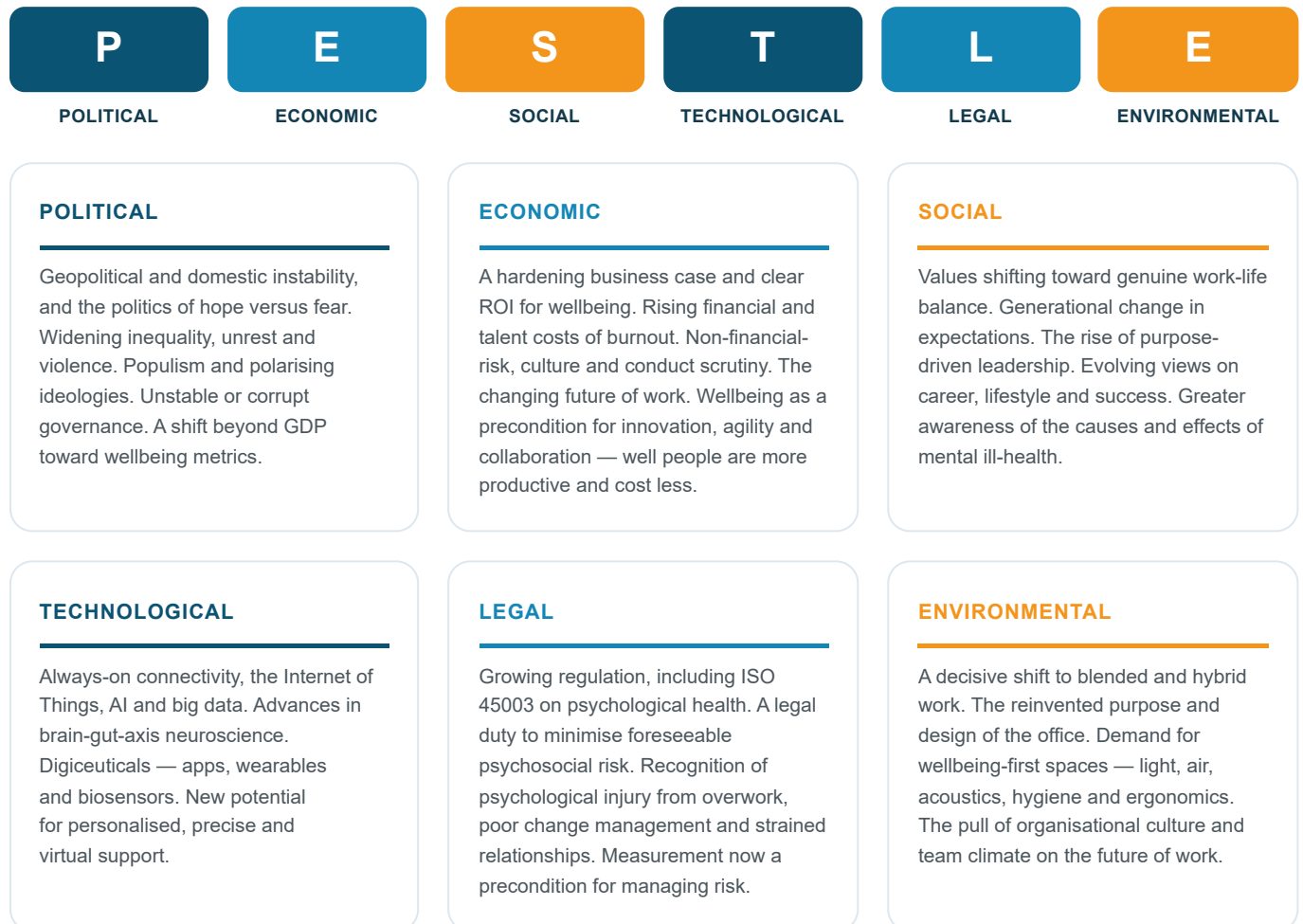


Adapted by EEK & SENSE from Keyes (2002, 2005), Huppert (2009, 2013), the Well-Being Institute (Cambridge University, 2009), the AHRI Wellbeing Lab (2016–2020) and GLWS data collected Feb 2020–Feb 2023.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

The macro forces shaping wellbeing at work.

No professional's wellbeing sits in isolation. A PESTLE lens — political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental — surfaces the external pressures and opportunities that quietly raise the demands, or expand the resources, we bring to work.



Adapted from the PESTLE business-risk analysis tool.

SIX CHARACTERISTICS

Six fundamentals of wellbeing.

Wellbeing is an elusive concept, often misunderstood. These six fundamental characteristics are a basic primer. To accurately and completely understand and evaluate wellbeing, only an integrated and holistic picture — one that includes both workplace and non-work experiences — will have meaning.



