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Building Brighter Futures

Career Development and Wellbeing -
A Practical Toolkit

Building Brighter Futures: Career Development and Wellbeing - A Practical Toolkit

Contents

Introduction

Careers and employability support services are vital parts of a well-functioning society. These services are increasingly recognised by employers, governments, and citizens as value-added means to help support individuals' transitions into meaningful learning and work. Transitions in and out of work, changes in physical and mental health, identity crisis, moving to another area and feeling stressed about life can sometimes be real challenges. We know that education, skills, health, relationships, finance, and location impact differently on people's lives depending on circumstance.

Helping individuals to understand changes, and acknowledging their feelings, can help them to get through life's difficulties.

Career development and wellbeing has been researched in many career construction studies (e.g., McMahon & Watson, 2008[1]; Savickas 2013[2]; Robertson, 2013[3]; Hughes et al, 2018[4], Redekopp & Huston, 2019[5]). However, little is known in a career development and employment services context about how best to approach potentially sensitive wellbeing conversations to support individuals who may be facing tough times. In the year(s) ahead it will be essential to find new ways to keep individuals motivated, resilient, agile, and aspirational in a rapidly changing world.

In this context, there is a strong rationale to ensure career development and employability practitioners feel sufficiently well-equipped to support a wide range of adults in 'a safe and ethical place' that supports career and wellbeing conversations and action.

Practitioners want to do a good job. They use a range of welcoming techniques to help put people at ease when they initially make contact.

More recently, policymakers are beginning to realise that significant progress has been made to measure wellbeing with encouraging signs that this can be incorporated into policy and practice.

The UK government recently endorsed a straightforward approach to monetising gains in subjective wellbeing for the purposes of policy and fiscal analysis, with supplementary guidance issued in July 2021 (HMT, 2021) [6].

Acknowledgements

Our work has been inspired by the expertise and dedication of 31 practitioners, managers and career development senior leaders in the UK and Canada who have each contributed to the 'Building Brighter Futures: Career Development and Wellbeing' research pilot.

We have been privileged to work closely as a UK and Canadian collaborative research programme originally inspired by:

- Dave Redekopp, President, Life-Role Development Group Ltd., Canada and Associate Professor Michael Huston, Mount Roal University, Calgary, co-authors of 'Strengthening Mental Health Through Effective Career Development: A Practitioner Guide': https://ceric.ca/publications/strengthening-mental-health-through-effective-career-development-a-practitioners-guide/

- With leadership support led by Nikki Lawrence (CEO, Gyrfu Cymru/Careers Wales), Sareena Hopkins (Executive Director, Canadian Career Development Foundation) and Sandra Cheyne (National CIAG Policy & Professional Practice Lead, Skills Development Scotland (SDS)).

Who is this toolkit for?

The toolkit will primarily be of interest to senior leadership teams, managers, and practitioners with responsibilities for working with adults 18+ in community services related to career development and employability. This will include those interested in effective career exploration, health and wellbeing, inclusion, skills development, and supporting transitions. It will also be of interest to community agencies from the health, voluntary and community service sector who are supporting adults to improve mental health, identity change, wellbeing, adjustments to life-work balance, pre-retirement choices, return to the workplace, portfolio working, and employability outcomes.

What does it aim to achieve?

This toolkit aims to equip practitioners and managers working with adults 18+ with a range of effective approaches to career development and wellbeing support.

Scope

Those working in education, careers, employability, and other local community settings supporting a wide range of adults aged 18+.

The content draws on recent real life adult case studies, experiences of and techniques used by practitioners and managers in Wales, Scotland and Canada who have been on a 'journey of discovery' to improve adults' life chances in finding support mechanisms that work in practice.

The toolkit will help you to:

- Understand the changing context of career development and wellbeing in society.

- Know how best to help support adults experiencing different types of transitions in their life.

- Be aware of techniques that can be applied in practice to improve career development and wellbeing outcomes for adults.

- Understand how to look after your own emotional care and competence in responding to and dealing with diverse and complex adult needs.

- Be empowered to understand and maintain boundaries supporting the learning of others.

- Identify further evidence to support your everyday practice to enable you to learn more.

Overview of content of the toolkit

SECTION ONE: Introduction & Key Concepts – We explore definitions of career, career development, career guidance, employability, and wellbeing. We then set out a range of differing elements that can impact on people's lives at any given time. A distinction is made between mental illness and mental health that helps to understand the mechanisms by which career development conversations and career guidance can support wellbeing.

SECTION TWO: Our Approach – This section describes the sources drawn on in developing this toolkit. We set out the complementary methodologies applied in practice in pilot studies across Wales, Scotland, and Canada to help support practitioners working with adults experiencing different types of transitions and challenges in their life.

SECTION THREE: Applying Key Findings to Skillful Practice – We focus on 'skillful practice' and techniques that can be applied in practice to improve career development and wellbeing outcomes for adults. This takes account of four 'e-cornerstones' underpinning effective practice, namely: (i) environment, (ii) emotional steadiness, (iii) exercises that can inform and support adults decision making process, and (iv) evaluation and impact assessment.

SECTION FOUR: Concluding Thoughts – We discuss ways to understand and maintain boundaries supporting the learning of others. Also, we describe some techniques that can help support practitioner wellbeing.

SECTION FIVE: Additional Resources – We provide some illustrative examples in the UK, of signposts to further resources and sources of mental health and wellbeing support in Wales, Scotland and Canada.

SECTION ONE:
Introduction & Key Concepts

In this section, we briefly explore definitions of career, career development, career guidance, employability, and wellbeing. We then set out a range of differing effects that can impact on people's lives at any given time.

A distinction is made between mental illness and mental health that helps to understand the mechanisms by which career development conversations and career guidance can support wellbeing.

Theoretical work and longitudinal case study reviews have documented the likely value of career development practices to wellbeing (e.g., Redekopp & Huston, 2020[7]; Whelan et al, 2017[8]; Robertson, 2013[9]; Bimrose et al, 2008[10]; and Kirschner et al., 1994[11]). In 2018, the British Journal of Guidance & Counselling published a special issue on Happiness and Wellbeing (Vol 47, Issue 2)[12].

Career development, career guidance and employability definitions

- **Career:** described as 'a sequence of life and work experiences over time.'[13]

- **Career development:** is the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions to move towards a personally determined, yet continually evolving preferred future. Career development encompasses the development of the whole person and is more than just deciding on a major or a job. It is a lifelong process, meaning that throughout life a person changes, situations change, and every individual must continually make – explicitly or implicitly - career and life decisions that will affect their future.[14]

- **Career guidance:** describes the services which help people of any age to manage their careers and implement the educational, training and occupational choices that are right for them. It helps people to reflect on their ambitions, interests, qualifications, skills and talents – and to relate this knowledge about who they are to who they might become within the labour market.[15]

- **Employability:** refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they possess, the way they present those assets to employers, and the context within which they seek work. As such employability is affected by both supply-side and demand-side factors which are often outside of an individual's control.[16]

Wellbeing definitions

Subjective measures of mental wellbeing [18] can be differentiated by types of wellbeing and the timescale they are asked about. Types of wellbeing include conceptualising wellbeing as:

- **Hedonic:** focused on pleasure and happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001).[19]

- **Eudaimonic:** focused on psychological health achieved by fulfilling one's potential, functioning at an optimal level, or realising one's true nature (Lent, 2004).[20] For example, overall sense of purpose and efficacy. Optimism can be defined as a predisposition to have positive expectancies about the future (Scheier & Carver, 1985).[21]

- **Evaluative:** focused on satisfaction level (e.g., are you satisfied overall with your life?)

- **Affective:** focused typically within a more "in-the-moment" experiential measure (e.g., recent positive feelings, how happy or anxious you feel etc.)

One common tripartite model emphasises three subjective aspects of wellbeing: satisfaction with life, the absence of negative affect (e.g., unhappy feelings), and the presence of positive affect (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985).[22]

As Redekopp and Huston (2020) indicate, a range of internal and external effects can contribute to positive mental health (p.93).
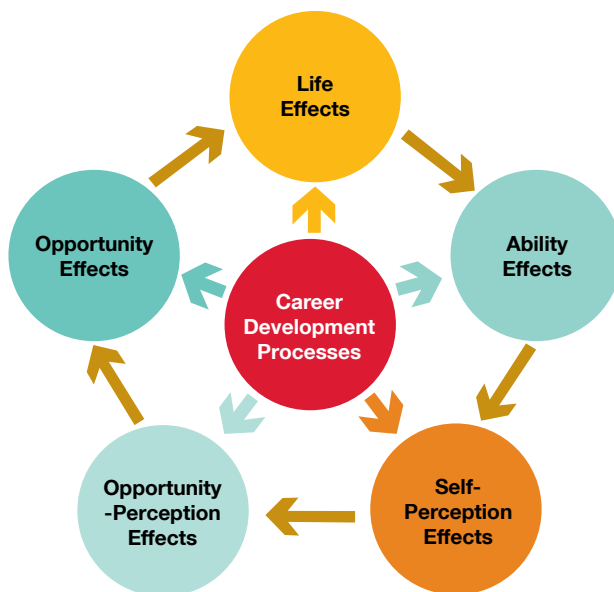
Image source:
Redekopp & Huston (2020)

Redekopp and Huston (2020) draw upon Corey Keyes' (2014)[23] distinction between mental illness and mental health that helps to understand the mechanisms by which career guidance can support wellbeing – see diagram right.

