Leadership Matters

Measuring Team Wellbeing

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15Be

Table of Contents

Table of Figures & Tables

Executive Summary

Faced with projects requiring skills from multiple disciplines, and driven by 24/7 philosophies, organizations recognize that teamwork is essential to their success. However, modern recruitment, assessment, and reward strategies still center around individuals, based on the assumption that the best teams are made up of the most talented people. However, a dysfunctional team of geniuses is likely far less productive than a highly functional team of less talented individuals. Organizations need to focus on team dynamics and methods of measuring the wellbeing of both individuals and teams.

15Be has developed a team wellbeing scale using a survey of 1,000 professional employees measuring team wellbeing and important individual and team outcomes.

Results from the study identified a 12-item team wellbeing scale with four subscales (mission, inclusion, management, and resources) that are conceptually aligned with four of the five most common components of individual wellbeing scales (purpose, social wellbeing, mental wellbeing, and financial wellbeing). Of those with high team wellbeing:

- 7% have strong intentions to leave vs. 44% with low team wellbeing,
- 16% report frequent counter productive work behaviors vs. 43% with low team wellbeing
- 49% report high ambition vs. 13% with low team wellbeing
- 57% report high engagement vs. 2% with low team wellbeing
- 52% report strong feelings of belonging vs. 6% with low team wellbeing
- 43% report high team effectiveness vs. 4% with low team wellbeing
- 39% believe their team performs much better than similar teams in their organization vs. 7% with low team wellbeing
- 48% strongly agree that their team has little turnover vs. 9% with low team wellbeing
- 40% strongly agree that their teammates are rarely unavailable due to illness vs. 3% with low team wellbeing

The 15Be team wellbeing scale offers a concise and intuitive tool for understanding a team's wellbeing that builds on existing work around individual wellbeing and provides insights into both individual and team level outcomes.

Introduction

Recently, organizations have been calling for greater focus on teamwork and collaboration as keys to increased productivity. Faced with projects requiring skills from multiple disciplines and driven by 24/7 philosophies, organizations recognize that teamwork is essential to their success. For example, major brands such as IBM, Bank of America, and Reddit have scaled back on telework, once shining jewels in their recruitment strategies, to encourage more in-person collaborative teamwork.

However, modern recruitment, assessment, and reward strategies still center around individuals, based on the assumption that the best teams are made up of the most talented people. As hiring managers and team leaders now know, getting the best employees is not enough if teams prove less than the sum of their members' talents. As we have seen in major league sports, "dream teams" made up of amazing players who don't work well together aren't better than a more functional team of less talented individuals. Even if each team member is individually a top-notch asset, the collective group can still be a disaster.

This reality raises the bar on people management and demands that organizations begin to assess teams as a unit and not just the average of their individual parts. Such an assessment strategy should be simple and intuitive and should build on existing understandings of individual performance to avoid overloading employees and managers with a multitude of surveys and metrics.

Individual Employee Wellbeing

One existing assessment trend that could be expanded to identify (dys)functional teams is employee wellbeing. Employee wellbeing began with a focus on physical health and has expanded to encompass a wide range of physical, mental, and environmental factors that improve individual performance and lower costs. Though there are a variety of definitions of employee wellbeing (Sidebar 1) most reference some combination of five core elements: physical wellbeing, mental/emotional resilience, spiritual wellbeing/purpose, financial wellbeing, and social wellbeing/community. Combined, these elements help organizations predict and improve a variety of outcomes such as intent to leave and engagement.

Sidebar 1

Employee Wellbeing *is the active state of pursuing health and life skills with the aim of achieving physical and emotional health and financial security. It's the confidence that a person has the ability, tools, and support to sustain individual health and productivity.*

Team Wellbeing

Although employee wellbeing is a measure of individual experience, it offers a useful framework for defining and assessing team wellbeing (Sidebar 2). By translating the individual concepts of employee wellbeing up to a group level, team wellbeing offers an intuitive method for employees to understand team dynamics. In addition, team dynamics should both emerge from, and influence, individual wellbeing, making team wellbeing an effective predictor of both individual and team level outcomes.

Sidebar 2

Team Wellbeing *is the active state of pursuing collaborative job skills with the aim of achieving effective strategies for group performance. It's the confidence that a group of people has the ability, tools, and support to sustain group membership and productivity.*

Developing a Team Wellbeing Scale

To craft an instrument to measure team wellbeing, 15Be conducted an online survey of 1,000 college-educated, wage and salary employees in fulltime, professional jobs in the United States. The 30-minute questionnaire was developed by 15Be and participants were gathered from an SSI survey panel. The survey was administered online from October 05-17, 2017.

Of the 1,000 participants in the study, 85% worked on one or more teams. When answering questions about their teams, participants were asked to consider only the team on which they spend the most time working each week (their main team).

The questionnaire included 58 items asking about the participant's main team and direct supervisor. The results of factor analyses revealed 12 items distributed across four subscales that combine to form the 15Be team wellbeing scale (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Team Wellbeing Scale

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your team? *Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Disagree Nor Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree*	
Mission: The team's work is meaningful and serves a greater purpose	• The team does interesting work. • The team makes a meaningful contribution to the organizational mission. • The team has goals worth striving for.
Management: The team leader provides clear direction and feedback	• The team lead sets clear and reasonable deadlines for work. • The team lead provides clear instructions for assignments. • The team lead holds people accountable for poor performance or behavior.
Inclusion: Teammates respect and support one another	• The team comes together when things are rough. • People on the team are friends. • Team members care about one another's personal lives.
Resources: The team has or can get the resources to be effective	• The team can request more resources when needed. • The team has the workspace it needs to succeed. • The team has the resources to do its job.