SECTION 02

Mental health, stress & performance

Wellbeing and mental illness are distinct but related; stress can help or harm; and wellbeing and performance rise together. Understanding how they connect is central to leading well.

MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

The Complete State model.

The Complete State model shows that wellbeing and mental illness are distinct but related. Individuals can achieve high levels of wellbeing even while managing a mental illness, and low wellbeing does not necessarily indicate the presence of mental illness.



WELLBEING LEADERSHIP

A complex, adaptive and emergent leadership challenge.

Wellbeing rarely responds to simple, linear fixes. As a system it moves between the predictable and the unpredictable, calling for leadership that senses, adapts and responds rather than reaches for a single formula.

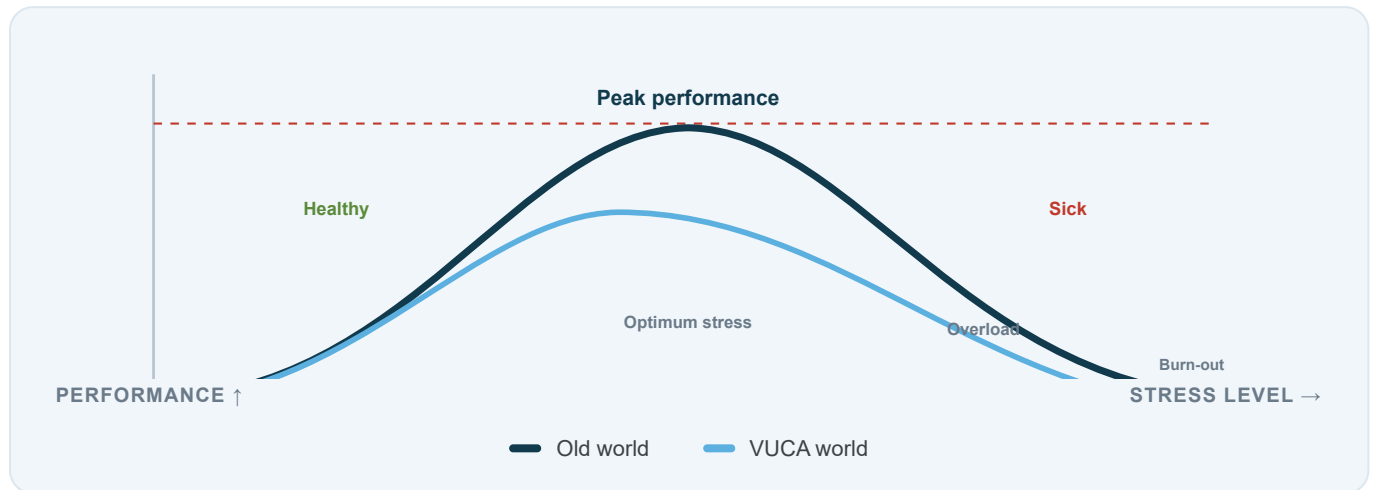


Adapted from the Cynefin Strategy Framework, Snowden, D. (2020).

THE ROLE OF STRESS

Not all stress is bad — but the VUCA world raises the stakes.

Moderate, positive stress can drive performance. However, in today's VUCA world — volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous — rising stress levels over a prolonged period make it harder to maintain both performance and wellbeing.



Adapted by EEK & SENSE from the Yerkes-Dodson Arousal Law.

WELLBEING & PERFORMANCE

Wellbeing lifts performance outcomes.

As social wellbeing rises, so do the outcomes organisations care about most — engagement, work effort, work quality, customer experience and commitment to the job all move in the same direction.



More detailed resources and references are available at glswellbeing.com/resources.

SECTION 03

The GLWS Wellbeing Framework

Decades of research have led to this — a holistic, scientific, research-driven and independently validated model of wellbeing, designed for use with senior professionals. Its dimensions, across the contexts of Working Well and Living Well, provide a valid and reliable assessment of wellbeing, highly correlated with positive mental health and lower burnout.

	
	
WORKING WELL Aspects of Wellbeing affected by our professional lives	LIVING WELL Aspects of Wellbeing affected by our home, social and personal lives
 AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS	The human side of living and leading – investing in your relational energy to sustain genuine, respectful, inclusive, kind and reciprocally rewarding connections with others.
 MEANING, PURPOSE & DIRECTION	Leading a purpose-driven life – finding and unleashing the forces to move and inspire your overall sense of leading a good and full life.
 RESILIENCE & EQUANIMITY	Navigating your emotional life with outer composure and inner calm – facing internal and external challenges with adaptability, acceptance and evenness.
 VITALITY & ENERGY	Being fit to lead your best life – exercising due care over the key pillars of your health and lifestyle that enhance body-gut-brain performance.
 BALANCE & BOUNDARIES	Sustainably outsmarting the work-life balance paradox – responding productively and purposefully to competing demands for your attention and energy.
 INTELLECTUAL ENGAGEMENT & FLOW	Feeling intrinsically interested and cerebrally active – enjoying a variety of mentally absorbing and creative pursuits with intense focus and deep concentration.