High Mental Health

Flourishing & Mental Illness

Flourishing

High Mental Illness

Moderate Mental Health & Mental Illness

Moderate Mental Health

Low Mental Illness

Languishing & Mental Illness

Languishing

Low Mental Health

Image source: Redekopp & Huston (2020) p. 27, adapted from Keyes (2014, p. 182)

Keyes posits that mental health and mental illness are two interconnected, but distinguishable continua. For instance, a person can be mentally healthy (flourishing) while having a mental illness or be mentally unhealthy (languishing) but not have a mental illness.

Differing contexts

In Wales, seven wellbeing goals are set out by government to improve the social, economic, environmental, and cultural wellbeing of Wales.[24] They are contained in law under the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'.[25] This policy area includes innovative pilot activity as well as reforms to core services. For instance, the Welsh government's pilot of a universal basic income will pay around 500 care leavers £1,600 a month for 24 months from their 18th birthday (as reported in March 2022).[26]
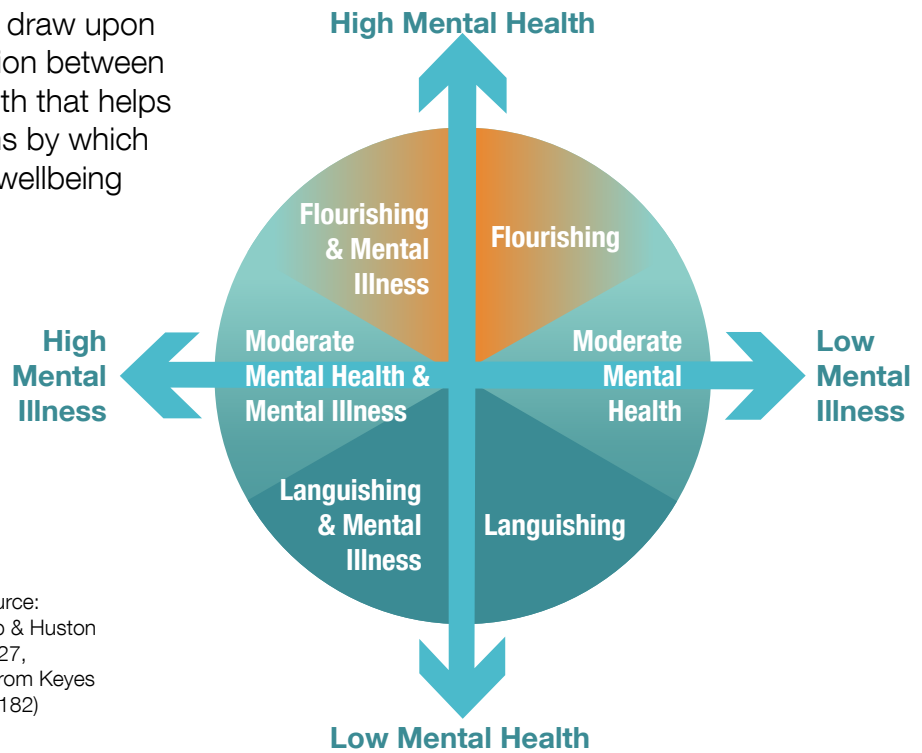
In Scotland, a national set of adult mental health indicators for Scotland, commissioned by the Scottish Government, was finalised in December 2007. These indicators cover both mental wellbeing (positive mental health) and mental health problems.[27] The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 focuses on improving the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland. The Scottish National Party manifesto[28] commits to start work on a universal basic income scheme in the five-year parliamentary term.

Canada's approach to wellbeing is institutionally complex. In general terms, the federal government funds health services but the provinces decide how the funds are spent. The federal government can and does lead in the mental health sphere through consultations, public education, and research. The Public Health Agency of Canada[29], an arm of Health Canada, promotes mental health, collaborates with the Mental Health Commission of Canada[30], an organization funded by Health Canada, and leads pan-Canadian research through the Positive Mental Health Surveillance Indicator Framework (PMHSIF).[31] The PMHSIF is comprehensive and quite current and has the distinct advantage of measuring mental health as distinct from mental illness, with indicators including self-rated mental health, happiness, life satisfaction, psychological wellbeing, social wellbeing. The PMHSIF also measures individual determinants (e.g., resilience, coping, control and self-efficacy, spirituality), family determinants (e.g., parenting style, household composition, household income), community determinants (e.g., community involvement, social networks, school environment, work environment), and society determinants (e.g., inequality, discrimination, and stigma) of mental health in communities.

The above example from three countries highlight both a general trend in high-income countries towards increased focus on wellbeing and the differing approaches to policy frameworks that countries and regions might adopt.

How important is career development and wellbeing in your country, region, or place of work?

SECTION TWO:
Our Approach

In this section, we draw on relevant research and approaches, based on our experience of practice, practitioner training, and the research literature. We also briefly set out complementary methodologies applied in practice in Wales, Scotland and Canada designed and implemented to help support practitioners working with adults experiencing different types of transitions and challenges in their life. A more detailed analysis of the research findings is available upon request.

A community of interest

In 2021, an international team of career development specialists, with a strong interest in the effects of Covid on adults' wellbeing, came together online to identify 'the art of the possible' in measuring and enhancing the impact of career development practice on wellbeing. They sourced theories and methodologies and reviewed literature to inform a career development and wellbeing project. A joint commitment was made to undertake a 'pilot project' in Canada, Wales, and Scotland to develop and apply a small set of indicators (up to 7 maximum) that could easily be applied by careers practitioners in their everyday work. A key driver was to find ways of supporting practitioners to consider and assess the impact of their work.

For example, different scales and question phrasing can be used for measuring wellbeing/life satisfaction. **The UK Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses four survey questions to measure personal wellbeing:**

1. "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?"
2. "Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?"
3. "Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?"
4. "Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?"

People are asked to respond to the questions on an 11-point scale from 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely". The first question is the primary one for the UK Treasury monetisation analyses, although it emphasises that different measures and scales can be used, provided they can be understood with respect to this evaluative measure of subjective wellbeing (HMT, 2021).

Hope and subjective well-being are "multidimensional concepts comprising emotion (i.e., anticipation and affect), cognition (expectation and satisfaction) and, to some degree, motivation (Pleeging, Burger & van Exel, 2021).[32] In British Columbia, the Hopeful Career State (HCS) scale assesses how hopeful individuals are at work considering their future career (Yoon et al, 2019).[33] It has nine items including the following sample items: "What I am doing now is helping me to build skills and experiences for the future." "I am hopeful that what I am doing now will help me in my career journey." A 4-point response scale was used, ranging from 1 ("Definitely false") to 4 ("Definitely true").

The pilot in Wales and Scotland

The implementation of the pilot involved career development practitioners using their professional judgment and experience to introduce an optional series of brief statements for adults' response in a post-pre interview[34] conversation.

- I am able to make up my own mind about things that are important.
- I feel my life is meaningful and I make a difference to my family, friends, or community.
- I feel optimistic about finding relevant and valued work that will fit in with my life.
- I am taking action / being proactive to help overcome the barriers and challenges in my life
- I feel positive about my ability to handle the demands/barriers/ challenges coming up in my life.

The post-pre-setting refers to asking clients after the support both how they feel about the statement now ("post") and how they felt beforehand ("pre"), i.e. asking about both simultaneously.

- The advantages of the post-pre approach include asking clients only once, reducing the burden on them, allowing them to answer with the full knowledge of the session, and not requiring them to answer questions before any help is provided, which can feel intrusive, like a pre-qualification requirement or a barrier to engagement in some cases.

- The disadvantages of the post-pre approach are that respondents may have the experience of the intervention high in their mind and translate this into a constructed view of how they felt beforehand which may not be the same as if they were asked directly. Respondents will often also be familiar with what the career development practitioner would like to see, and may feel some conscious or subconscious desire to provide a helpful answer for the person who has just spent time patiently and supportively working with them. This latter disadvantage is similar to other measures conducted immediately post an intervention even if they have a data point collected immediately prior to it.

Results from the initial pilot (between August 2021 – March 2022) show some encouraging findings.

Building Brighter Futures: Career Development and Wellbeing (Wales)

How true did this statement feel for you **coming into** the session today?

How true did this statement feel for you **leaving** the session today?

Statements:
- I am able to make up my own mind about things that are important
- I feel my life is meaningful and I make a difference to my family, friends, or community
- I feel optimistic about finding relevant and valued work that will fit in with my life
- I am taking action/ being proactive to help overcome the barriers and challenges in my life
- I feel positive about my ability to handle the demands/ barriers/challenges coming up in my life

Legend: Very true | True | Neither true or untrue | Not true | Not true at all

Building Brighter Futures: Career Development and Wellbeing (Scotland)

How true did this statement feel for you **coming into** the session today?

How true did this statement feel for you **leaving** the session today?