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

The components of the team wellbeing scale closely parallel four of the five common components of employee wellbeing (Figure 2). Purpose aligns with team mission, as both relate to having a clear set of meaningful goals around which to organize your efforts. Mental resilience and management both focus on the ability to strategize and adapt to changing circumstances and feedback. Teams with strong management will have the structure and sense of control that are the hallmark of mental wellbeing. Social wellbeing and inclusion both focus on relationships that allow people to feel connected to their communities and coworkers and draw upon them for support. Financial wellbeing and resources both reference the ability to access the tools and capital necessary to pursue the mission.

Figure 2: Comparing Individual and Team Wellbeing

Individual Wellbeing		Team Wellbeing
Purpose/Spiritual	⬌	Mission
Mental/Emotional Resilience	⬌	Management
Social/Community	⬌	Inclusion
Financial	⬌	Resources

Relationship to Individual and Organizational Outcomes

Taken collectively, team wellbeing is predictive of a range of individual and team outcomes such as:

- intent to leave
- counter productive work behaviors
- ambition
- engagement

- feelings of belonging
- team effectiveness
- relative team performance
- team turnover and absenteeism

The results of regression analyses show that team wellbeing predicts these outcomes even when controlling for personal demographics, job demographics, and job environment. Presented below are summaries of the findings for the statistically significant relationships between team wellbeing and each outcome variable.

Individual Outcomes

Though team wellbeing is a measure of how a group functions, it has strong relationships with individual experience. Participants reporting high levels of team wellbeing should be less likely to report a strong desire to leave, and behavior meant to undermine their peers and organization should be infrequent. Simultaneously, those with high levels of wellbeing should score well on scales of ambition, engagement, and feelings of belonging. The following charts outline how the 15Be team wellbeing scale overall and its four components relate to each of these variables.
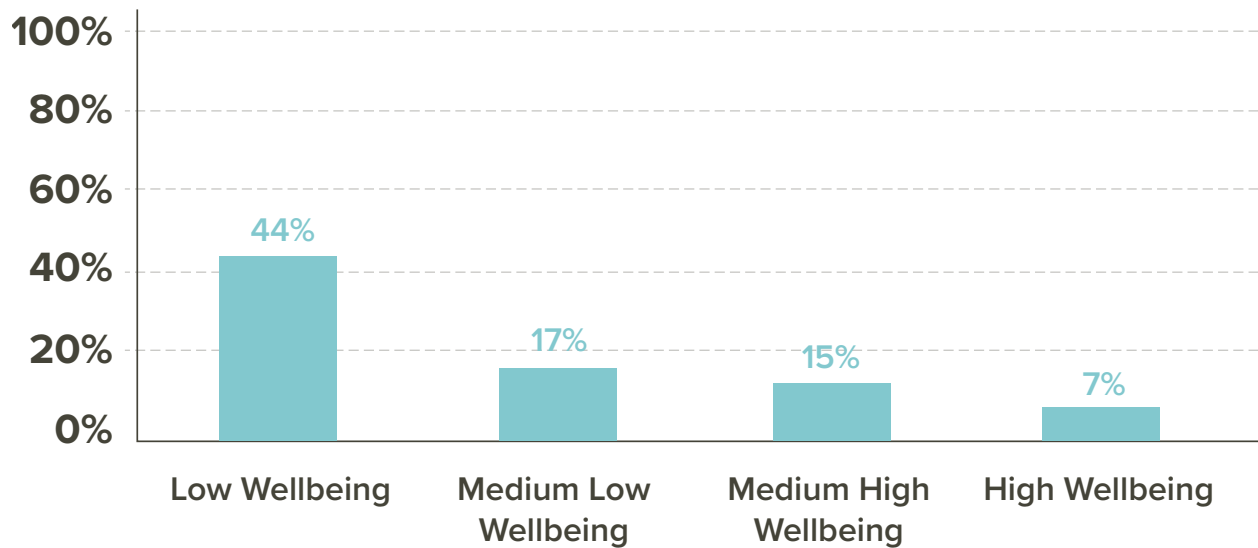
Intent to Leave

The sample in this study consisted of professional employees with advanced skills or training. As a result, they can be difficult to replace, and organizations spend a great deal of resources to attract, develop, and retain such employees, especially in industries built around their talents (e.g. medicine, technology, law). Given that many professionals spend years honing their knowledge and talents, working on functional teams that make good use of their skills should be a major motivator for staying at an organization or leaving if they find team wellbeing lacking.

Only 7% of participants with high team wellbeing report high intentions to leave, whereas 44% of those with low team wellbeing report high intentions to leave (Figure 3). Intentions to leave grew as mission, resources, and management ratings declined. Inclusion did not have a significant effect on intent to leave when holding all other variables constant.

