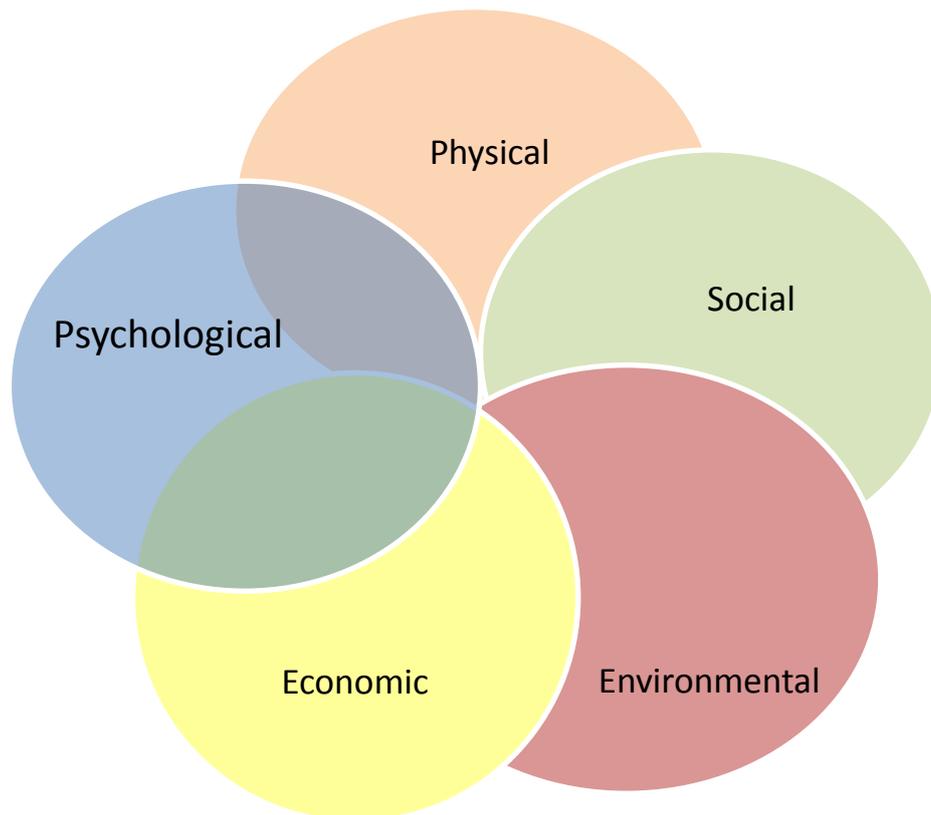# Measuring national well-being

IOSH response to the Office for National Statistics consultation

1. Summary

Because of its association with wellbeing, IOSH suggests that the ONS metrics should include national data about people's experience of work, its quality, and whether or not they find it 'good work'. We suggest a combination of subjective and objective indicators, as follows:

- objective data – to include both work-related health and safety failure statistics and also proactive data (such as the introduction of stress management standards, flexible working arrangements, training initiatives or wellbeing programmes)

- subjective data – to include people's experiences of work from national surveys of the country's workforce, for example to help gauge feelings of job satisfaction and job security, perhaps as part of an overall indicator of 'life satisfaction'

Provided the data is of sufficient relevance, quality, reliability and comparability and the analysis independent, transparent and peer-reviewed; we believe national work-related wellbeing data could be used to help track improvement or deterioration in people's experience of work and their associated wellbeing and potentially help inform policy and decision-making.

In the response that follows, we briefly introduce the subject of work-related wellbeing and outline the benefits of 'good work', explaining how more people could be given the opportunity to benefit from it, before closing with 'generic' responses to the ONS question-set on 'measuring national wellbeing'.

Introduction

IOSH welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this important ONS consultation on developing new measures of national wellbeing, which we note is intended to connect with government departments' policies to improve wellbeing.

We believe that any measurement of the nation's wellbeing must include measures of people's experience of safe and healthy work. Research shows that being in 'good work' is generally beneficial for people's health and wellbeing and positive perceptions about the workplace are linked with higher productivity, profitability and worker and customer loyalty (1, 2)

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We recommend a combination of both objective and subjective measures of work-related wellbeing issues, which, if sufficiently robust, could potentially provide a useful national resource to help inform policy and decision-making. Objective data could include both health and safety failure statistics and also proactive data – while national survey questions could provide valuable subjective information from workers themselves.