Statements:
- I am able to make up my own mind about things that are important
- I feel my life is meaningful and I make a difference to my family, friends, or community
- I feel optimistic about finding relevant and valued work that will fit in with my life
- I am taking action/ being proactive to help overcome the barriers and challenges in my life
- I feel positive about my ability to handle the demands/ barriers/challenges coming up in my life

Legend: Very true | True | Neither true or untrue | Not true | Not true at all

The pilot in Canada

There were two distinct components to the Canadian portion of the research. One involved an analysis of community employment services' outcomes and the other tested a new measure of mental health changes.

In the first case, a major analysis of community employment services took place in Canada between December 2018 and February 2020, built around the PRIME assessment tool, which asks a range of career development and wellbeing related questions scored on a 1-5 scale (CCDF, 2021).[35] The career development support was highly personalised and as such varied widely from person to person. The range of length of interventions was less than a month (11%) to over 6 months (22%). Within this range, there could be anywhere from two meetings / contacts to a long history of varied contacts (1-1, group, etc.).

The other component of the Canadian research efforts focussed on testing a recently developed survey of changes in mental health. The Mental Health Outcomes survey (MHO-5) is typically applied as a post-pre-measure assessing changes in mental health. It was developed to determine if practitioners' typical interventions with clients lead to changes in mental health?

The MHO-5 contains the following five statements and was tested with 62 adult respondents to comment on how much they agree with the statement on a 0-4 scale from "not at all" to "a lot".

- I feel my life is meaningful. (I know what matters to me, and I feel that I have some of that in my life.)
- I feel I can contribute to society. (I make a difference to my family, friends and/or community.)
- I feel I have supportive relationships. (I have people in my life who support me and who I support.)
- I feel good about my life. (I am happy or content with life.)
- I feel I can cope with life's problems. (I am able to manage the ups and downs of life.)

The career development interventions in the MHO-5 study are mixed and personalised. They might involve one to three individual sessions of varying length, with some individuals having several group sessions. Each of the five items improved by an average of at least 0.5 of an interval on a 5-point scale and only one of the 62 clients rated any item 0 or 1 after the intervention.

The work-in-progress results are summarised in the excerpt below:

MHO-5 Item Scores Before & After Career Intervention
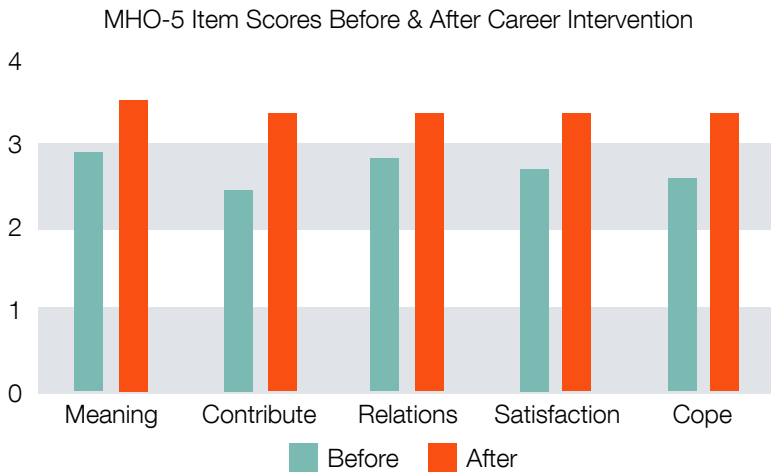
Dimension	Difference
Contributing	.9
Coping	.7
Meaning	.6
Happy/content	.6
Relationships	.5
OVERALL	**.7**

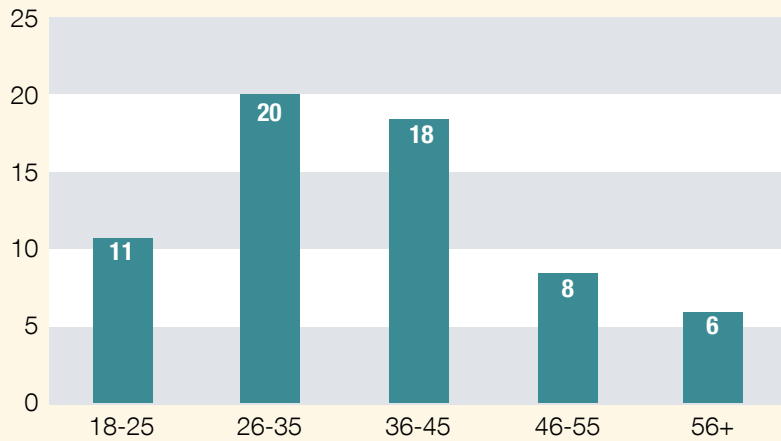Image source: Redekopp & Huston (2022)

Adult interview perspectives

The twelve-month collaborative research programme provided insight on adult perspectives on career development and wellbeing. Here, we share examples of typical words expressed by adults who participated in our research when they were asked to describe how they were feeling (Wales and Scotland x 63 adult interviews). This is followed by real-life case studies. The UK has adopted 'customer' to refer to individuals seeking career development services. In Canada, the term 'client' would more commonly be used.

Typical words expressed

Lack of motivation

Felling lost

Feeling of worthlessness

Family concerns (relationships)

Embarrassed

Anger

Shock of redundancy

Low confidence

Isolation

Lack of self esteem

Fear of change

General health concerns

Worried about finances and supporting family

Mental health issues

Boredom

Drug abuse

Numbers of customers interviewed by age range (63)

Age range	Number
18-25	11
26-35	20
36-45	18
46-55	8
56+	6

Identified Customer Needs

Need	Number
Looking to get back into education	1
Returning to work	2
Health impacting on ability to work	3
Help with CV	3
Careers Advice - help with options	7
Seeking course/training information	7
Help find a job	13
Support with Funding	18
Help with job changing - work/life balance or job satisfaction	18
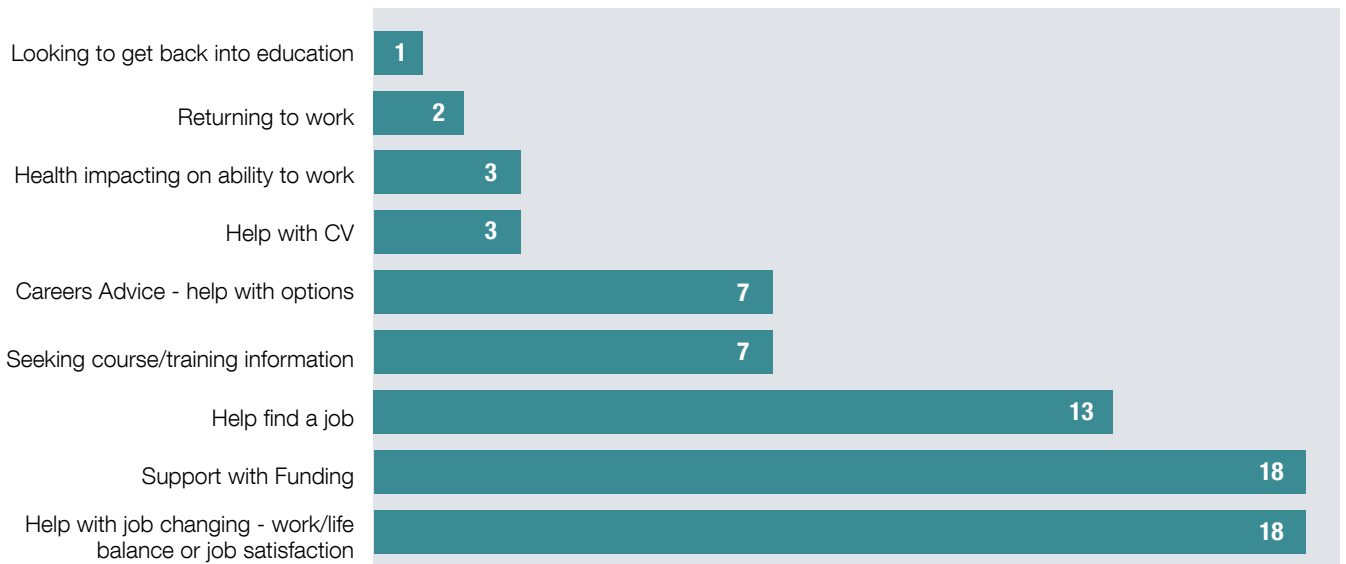
There is a need to tackle issues that threaten aspects of wellbeing and putting wellbeing at the heart of decision making (Carnegie UK, 2022).[36] People with high levels of hope are better at coming up with multiple higher quality alternative routes when faced with barriers than those with low hope (Peterson & Bryon, 2008).[37]

Brief case studies[38] below highlight some real examples of challenges faced by individuals, a solution focused approach and practitioner reflections.

Return to Learning

Challenge: An adult contacted me, a careers adviser, via the Skills Development Scotland telephone service. She had been off work unwell for an extended period. Health and mobility concerns were worrying her, and she felt increasingly anxious and isolated.

Solution: Having spent time on the telephone talking through about her experiences and feelings, including some of the barriers and enablers that were getting in the way of her making progress, we identified practical options (including taking small steps) to bring about the change she desired. A few weeks later she got back in touch to tell me how well she's doing with the LinkedIn learning courses we had discussed.