Figure 3: Percentage Indicating High Intent to Leave

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of intent to leave across each quartile of team wellbeing
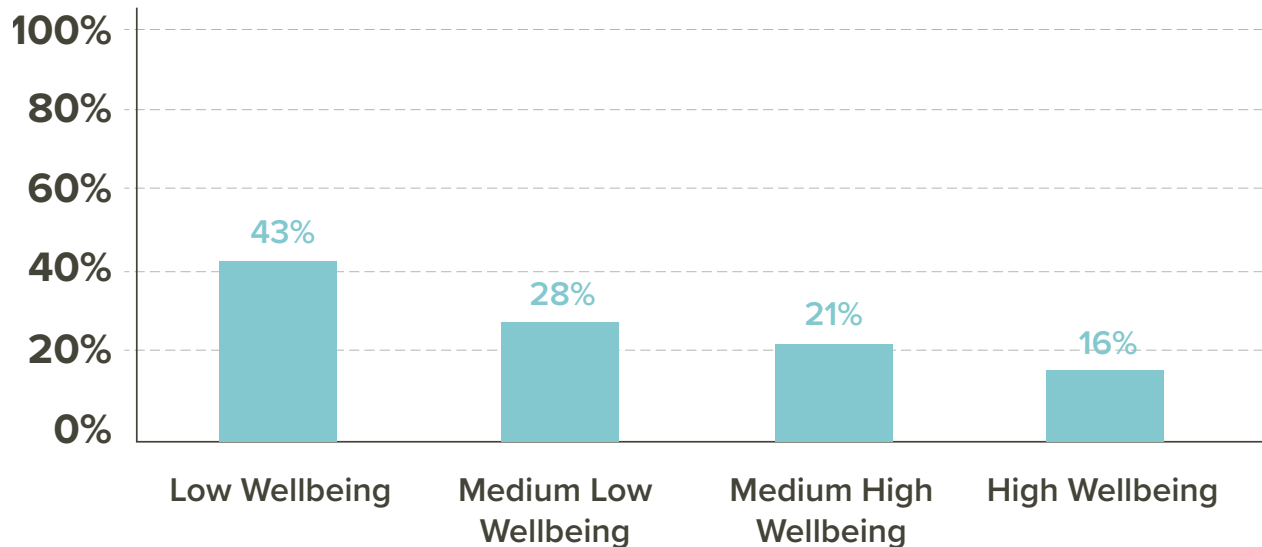
Counter Productive Work Behaviors

Counter productive work behaviors (CPWB) undermine the organization's interests and can disadvantage or harm the organization, other employees, clients, and customers. They include such behaviors as withholding one's ideas and insights, ignoring requests from others, and misreporting work hours. Such behaviors may emerge when employees resent their employers or teammates and choose to sabotage their efforts to restore a sense of equity or to advance personal interests. They can also occur when employees lack a sense of trust in their colleagues and avoid value-adding behaviors out of fear (such as making a harshly punished mistake or reprisal for alienating a more powerful and potentially vengeful colleague). Regardless of the cause, CPWBs are of little value to the organization and measures that can identify when they might occur are useful.

Only 16% of participants with high team wellbeing report frequent CPWBs, whereas 43% of those with low team wellbeing report frequently engaging in CPWBs (Figure 4). Of the four components of team wellbeing, only mission had a significant association with CPWBs. The lower the mission rating for the team, the greater the reports of CPWBs. This relationship with mission suggests that when teams have clear purpose, employees may be less likely to engage in bad behavior—possibly because they value the mission enough to take risks or repress maladaptive personality traits.

Figure 4: Percentage Indicating Frequent Counter Productive Work Behaviors (CPWBs)

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of counterproductive work behaviors across each quartile of team wellbeing.
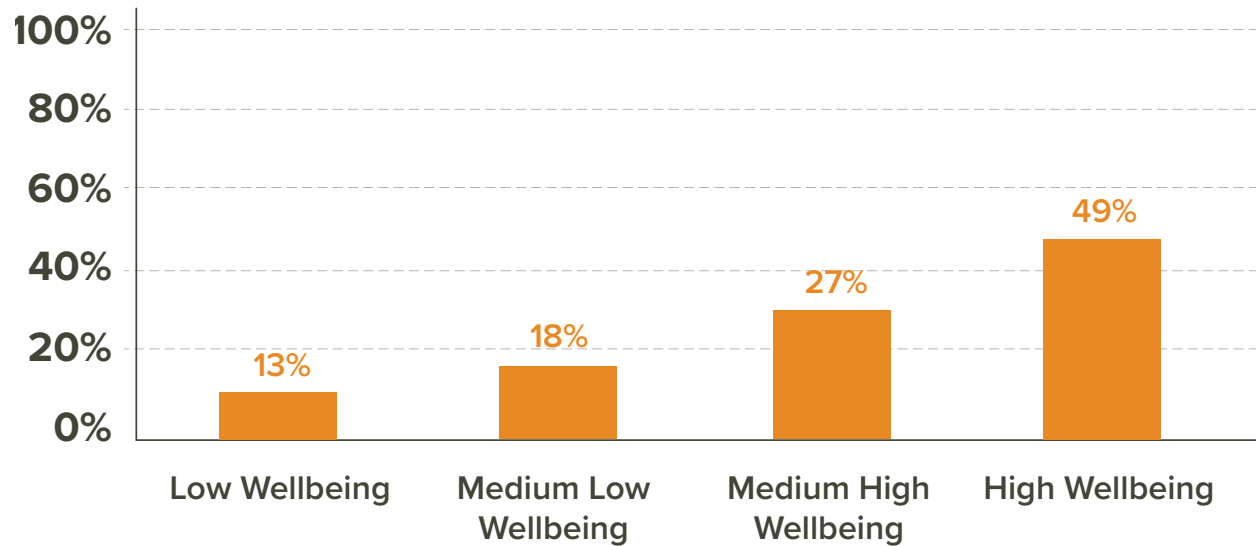
Ambition

In most organizations employees are expected to take the initiative for positioning themselves for career advancement. This includes behaviors like requesting developmental assignments, networking with leaders and decision makers, and seeking career advice from mentors and leaders. Employees who engage in such behaviors can be described as having greater ambition and should be better positioned to assume leadership roles on their team and in the organization.