What is wellbeing?

Descriptions of wellbeing generally relate to people's feelings about their quality of life and well-managed work has an important role in helping to achieve good life-quality. Examples of wellbeing definitions are:

'The subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one's quality of life. It includes physical, material, social, emotional ('happiness'), and development and activity dimensions'.
(Waddell and Burton, 2006 p4)

'Creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation'.
(Tehrani, 2007, p4) (8)

In terms of relating wellbeing to health, the constitution of the World Health Organisation says 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. (3)

What is 'good work' and how does it affect health and wellbeing?

Researchers report that issues such as organisational climate and work–life balance need to be considered when assessing and managing common health risks like stress and musculoskeletal hazards. They have also identified factors referred to as 'wellbeing assets', which they believe can help individuals to counter stress and include: (4)

- having a good job 'fit'
- finding work meaningful
- working for an organisation that has flexible working practices
- having a flexible coping style

- being realistic about their job

- being physically fit and eating well

- having social support

Components believed to be important in ensuring work is 'good' include that it is safe, supportive and accommodates people's needs. Other contributing elements are felt to be employee autonomy/control and job satisfaction (which we note is one of the key indicators being proposed in this consultation and wholeheartedly support) and also job security and fairness (1) Measuring people's perceptions and experiences around all these issues could be informative because of their association with 'good work' and wellbeing.

In Dame Carol Black's 2008 report of her review of the health of Britain's working age population, she describes key elements for preventing illness and promoting wellbeing, including the need for:

> *'Healthy workplaces, designed to protect and promote health and well-being…" and "…jobs being 'good jobs' in terms of individuals' sense of control over how they work, relationships with colleagues and managers, and understanding of their role'.* (Black, 2008, p23)

Dame Carol also outlined a new vision for the health of the working age population, at the centre of which were three key objectives, as follows:

- prevention of illness and promotion of health and well-being

- early intervention for those who develop a health condition

- an improvement in the health of those out of work – so that everyone with the potential to work has the support they need to do so

What measurements can we use for 'good work' and related wellbeing?
An improvement in health and safety failure statistics, provided this is reliable, would be an encouraging sign (and the converse is also true); so such data should continue to be systematically gathered. It is of concern that in 2009-10, the estimated number of workers who suffered from work-related stress, depression or anxiety was 435,000 and in addition:

- 28.5 million working days were lost

- 1.3 million workers had illness they put down to work (1.2 million in 2008-9)

- 572,000 workers suffered from musculoskeletal disorders
- 38,000 workers suffered breathing or lung problems
- 22,000 workers suffered skin problems
- 233,000 reportable injuries occurred
- 152 workers were killed at work
- 740 were killed and 8,230 seriously injured in work-related road accidents (2009)
- 8,000 estimated cancer deaths occurred (annual estimate)

In addition, national data about positive safety, health and wellbeing improvement initiatives (such as application of HSE's stress management standards or the introduction of flexible working arrangements, training initiatives and wellbeing programmes) could also be helpful in monitoring possible wellbeing precursors.

In terms of subjective information, national surveys asking workers about their experience of work, such as the Labour Force Survey and the Health and Safety Strategy Survey, could also include specific questions about job satisfaction or other work-related wellbeing issues, in order to track changes or trends.

How can we improve people's opportunities to benefit from 'good work'?

IOSH believes the UK can improve people's opportunities to benefit from 'good work' and so enhance their wellbeing by:

- embedding health and safety in the education system, so that future workers, employers and managers know what 'good work' consists of and its considerable benefits for the wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies

- encouraging employers to provide flexible working arrangements and to support healthy work-life balance, using guidance and positive case studies

- using behavioural economics to encourage employers to offer more health and wellbeing support to their workers

- ensuring that, as well as positive motivators, the UK also has an adequate inspection and enforcement regime to deter poor management practices that can be seriously detrimental to individual wellbeing

IOSH and our members are keen to help employers, workers and government to improve people's wellbeing and believe reliable national work-related safety, health and wellbeing metrics could help ensure policy and resources are appropriately directed.

How can we use measures of national wellbeing?