Reflection: How best to use apply personalised careers support techniques using a telephone helpline service?

A ten-stage career development and wellbeing interview process

A new and evolving ten stage process for embedding wellbeing more explicitly into career conversations emerged from the early pilot research conducted in Wales and Scotland. Hughes, Hambly and Percy (2022) developed a ten-stage interview process, drawing on practitioner feedback and recognising that different levels of focus on wellbeing will be appropriate for different clients. The process supports practitioners in applying their judgement as to how far and how formally to apply wellbeing techniques on a case-by-case basis. The process is designed to align smoothly with many common practice approaches to interview sessions, e.g., contracting, identifying needs and possible actions.

Step 1: A reminder to consider the environment, emotional steadiness, exercises available and evaluation approach in advance of beginning a career development conversation.

Steps 2–4: Key steps for supporting brief career information and advice requests or in the early part of triage assessment to determine good signposting and referral, where necessary.

Steps 5–9: Steps that are most relevant for the more in-depth stages of professional career development, action planning, career guidance and employability conversations.

Step 10: Another optional step for measuring progress to inform the evidence-base underpinning practitioners' skillful practice.

Step 1

Getting ready for the discussion: Check the environment and your emotional steadiness. Prepare exercises to inform and support adults' decision making process. Consider any evaluation and impact assessment to use e.g. a post-pre questions method or other preferred evaluation approach.

Step 2

Preliminary discussion to assess customer situation: e.g. is the person unemployed/part time employed/ job switcher/ facing redundancy, etc?

Step 3

Identify presenting need: e.g. what is it the individual would ideally like to achieve from the session?

Step 4

Spot any initial wellbeing indicators: e.g. Does the customer appear to be in need of a wellbeing focus as part of the career development support? e.g. listen for key words or phrases, observe indicators like low confidence/anger/signs of agitation/shock/frustration/depression/drug misuse etc.

Step 5

Discussion and contracting: Test how directly the customer may be willing to discuss wellbeing aspects. (To be applied when the practitioner considers a wellbeing focus may be beneficial).

Step 6

Reflecting back to the customer: Probing their feelings - "You said ..... tell me more about ....".

Step 7

Understanding wellbeing using questions and activities: For example Applying the Stepping Stone Exercise/ Maslow's Theory (described in section 3). Probing questions about individual's needs e.g. "What is important to you?" / "What was life like before ....?" etc.

Step 8

Explore the possibilities: e.g. "How do you think things would be in a year if you ....?"/ "On a scale of 1-10 how ready are you to ....?" / "On a scale of 1 to 10 how ready do you feel to XXX?"

Step 9

Overcoming barriers and action planning: Identify ways of managing and addressing needs, exploring what is preventing the person from taking the next step. e.g."Tell me what is your main fear at the moment?" / "What do you think is stopping you from taking that next step?". Consider visioning and backwards action planning technique. "What might it feel like if you never attempted to do XYZ?". Agree a direction to head in and at least one immediate action that will help generate momentum.

Step 10

Optional step for measuring progress: Asking how the customer feels about a particular wellbeing statement on a simple scale can be used to gauge progress. The same statements can be used twice, once at the beginning and once at the end ("pre-post"), where the practitioner reflects back any key differences between the customer's answers. Or the statements can be asked just once at the end of the session, asking the customer to compare how they feel now vs the beginning ("post-pre").

A TEN-STAGE CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING INTERVIEW PROCESS © Hughes, Hambly and Percy (2022)

SECTION THREE:
Applying Our Findings to Skillful Practice

In this section, we focus on ideas and techniques for 'skillful practice' that can be applied to improve career development and wellbeing outcomes for adults. This takes account of four 'e-cornerstones' underpinning effective career development and wellbeing practice, namely: (i) Environment, (ii) Emotional Steadiness, (iii) Exercises that can inform and support adults decision making process, and (iv) Evaluation and Impact.

Hope and inspiration – a lifesaver!

Challenge: John is sixty years old and was made redundant a few months ago. A neighbour passed on the Careers Service telephone number and he contacted Careers Wales himself. It was a particularly difficult period in his life when everything was going wrong. He said, 'getting their number was a real lifeline and saved my life…they inspired me to carry on and to take advantage of the ReAct [redundancy] support funding'. He knows of others who have taken their lives during lockdown. 'It wasn't about seeing the light at the end of the tunnel as the end of the tunnel was not in sight – they saved my life'. His previous work entailed a lot of driving coaches and lorries and he felt this may have led to him developing PTSD[1] (no official diagnosis). He certainly does not want to return to driving work in the future.

Solution: Careers Wales linked him up with funding and with 'Careers for Work' and has given him hope. He is excited about doing a security course and even getting his forklift license. He is currently doing an I.T. course which he is enjoying as poor technology skills held him back previously, particularly when trying to apply for jobs and benefits. His contact with the service has been entirely positive. During lockdown it was so good to be able to speak to a human being and they helped in so many ways. He explained that they were always 'really helpful and understanding' and 'like the RNIB rescued me psychologically'. He is now looking forward to the future and has hope and inspiration thanks to the support of Careers Wales.

Reflection: How best to measure the impact of careers work on well-being and mental health?

[1] Post-traumatic stress disorder

Environment

The importance of personal environment for physiological and psychological well-being is well documented (Suresh et al., 2006).[39] Lighting, ambience, noise, and comfort all have a part to play in enabling people to relax, relate and communicate. Neurodiverse people may be adversely impacted by bright lights, noise, smells, and textures. A further important consideration for many organisations is the reception area (online or offline) creating a welcoming environment.

The British Standards Institution has proposed guidance for the design of the built environment (approval pending May 2022)[40]. These standards will include the needs of any conditions that affect sensory processing and mental wellbeing. There are already helpful buildings checklists in existence, such as the Sensory Environment checklist produced by the BBC in partnership with UXD and CAPE. [41]

With this in mind, consider the environment of both practitioner and customer and its contribution to their wellbeing, as well as their preferred medium for delivery (whether face-to-face in a professional setting or via video and telephone in an environment of their own choosing).

"I'm a bit nervous face-to-face. I don't mind telephone or video."
Adult Customer, Wales

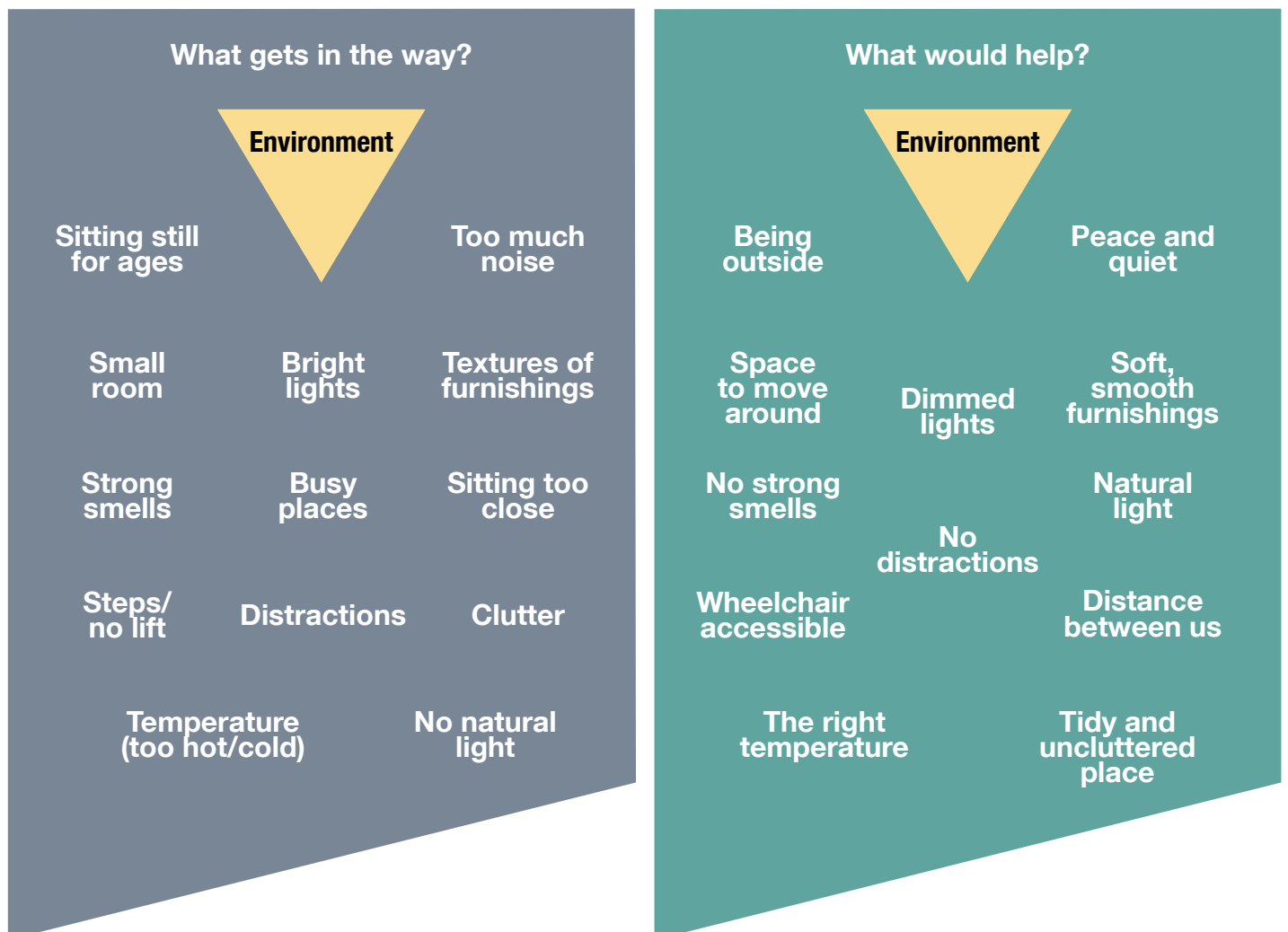# Example of practitioner approach

Questions I use (and used with my case studies)

- 'Do you have the time and space to talk to me now?'