Forty-nine percent of participants report high ambition at high levels of team wellbeing, whereas only 13% of those with low team wellbeing indicate high levels of ambition (Figure 5). Ambition was higher when participants report their team has a strong sense of mission and solid management. Working on a team with a strong mission may motivate employees to dig deeper into the organization, committing to not just their own work but an expanded level of responsibility for the overall mission. Simultaneously, teams with a strong management rating may provide inspirational role models that help employees understand the roles they would be undertaking as they advance. These teams may also provide constructive feedback that help employees to continue advancing their skills.

Figure 5: Percentage Indicating High Ambition

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of ambition across each quartile of team wellbeing.

Engagement

Engagement is one of the most highly sought-after employee attitudes in the U.S. workplace. Believed to increase discretionary effort and performance, the value of engagement is especially high for the kinds of professional employees in this study. Professionals are expected to work autonomously and are called upon to innovate new ideas in uncertain situations. Such work requires employees to be attentive and interested in their tasks to be maximally productive.

Fifty-seven percent of participants with high team wellbeing report high engagement, whereas only 2% with low team wellbeing report high engagement (Figure 6). Unsurprisingly, working on a team with a strong mission, good coworkers and management, and the resources to achieve goals is associated with a greater engagement with one's work.

Figure 6: Percentage Indicating High Engagement

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of engagement across each quartile of team wellbeing.
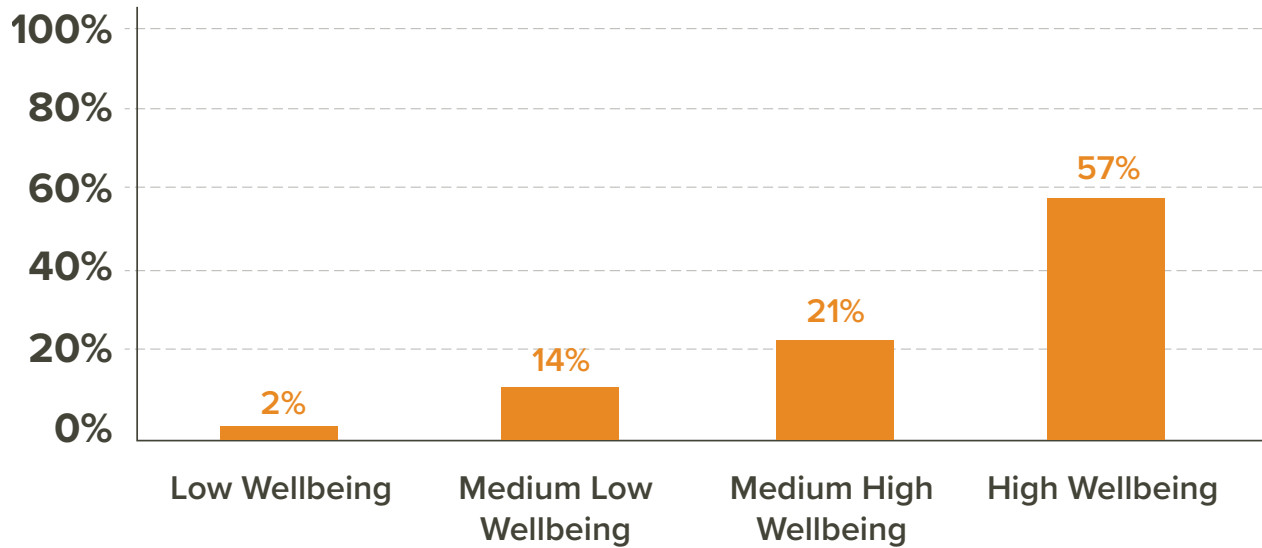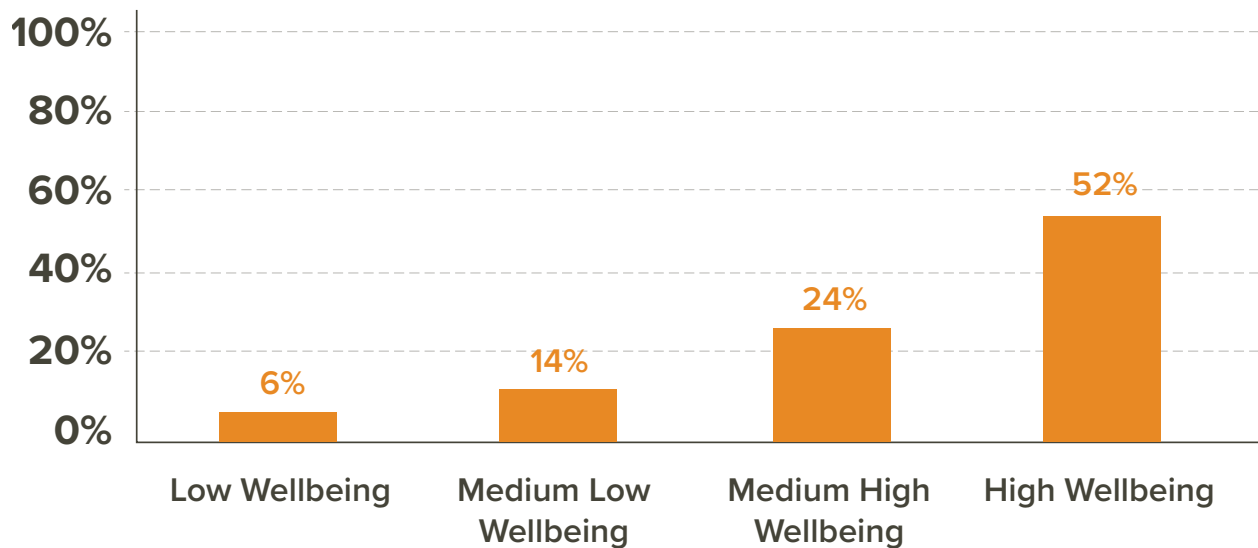
Belonging