The GLWS® Wellbeing Framework is the research basis of the GLWS® assessment system — a precision instrument, scientifically validated and designed exclusively for senior professionals and leaders at all organisational levels. The Framework should always be used in conjunction with GLWS assessment results.

INDIVIDUAL & SYSTEMIC

Deconvoluting the demands & resources.

Wellbeing is never the product of the individual alone. It emerges where personal factors — our biology, personality, beliefs, history and habits — meet the systemic conditions of work: the demands of the role, the quality of team and manager relationships, and the fairness and effectiveness of the wider organisation. Sustainable wellbeing depends on getting both the individual and the systemic right, together.



Adapted by EEK & SENSE from: Mentally Healthy Workplace Risk & Protective Factors (National Mental Health Commission, 2014); Job Demands-Resources Theory in times of crises (Bakker & Demerouti, 2023); Managing Psychosocial Hazards at Work, Code of Practice (Safe Work Australia, 2022); The SMART model of work design (Parker & Knight, 2024).

NEEDS & OBJECTIVES

What individuals and organisations are trying to achieve.

Wellbeing serves two agendas at once: better health outcomes and better performance outcomes — for the individual and for the organisation alike.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

ORGANISATION

- Reduce the costs and impact of absenteeism, presenteeism, sickness and stress leave
- Lower actual burnout and the risk of burnout
- Reduce risk and complaints re harassment, bullying and other psychosocial hazards
- Increase EAP utilisation, effectiveness and reporting
- Build education, awareness and understanding of psychosocially and mentally healthy, thriving work practices
- Ensure cost-effective, timely, accessible and personal support is available for 5 in 5 employees

- Attract, retain, protect, develop, reskill and upskill key leaders, managers and critical talent to optimise growth, agility, innovation, resilience and sustainable high performance
- Protect against overload, overwhelm and loss of efficiency and effectiveness
- Develop leaders as better wellbeing advocates and role-models
- Develop a psychologically safe, healthy and inclusive culture for 5 in 5
- Build and maintain engagement and productivity
- Address wellbeing and mental health as drivers of inclusivity, diversity, learning and equality of opportunity

INDIVIDUAL

"I'd like to..."

- Improve my overall life satisfaction
- Improve my overall quality of life
- Increase my overall happiness
- Have better job satisfaction
- Improve and protect a better work-life balance
- Improve the odds of my longevity
- Break habits that aren't serving me well and create healthier ones
- Improve specific aspects of my physical, social or mental health

"I'd like to develop my..."

- Leadership skills
- Emotional intelligence, interpersonal and communication skills
- Human-centric professionalism
- Capacity for trust, authenticity and vulnerability
- Social influencing, networking and stakeholder relationship skills
- Cultural competencies
- Mastery, autonomy and control over my work
- Change management skills

SECTION 04

How we help

We equip organisations to **Learn, Live, Lead & Embed** better wellbeing for all, through our consulting services and the GLWS Wellbeing System.

Wellbeing Advisory

Thought leadership and wellbeing strategy.

Leader-led Wellbeing Programs

Custom-designed for individuals or groups and delivered in partnership with coaching partners.

Employee Wellbeing Solutions

Deploying personalised, practical wellbeing tools and capabilities at scale via the GLWS Wellbeing System.

GLWS Accreditation & Practitioner Support

For in-house teams to develop expert wellbeing capabilities — transferring knowledge, tools and approaches grounded in rigorous best practice, and co-created in areas of emerging know-how.

Learn more about the GLWS Wellbeing System at glswellbeing.com.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

As organisational psychologists with decades of expertise in leadership, organisational psychology and leader wellbeing assessment and research, we channel this expertise into helping organisations measurably support the mental health and wellbeing of their people. The GLWS team, led by Audrey McGibbon, is best known as the developer of the GLWS Wellbeing System, which today has been used by over 10,000 senior leaders and is trusted by organisations and a network of 500+ GLWS-accredited practitioners around the world to help their teams and leaders thrive.

10,000+

senior leaders assessed

500+

accredited practitioners worldwide

Want to learn more about how to apply these concepts?

Get in touch at support@glswellbeing.com. To become a knowledge expert in this space, explore **GLWS Accreditation** — a fast, comprehensive learning program.

Feel free to share this paper with others you think may be interested — we love it when people find value in our work.

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