- 'Do you have any privacy?'

- 'I'm working from home and no one else can hear me, where are you at the moment?'

- 'I am working from home and might be interrupted by my children coming in from school any minute, but I will let you know if that happens, what about you?'

- 'It sounds like there is a lot going on for you at home just now, I can hear your children calling you, would you like me to call back?'

- 'Do you have access to the internet or pen and paper?'

- 'I can't see your face or read your expression, so I will check in with you more on what I think I hear in your voice, is that ok?'

In practice, the suitability of the environment can be checked with the customer as part of "settling in", for example.

- On entering the room, checking that the lighting, noise and temperature is conducive.

- Using a laminated poster or handout with factors that may help and hinder communication, asking the customer to tick those important to them.

- If working over the telephone, checking that the customer is in a quiet place and comfortable to talk and reflecting back their words to them, especially if it becomes clear that the customer is in a public, noisy and distracting environment, or has a poor signal.

- If working in an educational establishment, tutors may share information on the student in advance so that practitioners can prepare the environment or consider alternatives such as walking coaching in a more natural environment (weather permitting!)

These templates below which can be used to inform the design of the environment. One template works from the positive, the other from the negative (some customers might find it easier to work from the latter). Both cover the same conditions. The same template can be used to reflect on practitioners' own needs.

What gets in the way?	What would help?
Environment	**Environment**
Sitting still for ages — Too much noise	Being outside — Peace and quiet
Small room — Bright lights — Textures of furnishings	Space to move around — Dimmed lights — Soft, smooth furnishings
Strong smells — Busy places — Sitting too close	No strong smells — No distractions — Natural light
Steps/no lift — Distractions — Clutter	Wheelchair accessible — Distance between us
Temperature (too hot/cold) — No natural light	The right temperature — Tidy and uncluttered place

The importance of setting goes beyond the policy context of public employment policy. It might encompass the extent to which individual practitioners enjoy their work and feel able and willing to build human relationships with clients, as opposed to being neutral or objective providers of a specific service – building from asking about clients' lives from a position of genuine curiosity, smiling, and sharing their own experiences. It could include the deliberate establishment of an informal, private space for conversation, without security guards, CCTV, or taking a ticket to wait to be seen. The environment is also important for the practitioner to be able to fully focus on and be present for the customer.
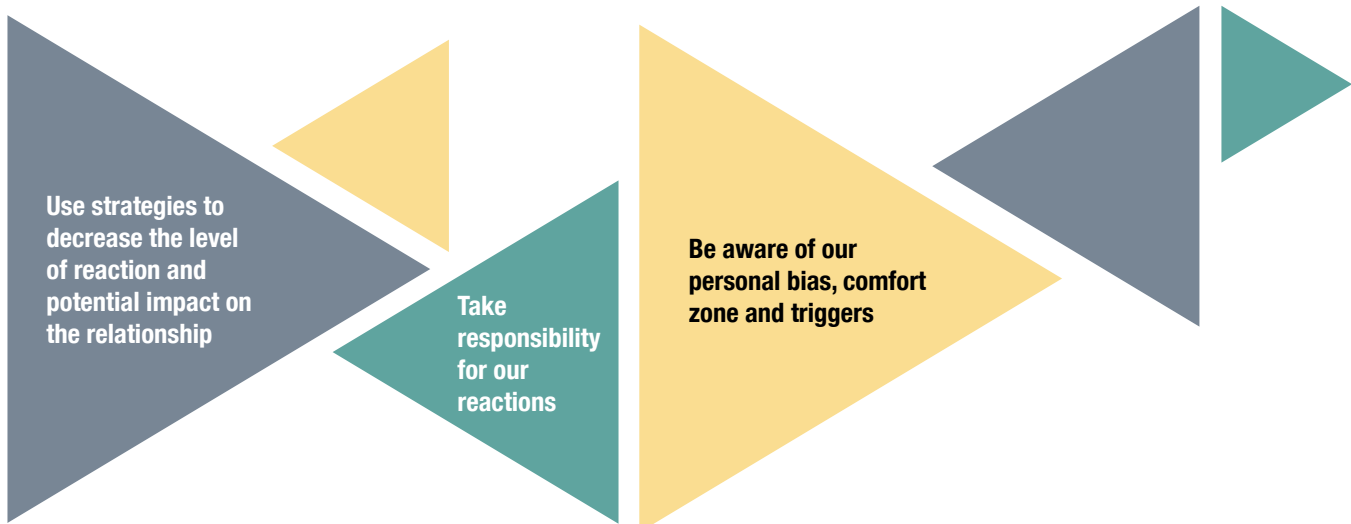
Emotional Steadiness

"To be effective, you need to listen not only to the client but also to yourself… to identify what is standing in the way of your being with and listening to the client."

(Extract from: Gerald Egan, The Skilled Helper: a problem management and opportunity development approach to helping, 7th edition, Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks Cole, 2002)

One of the participants found that she struggled to stay emotionally steady with one of her interviewees who was in an emotional state. On discussing this with a supervisor, she reflected that she hadn't been in a good place herself at the time. Organisations are advised to consider how practitioners are trained and supported in the area of observing, responding to, and managing their emotions in a work context. Consideration should be given to how they might have flexibility over their schedule to ensure they do not work at times when they are not in the right place to do so.

A key skill of a skillful practitioner is to reflect on and regulate our own emotions in order to ensure that our own anxiety and bias does not distort our ability to be present and effective. When we experience any discomfort with a customer, we may subtly communicate this through our body language, tone, warmth.

To remain ethical and professional we need to:

Use strategies to decrease the level of reaction and potential impact on the relationship

Take responsibility for our reactions

Be aware of our personal bias, comfort zone and triggers

Terms for this skill include emotional competence (Heron 2001)[42], emotional resilience and literacy (Grant & Kinman 2014)[43], and emotional intelligence (Lucero 2021).[44] By becoming more conscious in the moment, we can gain critical distance from our feelings and have greater control over how we relate and behave – see: https://creativecareercoaching.org/the-nodes-model-supporting-ethical-practice/

Increasing Emotional steadiness

- **Supervision:** "Sometimes it can be difficult to differentiate between what is our emotional 'stuff' and what belongs to the client" (Westergaard 2017:150)[45] and so supervision can be used to support the practitioner through a process of reflection and development of practice.

- **A peer support group:** This can offer informal supervision/support and a 'safe space' to discuss and reflect on challenges within practice. It's important to ensure that both support and challenge are recognised functions of the group, agreeing at the outset ground-rules and principles to encourage honesty and growth.

- **Bracketing:** The practitioner 'brackets off' the assumptions he or she holds about the subject being explored or the person in front of them i.e., tries to put them to one side and not impose his or her own values and assumptions. Instead, they listen carefully to what else the client has to say to gain a more complete picture of the person.

- **Advanced empathy:** The ability to work hard at understanding those people who we find challenging. It's useful to recognise that there may be a story behind what a person presents and to remind ourselves not to take their behaviour personally. It is a skill to recognise that there may be 'a story behind the story' and to work hard through questioning and listening to find a more complete picture of the person.

- **Self-acceptance:** one view is that the more we accept ourselves then the more able we are to accept other people:

  » *'To be able to see other people as they really are, that is, without being influenced by our biases, demands that we know a good deal about ourselves. We cannot learn to accept others until we have first learned to accept ourselves, and we cannot help others until we are able to accept them as they are and for what they are' (Beveridge 1968).[46]*

Dealing with highly sensitive situations

- Trauma informed practice: In general, people who have suffered trauma can be over-sensitive to triggers such as stress. Responses include flight, flight, freeze and fawn – the part of our brain linked to survival (the amygdala) is triggered and the rational part of our brain (the cortex) ceases to function properly. A trauma-informed response is to notice and understand what is happening to the individual, to avoid taking heightened behaviour personally, and employ tactics designed to calm instinctive emotions and regulate heightened states.