In addition to engagement, a sense of belonging is another employee attitude that organizations seek to maximize as a method to improve collaboration, innovation, and productivity. In collaborative environments, employees must trust one another enough to share their ideas and foster innovation. Employees that lack a sense of belonging, especially those from underrepresented groups, are unlikely to take the social risks inherent in sharing their unique perspectives and insights. Without employees who feel like they belong, organizations risk plodding along on old strategies while innovative ideas blossom among competitors who can offer a more inclusive workplace.

Fifty-two percent of participants with high team wellbeing report high levels of belonging, whereas only 6% of those with low team wellbeing report high levels of belonging (Figure 7). Belonging rose along with ratings of mission and inclusion. Employees who have a clear sense of what they are working towards (mission) and good relationships with their colleagues (inclusion) report stronger feelings of belonging.

Figure 7: Percentage Indicating High Belonging

| Low Wellbeing | Medium Low Wellbeing | Medium High Wellbeing | High Wellbeing |
| 6% | 14% | 24% | 52% |

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be
Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of belonging across each quartile of team wellbeing.

Team Outcomes

In addition to individual outcomes, team wellbeing is directly related to team results such as team effectiveness, relative team performance, team turnover, and team absenteeism. Teams with high levels of wellbeing should score well on scales of team effectiveness and compare favorably to their peers. Simultaneously, they should be able to retain talent with lower turnover and absenteeism. The following charts outline how the 15Be team wellbeing scale relates to each of these variables.

Overall team effectiveness

Team effectiveness scales are close cousins of the team wellbeing scale in that they also assess efficient work process and collaborative relationships. Unlike team wellbeing, team effectiveness is not conceptually aligned with intuitive, individual level constructs (like employee wellbeing) that can aid teams in discussing and improving how both they and their teams function.

Forty-three percent of participants with high team wellbeing report high team effectiveness, whereas only 4% of those with low team wellbeing have highly effective teams (Figure 8). All four team wellbeing components contribute to team effectiveness with higher levels of mission, inclusion, resources and management predicting greater team effectiveness.

Figure 8: Percentage Indicating High Team Effectiveness
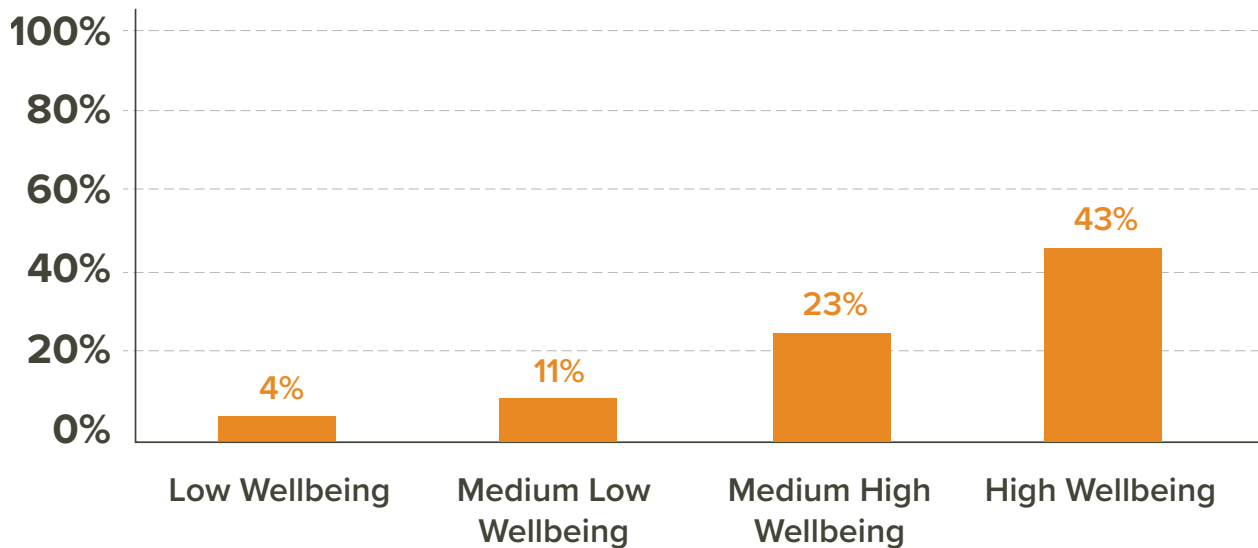
Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be
Notes: Figure presents the distribution of respondents in the top quartile of team effectiveness across each quartile of team wellbeing.
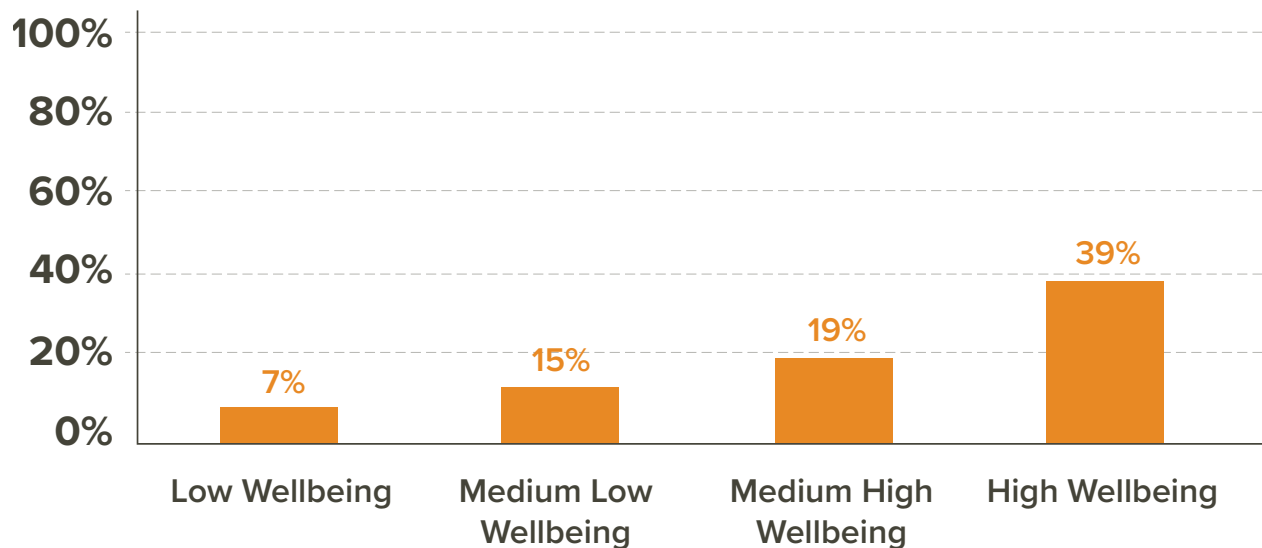
Relative Team Performance