National data (provided it is of sufficient relevance, quality, reliability and comparability and its analysis is independent, transparent and peer-reviewed) could be used to help track improvement or deterioration in people's experience of work and their associated wellbeing. At a country-wide level, it might be feasible to identify possible links between such findings and changes in government policy on health, safety, equality, employment, retirement, education and other issues – though 'cause and effect' would need to be established and confounding factors accounted for. Satisfying all these provisos, data about improving or deteriorating work-wellbeing trends could potentially be used to help inform decisions on public policy, planning, budgeting and resourcing.

2. IOSH response to consultation questions

In addition to our narrative submission above, our members have a variety of personal views and responses to the specific ONS consultation question-set / answer options. However, a 'generic response' to the ONS survey questions based on our general position on work-related wellbeing, and appreciating that other indicators are also pertinent, could include:

Q1. What things in life matter most to you?

Please see our choices below. However, 'job satisfaction' would need to be part of an overall indicator for 'life satisfaction' (to cover those not employed) and also have metrics for safety. 'Economic security' would need to include measures related to 'job security'.

Table 1. what things in life matter most to you?

Options	Choices	
Income and wealth		
Job satisfaction	✓	
Economic security	✓	
Ability to have a say on local and national issues		
Having good connections with friends and relatives		
Having a good relationship with a spouse or partner		
Present and future conditions of the environment		
Crime		
Health	✓	
Education and training	✓	
Personal activities, including volunteering		
Cultural activities		
Unpaid caring, such as for children or other family members		
Spirituality or religion		
Other – please specify		

Q1a. Of the above options, which are the three most important?

1. Job satisfaction/economic security
2. Health
3. Education and training

Q2. Of the things that matter to you, which should be reflected in measures of national well-being?

- Life satisfaction
- Health statistics Education levels
- Employment / unemployment levels

Q3. Which of the following sets of information do you think help measure national well-being and how life in the UK is changing over time?

Table 2. Measures of wellbeing and changing life in the UK

Options	Choices
economic measures such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	
employment/unemployment rates	✓
life expectancy	
life satisfaction	✓
crime figures	
education levels	✓
income distributions	
social capital measures	
health statistics	✓
environmental statistics	
other – please specify	

Q4. Which of the following ways would be best, to give a picture of national well-being?

We have a mixed response on this with members suggesting:

a small number of indicators;

a large number of indicators;

and a 'single index' (provided it is made up of many specific indicators)

Q5. How would you use measures of national well-being?

We have a mixed response on how IOSH and its members might possibly use such data if made available. Depending on the relevance, quality, reliability, comparability and break-down of the data and whether there is independent, transparent and peer-reviewed analysis; and also with the proviso that such data may be just one potential contributing source, we could consider all listed options, particularly a), d), and e) below:

a) to generally assess how the UK is doing

b) to assess the performance of government and public services

c) to see how the UK is doing compared with other countries

d) to see how different parts of the UK are doing

e) to compare how different groups of people are doing

f) to help understand the longer term implications of our current activities

Q6. We welcome any other comments you have regarding the measurement of national well-being.

Please see our narrative response above. In addition, we feel that the term 'social capital measures' could have been presented in more commonly used language, such as 'social support network' or 'sense of community'. This indicator could also include people's experience of work, which can provide valuable social support and networks, which in turn could contribute to an overall 'life satisfaction' measure.

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About IOSH

Founded in 1945, the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH) is the largest body for health and safety professionals in the world, with around 39,465 members in over 80 countries, including over 13,000 Chartered Safety and Health Practitioners. Incorporated by Royal Charter, IOSH is a registered charity, and an ILO international NGO and CIS collaborating centre. The IOSH vision is:

"A world of work which is safe, healthy and sustainable"

The Institution regulates and steers the profession, providing impartial, authoritative, free guidance. Regularly consulted by government and other bodies, IOSH is the founding member and secretariat to UK, European and International professional body networks. The Institution also has a research and development fund, which is developing the evidence-base for OSH policy and practice.

IOSH has 31 Branches in the UK and worldwide including the Caribbean, Hong Kong, Middle East and the Republic of Ireland, 16 special interest groups covering communications and media; construction; consultancy; education; environment; fire risk management; food, drink and hospitality; healthcare; international; major hazards; offshore; public services; railways; retail and distribution; rural industries; and safety sciences. IOSH members work at both strategic and operational levels across all employment sectors.

IOSH welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the *Measuring national well-being* consultation. For further information about IOSH, our members and our work please visit our website at www.iosh.co.uk

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