- **People who have panic attacks** or who have attended anger management courses, have been trained to notice **5 things they see** around them (table, computer etc), **4 things they feel** (feet on the ground etc), **3 things they hear** (the wind, traffic etc), **2 things they smell** (cooking, perfume etc), **1 thing they taste** (toothpaste etc). So, to help people ground themselves, avoid asking complex questions as the thinking part of the brain will struggle to engage and can feed the stress response. Instead, focus on the sensory, perhaps offering them a seat or glass of water, or reflecting back with warmth and empathy. Recognise that their response may trigger your own anxiety and stress - if this occurs, you may regulate your own breathing (take deep slow breaths) and use the grounding exercise on yourself. Having something that people can fidget with on your desk is becoming more common, for example, stress balls.

A lot of people find being made redundant difficult – what is key is the reassurance and empathy, especially in these difficult times.

From redundancy to a dream job

Challenge: At 56, Geraint was made redundant from his job as an ICT director. Being in his mid 50's, his first thoughts were about what his career path could now be. He had never experienced redundancy before and felt lost. Thankfully his wife had come across Careers Wales when she was made redundant a few years ago and encouraged him to find the number on-line and get in touch.

Solution: It seemed that nothing was too much trouble for his guidance practitioner. Aside from the quality of the relationship, Geraint appreciated the practical help. From their discussion he decided to return to his old dream of being a HGV lorry driver. She helped him research opportunities, provided information/weblinks, and supported him with his ReAct[2] application: "these forms are complicated. She walked me through the process and made it easy". She also used her local knowledge and network, ringing up local providers to ensure the forms were filled in correctly. "She didn't treat me like a number but like a person, it showed all the way through. It wasn't just about getting a CV done. The back-up, help and reassurance was 'second to none'. I couldn't have done it without her and the funding."

Reflection: How best to be conscious of the moment, develop a good relationship, offer brokerage and practical help?

[2] ReAct is programme of support in Wales made available to anyone whose job is at risk of redundacy or those unemployed. It is part-funded by the European Social Fund through the Welsh Government.

Changing the roles

Transactional analysis provides models for understanding how we relate to others, reacting to familiar triggers and taking on different roles. The most well-known is the 'Parent-adult-child' model. Another useful model for the helping professions is the drama triangle with roles of rescuer-persecutor-victim (Karpman 1968 cited in Stewart and Joines 2012).[47]

Transactional analysis

3 states   **- Behaviors - Thoughts - Feelings…**

Parent   Copied from my parents or other parent/authority figures

Adult   A direct response to the here-and-now, not coming from parent or child but using all the resources available to me now

Child   Replayed from how I behaved, thought and felt as a child

Victim   **Persecutor**

✓ Acknowledges pain and injustice

✗ Discounts their own power

✓ Maintains personal boundaries

✗ Protects self at other's expense - discounts their worth

Rescuer

✓ Has a social conscience

✗ Discounts people's potential to solve their own problems

Practitioners may not be able to stop people acting as a persecutor, victim or rescuer. However, if they notice and name their own reactions to this behaviour, then they may gain the critical distance necessary to step back and think more about how best to respond.

The ability to challenge

Being respectful and empathic does not mean always agreeing with or accepting other people's behaviour and attitudes. There are behaviours and attitudes which are legitimate to challenge, for example oppressive behaviour towards others, exploitation, or deception. Although it may be acceptable to challenge, there are several reasons why practitioners may find it difficult (Egan 2013).[48] Examples of practitioner responses that reflect the difficulty in challenging others:

"I am not used to challenging others. My interpersonal style has had a lot of the 'be and let be' in it. I have misgivings about intruding into other people's lives."

"If I challenge others, then I open myself to being challenged. I may be hurt or I may find out things about myself that I would rather not know."

"I might find out that I like challenging others and that the floodgates will open and my negative feelings about others will flow out. I have some fears that deep down I am a very angry person."

"I am afraid that I will hurt others, damage them in some way or other. I have been hurt or I have seen others hurt by heavy-handed confrontations."

"I am afraid that I will delve too deeply into other people's problems that I cannot help them handle. It will get out of hand."

"If I challenge others, they will no longer like me. I want people to like me."

If practitioners are more aware of the source of their reluctance, they can gain the critical distance necessary to challenge from a clean and objective place. The following process might help:

- Notice what you feel and own your part i.e., personal reactions/ values
- Bracket these feelings if possible or use advanced empathy to gain critical distance
- Work out what is legitimate to challenge
- Commit to being assertive without wiping out the other
- Reflect back observations of tone and body language without judgement
- Challenge through curious enquiry rather than confrontation
- If you still struggle, seek supervision or other sources of support.

Exercises

There are many career development and coaching models in existence, but for the sake of simplicity this three-stage process can be effective.

1. The initial or foundations stage where rapport is built, the purpose and process are agreed.

2. A deeper exploration stage where the customer is enabled to share and reflect on their career story, identifying their career related strengths and development needs

3. Moving forward through addressing some of the customer's most urgent needs and action planning.

A holistic approach to career development work will recognise that the individuals' well-being is an important factor in their career development journey. What follows are ideas drawn from the practitioners involved in the study as to how they weave wellbeing into the interview process, as and when required. Other ideas are drawn from the researchers' practice and common techniques in careers and wellbeing.

Stage 1: The Foundations
(settling in, agreeing the purpose and process)

Practitioners often start the session by welcoming the customer, ensuring they are comfortable and settled, and clarifying their situation and expectations. Questions used by the practitioners in the pilot included:

- Tell me what has led to this appointment?

- Can you give me an idea of what has been happening for you recently/last month/six months?

- What has happened since I last saw you?

- How do you feel about how everything is going at the moment?

- What are you hoping to get from today?

- Are you happy for us to spend some time having a chat about that today?

- What are your priorities for our appointment today? Would you prefer to focus on just these for now or are you happy for us to have a chat about how you are dealing with what else is going on?

- How much thought do you give to your wellbeing when you are thinking about your career ideas? Would you like to spend some time talking about this?

When answering such questions, it may become apparent that all is not well.

> **"I can normally gauge from their answers to the initial questions as to whether a customer is open to being honest about their wellbeing and support they currently have."**

Customers may say they are struggling, stressed, confused, frustrated, the degree of which is communicated by body language and tone. Some may even say they are struggling emotionally and mentally:

> **"Recently, mental health has been raised by customers quite early in the interview."**

Practitioners may tentatively reflect back what they are picking up to demonstrate listening, empathy and also check that they are understanding the customer.

> **"From what you are saying it seems as if you are feeling …"**
>
> **Tell me if I'm wrong, but when you talked about finding work you seemed quite anxious .."**

The practitioner can explain the relevance of "wellbeing" or "mind-set" (if that's a safer term for a particular customer) to motivation, decision making and change management, and offer to build that into the conversation or agenda.

> **"I work as an adult adviser and tend to work with those in transitions such as redundancies, personal circumstance change, career changers and people seeking to re/upskill. Generally, adults will talk about their wellbeing if they understand why you are asking and how it might help more effective future planning."**

Tools such as prompt cards and visuals are often used in sessions to engage adults and increase levels of understanding and retention. They can be particularly useful in the foundations stage when customers have a narrow understanding as to the practitioner's role and potential outcomes of the process, for example, thinking it is only about information and CV's/ resumes. The following is an adaptation of Hambly and Bomford's (2019)[49] broad outcome prompts used by some of the practitioners in the pilot. Practitioners would ask the customer to pick any cards which would like to work towards. The selection of cards used would depend on the age and situation of the customer. A useful tip for organisations interested in wellbeing is have a card sort exercise for practitioners as part of reflective practice sessions to discuss how career guidance supports wellbeing.

Be happier in what I'm doing	Stay out of trouble	Have more support
Make a decision that's right for me	Find things I enjoy doing	Be more in control
Feel more positive	Be less anxious	Know what my ambition is
Get the help I need to make the plan work	A fresh start	Solve this problem
Have something to aim for	Feel more confident	Get a plan in place

These are broad goals rather than

- option specific choices (which can narrow the focus down too early in the conversation e.g., go to university or a find a course at the local college)

- the means of reaching that goal e.g., if a client would like a CV or specific information, the question asked by the practitioner is for what purpose? Help with CV writing, information on options/routes etc are stepping-stones or resources that are needed on the way to reaching their broad goal.

Some of those cards are related to wellbeing and enable the customer to realise that these topics could be part of the conversation.

A practitioner in the pilot developed her own set of colourful cards and images (including brief prompts and metaphors) with laminated copies of the cards used in face-to-face settings and also saved the cards as a pdf to screenshare on video calls - this worked well.

Stage 2: Deeper exploration

Once the foundations are in place, the practitioner and customer can safely and ethically explore the story in more depth. The following are examples of questions and activities that practitioners use to explore the topic of wellbeing.

General wellbeing questions

- Could you say a little more about how that makes you feel?
- Describe what makes you happy/tell me about what you do in your spare time or for fun?
- What is important to you?
- How was that for you?
- How are you feeling at the moment about your plans for the future?
- Thinking about your situation, what would you say are your main barriers?

Picking up and probing further

- You mentioned….(stress, anxiety, hospital etc) would you like to say a bit more about that?
- How would you feel about us talking about…? Would you mind saying a bit more about that so that I can better understand?
- Tell me about when this first began?