Ultimately the goal of any organizational assessment is to identify ways to improve productivity. It is therefore essential that scores on a team wellbeing scale be useful for differentiating between team performance. Though this study is limited to data possessed by team members, team wellbeing should still be directly connected to employee estimations of the performance of their teams. Since performance metrics vary wildly between workplaces and professions, participants were asked to compare their teams to similar teams at their organization and indicate if they were performing better or worse.

Thirty-nine percent of participants with high team wellbeing believe that their team performs much better than similar teams in their organization. On the other hand, only 7% of those with low team wellbeing felt that their team performed much better than their peers. (Figure 9). Mission and inclusion were the primary aspects of team wellbeing to contribute to performance assessments.

It is important to note that participants do not necessarily have the best picture of how other teams are performing and may be motivated by self-serving biases to rate their team as better than others. However, results are essentially unchanged even when controlling for participant tendencies to answer in a self-serving manner using a social desirability scale. Future research should build on this finding by adding more objective measures of performance such as productivity, sales, and customer satisfaction.

Figure 9: Percentage Indicating the Team Performs Much Better than Similar Teams

Bar chart data:
- Low Wellbeing: 7%
- Medium Low Wellbeing: 15%
- Medium High Wellbeing: 19%
- High Wellbeing: 39%

Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Turnover and Absenteeism

Two negative aspects of team life that are believed to have significant effects on employee morale and productivity are turnover and absenteeism. In both cases the loss of talent can be due to employees fleeing or simply avoiding difficult situations at work such as a bullying manager or a frustrating team environment. Watching team members come and go or be unavailable at crucial times can be disruptive to morale and team functioning. Organizations also pay recruitment costs to replace lost employees and lose productivity when employees are out due to illness. All other things being equal, teams with lower levels of turnover and absenteeism should be more productive.

Participants who report high levels of team wellbeing are also likely to report that the team retains its members. Forty-eight percent of participants with high team wellbeing strongly agree that their team can retain staff, whereas only 9% of those with low team wellbeing say the same (Figure 10). Participants report greater ability to retain team members when inclusion and resources receive higher ratings.

Similarly, 40% of participants with high team wellbeing report that teammates are rarely unavailable due to illness while only 3% of those with low team wellbeing said the same (Figure 11). Responses suggesting high absenteeism were less common when inclusion and management received higher ratings.

Figure 10: Percentage who Strongly Agree that the Team Retains its Members

Bar chart showing:
- Low Wellbeing: 9%
- Medium Low Wellbeing: 14%
- Medium High Wellbeing: 29%
- High Wellbeing: 48%
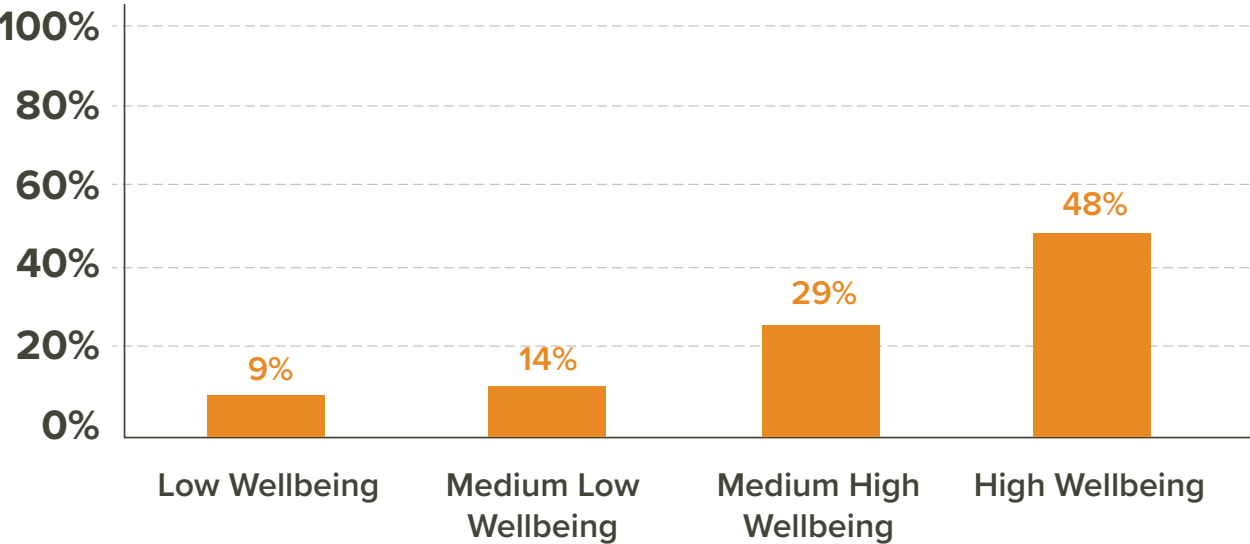
Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Figure 11: Percentage who Strongly Agree that Team Members are Rarely Unavailable due to Illness

Bar chart showing:
- Low Wellbeing: 3%
- Medium Low Wellbeing: 9%
- Medium High Wellbeing: 16%
- High Wellbeing: 40%
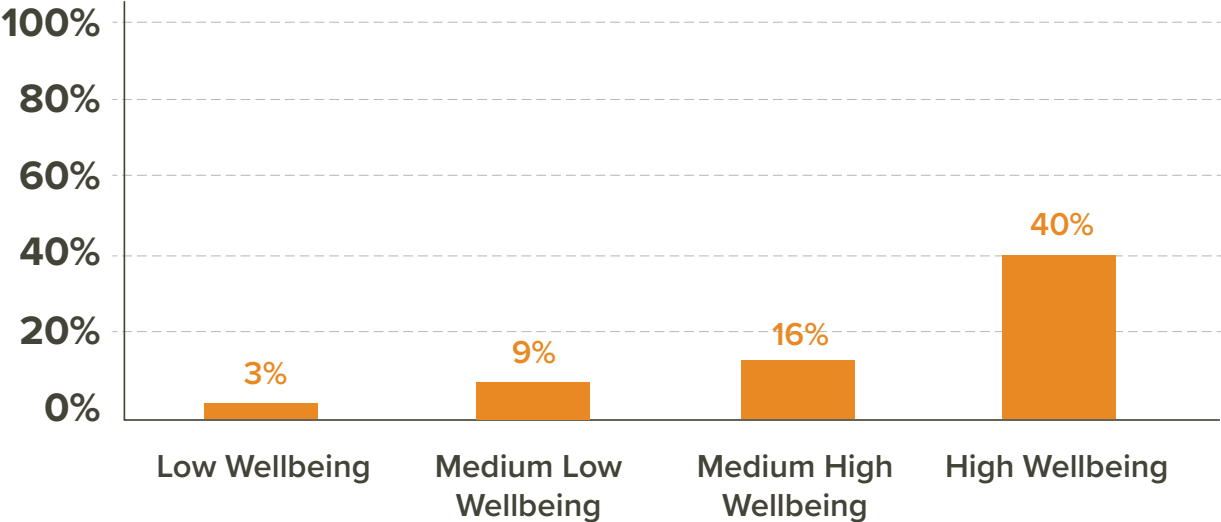
Source: Measuring Team Wellbeing, 15Be

Conclusion

This study provides initial validation for the 15Be team wellbeing scale, demonstrating its relationship to essential individual and team outcomes, even after controlling for a variety of other factors. As such, it offers a concise and intuitive tool for understanding a team's wellbeing that builds on existing work around individual wellbeing.

By examining the results for each of the components of team wellbeing, leaders can identify which aspects of team functioning are not meeting expectations and target their interventions towards the area most likely to create positive change.

About the Author

Dr. Kenneth Matos conducts research on a wide range of workforce and workplace issues, including diversity, mentoring, work-life alignment, wellness, engagement, and workplace effectiveness. He has been frequently quoted in a variety of media, such as *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Today Show*, and NPR.

About 15Be

15Be is a technology and training firm focused on the transformative power of human connection. We improve wellbeing for companies, people, and teams. Visit www.15Be.com or contact 15Be to set up a discussion about how we can help you create sustainable cultures of collective success.

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Endnotes

I.   Noguchi, Y. (July 11, 2017). Some Employers Are Rethinking Telework, Citing A Need For Better Collaboration. National Public Radio.

II. Neumann, T. (Mar 25, 2016). Five Dream Teams that Failed Spectacularly. ABC News.

III. Casey, J. (2016). Employee Well-being: A Comprehensive Approach. Boston College Center for Work and Family

IV. The definition used to describe employee wellbeing originated in Mercer (2016). Can Health and Well-being Programs Add to the Bottom Line?

V.   To be eligible for the study the U.S. participants needed to be 18-70 years old and have at least a four-year college degree. Participants were also required to be currently working as a wage and salary employee in one job requiring at least 35 hours of work per week and self-identify as a learned (74.3% of the sample), creative (4.4%), or mixed role (21.3%) professional.

The two primary professional categories were defined to the participants as: "Learned Professionals focus on exercising discretion and judgment in the application of intellectual skills and "advanced knowledge" acquired through specialized academic training. Learned professional positions include those in medicine, law, business, accounting, technology, research and other specialized fields. Creative Professionals focus on invention, imagination, originality or talent in a recognized field of artistic or creative endeavor. Creative professional positions include actors, musicians, composers, soloists, certain painters, writers, cartoonists, essayists, novelists, and other artistic professions." Mixed role professionals have jobs that "combine elements of both types of professional positions."