Support

- Tell me about any support you have in place (e.g. what does your network of support look like?)
- Have you spoken to your friends/family about this? What did they say?
- Have you any thoughts on the reasons why your family/friends may be concerned?
- Do you have friends or family who you can speak for advice and support? What support are you getting? e.g., family / GP or others?

Coaching questions

- (Miracle question) Imagine you woke up and the situation had changed for the better. What would that look like? How would you know? What would other people notice? How do you think things would be in a year if _____changed?

- (Discrepancy discussion) Help me to understand this - on the one hand you say _____, but you also said _____. I am wondering how that might affect the longer term aim of finding full time work.

- (Barrier removal) What difference would it make if (you had money for the rent, had extra support)?

- (Hypothetical removal) If this wasn't an issue, how would things feel, be different?

- (Exception seeking question) Can you tell me about a time when your anxiety wasn't so much of an issue? What was different?

Cognitive behavioural coaching questions (Hambly & Bomford 2019, p.195)

- When you have that thought, how do you feel?

- What sensations do you have in your body when you think that? (Helping the customer to make links between thoughts, emotions and physical sensations)

- What is the worst that can happen? (Useful if the client is catastrophizing)

- What makes you say that/what evidence do you have that what you are saying is true? (Useful if thinking is distorted).

Reflecting back with empathy

- I get the sense that you want to change this, but you have concerns about…

Using an alternative visual approach

An outline body visual image and/or circle of support technique can also work well.

"Sometimes my customers are overwhelmed by their current situation, they have a lot of pressing immediate worries and are unable to consider planning for next steps until they have felt heard. In these instances, I tend to restrict my verbal input to open questions, non-verbal encouragement and pauses for the customer to collate their thoughts. I take notes using the following diagrams to illustrate to the customer what they are dealing with and begin to consider which elements they wish to tackle. In a telephone context I have still been writing these in my notes and thematically summarising – health, support network, outside pressures, positive activities etc."

(Career development practitioner)

This outline body technique can be useful to help the customer point to the area of most concern.

Depression
Stressed
Worried
Waht do I do now?

Crowd anxiety

**Mortgage
Bills
Children
Transport
Family to support**

Knee
replacement

**External pressures
Support network
Hobbies**

**Me -
My story
Feelings
Health
Money
Gym
Friends**

This 'circle of support' is a technique that can be used with adults in two-stages - let the customer choose the direction of conversation e.g., self-disclosure and external factors

Scaling questions

Skillful practitioners often use scaling questions such as: If we look at a scale of 0 – 10, with 0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest:

- How do much do you think your anxiety is affecting you with making plans/ moving forward/looking for work/ getting on in the workplace?

- How positive about your future did you feel at the beginning of our interview? How positive do you feel now?

- How would you rate your confidence at the moment on a scale of 0 to 10

- On a scale of 0-10 how confident do you feel that you can achieve your goal?

- On a scale of 0-10, how ready do you feel?

- On a scale of 0-10, how confident do you feel about these changes?

- On a scale of 0-10, how important is this?

- Why did you choose [insert #] on the importance/confidence scale rather than [lower #]?

- On a scale of 0 – 10, where 10 is where your hopes have come true, and 0 is the worst you can imagine, where are you now? How would you know if you moved up a number?

- How motivated/confident are you on a scale of 0-10?

- How supported do you feel on a scale of 0-10?

Tell me what made you choose that number?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Not ready	Not sure	Ready

How could you get to a higher number?

Stage 3: Agreeing actions

"Setting a clear intention helps to direct the unconscious mind as to what is important and what it should flag up to the conscious brain" (Hambly & Bomford, 2019 p.99).

Hambly & Bomford cite research that highlights "people who set goals tend to perform better, exhibit increased confidence, are happier with their performance, and suffer less stress and anxiety." Nathan and Hill (1992)[50] argue that goals and actions are more likely to be successful if:

- the goals are well developed and thought through

- the actions are owned by the client(customer)

- the person understands that the plan is flexible and can be amended

- the person is committed to regularly review the plan

- there is enough time to address any fear of change

- the practitioner and client (customer) have identified ways of coping with setbacks and disappointment.

It can be a temptation, particularly when time is tight, to rush into action planning, without really developing a clear goal the client (or customer) has committed to.

There is also a critique of the accepted practice of setting goals and SMART action for all clients. In particular, there are caveats concerning neurodiversity and well-being. For example, goal setting can add to some people's stress. Others struggle to visualise into the future. For further insight into this topic see: https://creativecareercoaching.org/inclusive-action-planning-reflections-on-a-conversation-with-jules-benton-2021/.

There is a further opportunity to draw on key reflections from 'Don't Dis-MyAbility®' and 'Living with Loss' expert international webinars:
- https://dmhassociates.org/webinars

Working collaboratively to support refugees

Xolani has been granted refugee status. She was being supported by Oasis, a charity that supports refugees and learning English through them.

Challenge: She would have preferred to have seen the adviser face-to-face as "you can see who you're working with" but, due to lockdown, she has been working with the adviser over the phone. She believes she would not have found her current job without the skilful help and support from a careers adviser.

Solution: She appreciated the phone calls and texts to check how she was: "I was new to everything … and I knew nobody. They picked me up – they did very well." She had no internet, no television, and so this contact with the adviser kept her going. At one point there was a problem with her universal credit with nobody answering her calls, and so the adviser rang them to sort it out. There were other ways in which the adviser helped – she was supported to apply for funding and secured a training place in food and safety, which unfortunately didn't happen due to lockdown (she eventually wants to own a restaurant). She connected her with Community of Work, a voluntary project where she received additional support in job hunting, notified her of vacancies and supported her with applications – which led to her current job as a care worker.

Reflection: How can we best achieve effective multi-agency working and making effective referrals, while offering continuous and moral support combined with practical job search activities?

Evidence and impact: useful anchor points

At a practical level, some of the approaches outlined in this toolkit provide a good starting point for practitioners to begin thinking about evaluation and impact approaches e.g. post-pre-interview approach and/or re-using specific questions to help measure impact. Although this process can seem daunting initially, there are easy approaches that can be followed in developing and implementing an evaluation strategy.

In its simplest form, evaluation seeks to identify good and interesting practice, and based upon that, use the findings to inform future policy and practices. It is important to recognise that learning from one's failures, as well as the things that were a great success, can provide valuable insights into what works and what doesn't.

The concept of evidence-based practice originated in medicine and has now been translated to a number of fields of professional practice, including mental health, education, and social work. Supporters of evidence-based practice often point to common benefits:

- help ensure that new initiatives are likely to be successful, as they have been proven to work in a similar context
- maximise efficiency, especially in the light of scarce resources
- support value for money in research by directly linking to practice
- support the transparency and accountability of decision-making
- empower practitioners and encourage self-directed learning for staff
- enhance multi-disciplinary practice (Trinder, 2000).[51]

Practitioners have all sorts of competing pressures on their time and workload. With this in mind, evaluation could be viewed either as an extra burden, or as something that is an integral part of a practitioner's work, i.e., a regular part of one's professional practice and personal development.

Six main components of an evaluative framework:

- Key feature: the broad aim and objectives of the project.
- Rationale: the underlying reasons for what you want to achieve and why.
- Process: how you are going to approach the evaluation and how you will go about it.
- Inputs: the resources needed to achieve your aims and objectives.
- Indicators of success: the measure of whether the purpose has been achieved.
- Reporting and dissemination strategy: the methods used to present and promote the outcomes and findings.

A number of factors should be considered when preparing to evaluate a particular activity. What structures are in place to help you collect, analyse and interpret data, and to inform decision-making? Identifying these structures will help you to recognise the practical and logistical constraints that limit any evaluation. What is/are the most appropriate method(s) of data collection - qualitative and/or quantitative.

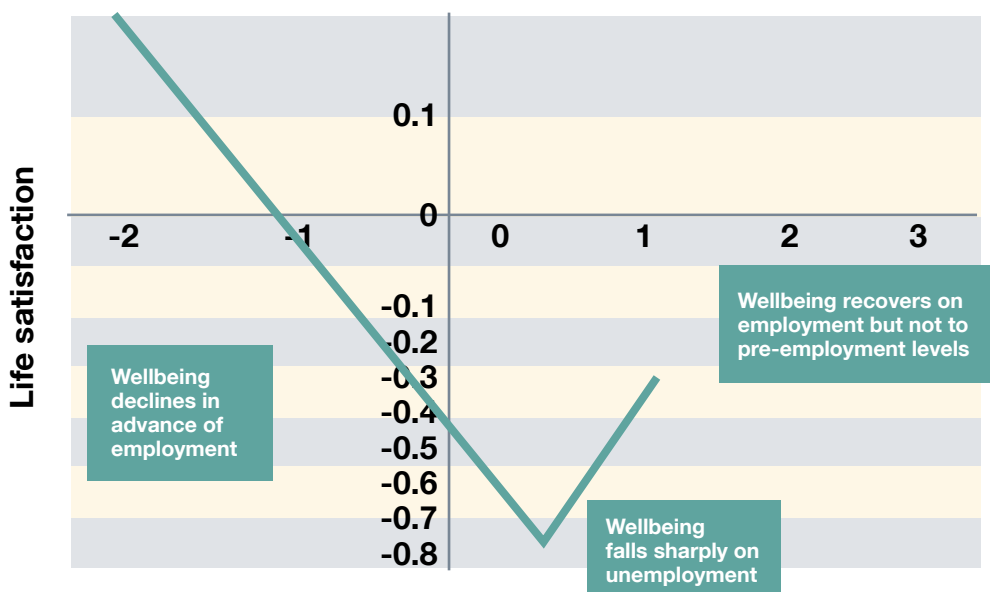The main distinction between the two is:

- *quantitative research methods* deal with numbers and usually employ statistical techniques.
- *qualitative research methods* typically deal with verbal descriptions that are recorded and later transcribed for analysis and interpretation.

Top ten questions to ask yourself when preparing to conduct an evaluation project:

1. What do I want to evaluate, and do I have a clear rationale for doing it?

2. What research or baseline information already exists?

3. Is the timescale for collecting, analysing, and presenting information realistic and achievable?

4. Do I have permission to undertake the evaluation and the commitment and support of key stakeholders?

5. What are the key indicators of success?

6. How do I intend to evaluate the outcome(s) and compare them to the initial aims and objectives of the project?

7. Can I clearly identify the deliverable outcomes from the project?

8. Have I piloted the research instrument(s) before embarking on the main evaluation activity?

9. Have I dealt with and/or assessed the reliability and validity of the evaluation procedures?

10. Have I developed effective communication protocols and/or channels for disseminating the results appropriately and widely?

But sometimes policymakers want more! Here is a brief example of evidence from the wellbeing research that unemployment not only has a serious negative average effect on subjective evaluative wellbeing, but also that it is hard to recover from, even on re-entry to employment (see diagram below). In other words, guidance aimed at prevention may have even higher wellbeing benefits than guidance supporting the unemployed, provided it can be well targeted. In a related sense, preventing those in short-term unemployment from getting stuck and transitioning into long-term unemployment may also have significant benefits, given the negative, scarring consequences of long-term unemployment and the risks of adverse spillover effects on friends and family.

Pre-experience of wellbeing

Life satisfaction

-2	-1	0	1	2	3

0.1
0
-0.1
-0.2
-0.3
-0.4
-0.5
-0.6
-0.7
-0.8

Wellbeing declines in advance of employment

Wellbeing falls sharply on unemployment

Wellbeing recovers on employment but not to pre-employment levels

Reference: Lucas, R.E., et al, unemployment alters the set point for life satisfaction. PsycholSci 2004. 15(1):p.8-13.

Image source: https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/unemployment-alters-the-set-point-for-life-satisfaction/

Whelan (2017) conducted a randomised comparison trial on 149 long-term unemployed individuals in Ireland, comparing service as usual to an 8-12 week high support therapeutic guidance programme focused on developing a career plan and strengthening human, social, and psychological capital to implement the plan, including focuses on self-efficacy and wellbeing. Life satisfaction increased in the intervention group by 4.0 points on a scale from 5 to 35 (SWLS), which remained stable through to the six-month follow-up (p-value for post vs pre change 0.001). A similar, albeit smaller effect was also observed for the control group.

SECTION FOUR:
Concluding Thoughts

In this section, we briefly discuss ways to understand and maintain boundaries supporting the learning of others. We begin with some examples of tactics and strategies for looking after practitioners' own emotional care and competence.

Self-reflection, supervision, and discussion with colleagues reviewing 'critical incident' case studies can help to guide appropriate boundary management.

There are complex issues around professional and personal boundaries that can arise when working with some adults, particularly those with complex circumstances. Practitioners working with adult customers should consider cultural, social and economic factors in their formulations and responses to individuals' needs. This may involve spending time to help liaise with other organisations.

Emotional care and competence

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented additional challenges for practitioners around the world, including rapid change, remote working, pent-up demand, reductions in face-to-face service delivery, and new and alternative methods of delivery.

Gender and age differences are noteworthy and may warrant further exploration. Although women may be more open in discussing difficulties and seeking support because of socialised gender norms, women sometimes experience significant pressures because of wider caring responsibilities.

We asked practitioners to share tactics and strategies for looking after their own emotional care and competence. Some examples include:

- Making time and space to reflect on personal wellbeing throughout the working day and week.

- Taking action after a difficult conversation/call/interview. For example, go outside for 5 minutes, stretch, and go for a short walk, spend time with a pet, call or message a colleague/team leader to discuss things.

- Encouraging reflective practice. Teams are encouraged to work this into their meeting schedule. This can be an opportunity for advisers to discuss difficulties in their role or with a difficult customer or scenario[3].

- Having monthly one-to-one meetings with the line manager with an opportunity to raise issues about their emotional care/competence.

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) has a free employee assistance programme and advisers can call this line at any time of the day or night for support with wellbeing. From this programme counselling or other appropriate support can be arranged. Also, on an informal basis, SDS organises team mindfulness sessions where "we all get together (online now) and practice guided meditations from the 'Headspace app'"[4].

Some organisations, particularly those in 'helping professions' have in place 'supervision' to download worries and stresses and to alleviate anxieties. This is often built into 'case conferencing' sessions. However, school advisers are often working alone in difficult circumstances, compounded by Covid, therefore careful consideration is needed on the most appropriate support mechanisms.

Making time for hobbies and interests outside of work; for example, running, walking or yoga to help to be active and physical, creative crafts such as crochet, art, crafting, drawing or anything that helps with nurturing personal wellbeing can make a positive difference.

For practitioners working independently, perhaps self-employed or engaged in short-term contracts, being part of a professional body and/or community of interest can assist in providing a 'safe place' to share ideas, concerns and find strategies for looking after one's own wellbeing, as well as that of the client or customer. Some practitioners find being part of a social media group, such as a social media group, provides reassurance that issues are commonly experienced by colleagues and provides ideas for what to do in response to common situations.

[3] Skills Development Scotland has embedded this within its working policies and practices.
[4] https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app

SECTION FIVE:
Additional resources

In this final section, we acknowledge that many community and charitable organisations, as well as public sector and private agencies in Wales, Scotland, Canada (and further afield) support individuals' career development and wellbeing. Also, specialist associations and private sector organisations have an important role to play. It can often be helpful for career practitioners to know which organisations might be available to help with different issues, both for client referrals they might suggest and also in their own lives.

A few selected examples, for illustrative purposes only, include:

Community and Charitable Organisations

Anxiety UK - offers support, advice and information on a range of anxiety, stress and anxiety-based depression conditions - visit https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk to use Anxia - a chatbot that can help provide support.

Breathing Space - Free, confidential, telephone phone service for anyone in Scotland over the age of 16 experiencing low mood, depression or anxiety - visit www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Combat Stress - Combat Stress is the UK's leading charity for Veteran's Mental Health, providing specialist treatment and support for veterans from every service and conflict. 0800 1381619 – visit https://combatstress.org.uk/

Mental Health Matters Wales - An independent, non-profit and non-political charity which works with people who have a mental health related issue, other voluntary organisations and statutory services to promote mental well-being - visit: https://mhmwales.org.uk/

Samaritans - Mental health support by phone, support groups, online. Tel 116 123, open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day – visit: https://www.samaritans.org/

The Mental Health Foundation - A charitable organisation that aims to improve the lives of people with mental health problems or learning disabilities - visit: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Public sector agencies

Gyfra Cymru/Careers Wales - Specialises in all-age career development, skills, training and employment support with teams of highly trained careers advisers and coaches. Call 0800 0284844 or visit https://careerswales.gov.wales/

NHS 24 - Telephone 111 (open 365 days a year, 24 hours a day) A telehealth and telecare organisation - visit: https://www.nhs24.scot/

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) - Specialises in all-age career development, skills, training and employment support with teams of highly trained careers advisers and coaches. Call 0800 917 8000 or visit www.myworldofwork.co.uk

The Government of Canada Mental Health Services - Support for those in crisis, including Indigenous peoples, veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and federal employees -
visit https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/mental-health-services.html

Specialist Associations

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) - The professional association for members of the counselling professions in the UK -
visit: https://www.bacp.co.uk/

Ontario Association of Mental Health Professionals (OAMHP) - The OAMHP supports the spectrum of mental healthcare providers at work everywhere you find mental healthcare in your community – visit: https://oamhp.ca/

Scottish Association for Mental Health - Runs various projects across Scotland -
visit: www.samh.org.uk

Soldiers, Sailors, Airman and Families Association (SSAFA) - The UK's oldest Armed Forces charity offering practical help and assistance -
visit: https://www.ssafa.org.uk/

TWO KEY QUESTIONS...

- What sort of organisation(s) can best help support your clients/customers?
- How would you build up a contact list to find career development and/or wellbeing specialist services in your country, region, and/or place of work?

A FINAL THOUGHT

Shared in the spirit of sentiment expressed by Maya Angelou, as recounted by Oprah Winfrey in 2011: "Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better."

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Appendix 1

Inspirational practitioners, managers and senior leaders who contributed their invaluable experiences, ideas, and techniques as part of the pilot programme. We remain greatly indebted to all contributors.

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