All eligible participants identified with one of the following gender identities: male, female, transgender male, transgender female, non-binary/third gender. The final sample was 49.8% male, 49.9% female with the remaining 0.3% identified as transgender male, transgender female, or as a non-binary individual

VI. Factor Loadings for Team Wellbeing Scale

Items	Factor 1 Mission	Factor 2 Inclusion	Factor 3 Resources	Factor 4 Management
The team does interesting work.	.787			
The team makes a meaningful contribution to the organizational mission.	.825			
The team has goals worth striving for.	.823			
The team comes together when things are rough.		.588		
People on the team are friends.		.847		
Team members care about one another's personal lives.		.863		
The team can request more resources when needed.			.758	
The team has the workspace it needs to succeed.			.764	
The team has the resources to do its job.			.817	
The team lead sets clear and reasonable deadlines for work.				.825
The team lead provides clear instructions for assignments.				.798
The team lead holds people accountable for poor performance or behavior.				.747

VII. Reliabilities for the team wellbeing scale (0.87), Mission (0.84), Inclusion (0.78), Resources (0.75), and Management (0.78) were calculated using Cronbach's alpha and exceed the standard 0.7 cutoff used in social sciences.

VIII. Since a team is made up of multiple individuals and has no "body" of its own, physical wellbeing doesn't directly translate into a team wellbeing concept. There may be aspects of physical wellbeing that are shared on a team level (such as health issues from stressful or hazardous situations that affect the entire team) but measuring such relationships is not possible from the current study.

IX. Regression analyses of team wellbeing components and control variables revealed that team wellbeing has a significant (p<.05) relationship with the outcomes even when controlling for other variables. The control variables included in these analyses are gender, age, the presence of children under 18, the presence of a spouse/partner, job industry, managerial responsibility, hierarchical level, personal income, work hours, work demands, job autonomy, and competitive cultures.

The following chart presents R2 values for regressions for each outcome with just the control variables and with the control and team wellbeing components. An R2 of 1 would signify that the equation perfectly predicts the outcome variable. Therefore, the larger the change in R2 in the table below the greater the value of accounting for team wellbeing along with the other variables.

Outcome	Adjusted R^2 for control variables	Adjusted R^2 for control variables and team wellbeing components	Change in Adjusted R^2
Intent to leave	.15	.28	0.13
Counter Productive Work Behaviors	.20	.23	0.03
Ambition	.20	.30	0.10
Engagement	.19	.49	0.30
Belonging	.18	.46	0.28
Team effectiveness	.15	.50	0.35
Comparative performance	.052	.176	.127
Turnover	.106	.165	.063
Absenteeism	.027	.099	.076

X. Intent to leave was measured with the following four items resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87.
Response options for each item included "*Very unlikely, Unlikely, Neither likely nor unlikely, Likely, and Very likely.*"

1. How likely is it that you will look for a new job with another employer in the next 12 months?
2. If you were invited to interview for a new job with another employer how likely would you be to take the interview?
3. How likely is it that you will still be working for your current employer in the next twelve months? (Reversed)
4. How often do you consider changing employers?

XI. Counter productive work behaviors were measured using the following 13 items resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

"How often have you done the following things on your present job?
Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Very often, and Not applicable/No opportunity."

1. Complained about insignificant things at work
2. Gave less than your full effort to a project or assignment
3. Insulted another employee
4. Purposely came late to an appointment or meeting
5. Billed or reported more hours than you actually work
6. Purposely interfered with someone else's job performance
7. Spoke poorly of your employer to outside people
8. Took sick leave when you weren't ill
9. Took credit for someone else's work
10. Ignored a request from someone at work
11. Started an argument with someone at work
12. Withheld your ideas or expertise from coworkers
13. Refused to help a coworker or client

XII. Ambition was measured using the following 10 items resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

"To what extent do you agree with the following statements?
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, and Strongly agree"

1. I strive to improve my performance every year.
2. I seek opportunities to improve or learn valuable job skills.
3. I want to advance to a more senior position than I currently possess.
4. I have a clear plan for how to advance my career.
5. I make an effort to build relationships with people who can advance my career.
6. I volunteer for high profile and developmental assignments.
7. I put myself forward for recognition and promotions.
8. I ask my supervisor or mentor for advice on how to advance my career.
9. I want to advance to the most senior ranks of my organization.
10. I want to be widely recognized as successful at my organization or in my profession.

XIII. Engagement was measured using the nine items included in the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale – Short Version as presented in Workflex: The Essential Guide to Effective and Flexible Workplaces. The scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94.

XIV. Belonging was measured using the following nine items resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

"To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements"?
Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, and Strongly agree"

1. I fit in well at my workplace.
2. I feel like people at my job "get me."
3. I can joke around with my coworkers.
4. I can share important personal moments with my coworkers.
5. I feel safe bringing my "whole self" to work.
6. I consider at least one of my coworkers to be a personal friend.
7. I worry about what my coworkers think about me. (Reversed)
8. I am able to be open about my feelings at work.
9. I feel supported by my coworkers.

XV. Team effectiveness was measured using 17 items based on a modified form of the team effectiveness items presented in The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools. The scale resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95.

XVI. Participants completed the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale as described in Reynolds, W.M. (1982). "Development of reliable and valid short forms of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale." Journal of Clinical Psychology 38(1): 119-125.

XVII. The item used in the questionnaire was "There is little turnover on the team."

XVIII. The item used in the questionnaire was "Team members are rarely unavailable due to illness."