



Practice Tool

The Professional Wellbeing Self- assessment Tool

Introduction

This learning tool was developed by Vicki Hirst and Rosemary Nash, professional supervisors working in private practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. We meet monthly with others in a peer supervision group to discuss our work for learning, accountability and support.

Over time, we became increasingly concerned about the wellbeing of many of our supervisees who were expressing and exhibiting signs and symptoms of extreme stress and burnout. While there were many questionnaires readily available to assess personal wellbeing, we could not locate any that specifically addressed the topic of professional wellbeing and so decided to create one ourselves. It was important to develop a tool that was evidenced-based, effective, and quick and easy to use.

The Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool is, therefore, designed to help supervisees assess their own wellbeing, and supports them to recognise and remedy challenges to their wellbeing before these become detrimental. We piloted the tool with a wide range of supervisees – in terms of culture, age, gender, social work experience, fields of practice, and work environment – in Auckland, New Zealand where we live and work, and were pleasantly surprised that everyone found the tool beneficial. We now offer the tool to all of our supervisees and invite them to discuss their professional wellbeing map and review their plans on a regular basis in supervision.

You can read more about the Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool and the issue of burn out in this open access paper by Vicki Hirst.

In the following sections we discuss what we mean by professional wellbeing before introducing you to the Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool and providing brief guidance about how you can use it with supervisees.

Introducing the Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool

The Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool provides the opportunity to reflect on, and map, professional wellbeing across seven dimensions through a range of questions that cover key aspects of our current professional life. A literature review highlighted themes that were used to arrive at each dimension, and the aspects within each one that were proven to be important for long-term professional wellbeing and resilience. If these things are in place then a practitioner is less likely to suffer from burnout, vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue.

An explanation of each of the seven dimensions follows.

The seven dimensions

Perspective

These questions focus on our ability to 'keep things in perspective', maintaining a healthy / positive frame of reference in the face of work that presents us with the trauma and pain of people's lives on a daily basis. If our world view begins to shift under our feet, we may lose confidence and respect for human resilience, and we can become vulnerable to vicarious trauma and despair. Vicarious trauma – or compassion fatigue – is a state of mind that results from hearing people's stories of trauma and witnessing the pain and fear felt by them over time. We may become numb to these emotions or exist in a state of continual arousal where our senses are on constant alert, sometimes referred to as a 'fight-flight' response.

Self-management

Maintaining a sense of autonomy allows us to negotiate personal, professional and organisational accountabilities. The ability to have some meaningful control over our work lives contributes to a sense of wellbeing, and these questions measure the extent to which we are finding ways to take responsibility for our work lives. Lack of autonomy is a major contributor to burnout (Maslach, 2017).

Supports

To do a good job, we require a range of both physical and emotional supports. We require practical tools and resources like access to transport, a lockable filing cabinet, a computer, clear policies and procedures, to help us feel we are working professionally and making a difference in peoples' lives. Having collegial and social support enables us to feel part of a team, to share knowledge and skills and to learn from one another. Having healthy work relationships also reduces stress and anxiety and enables us to better focus on our work.

Meaningfulness

To have meaning, our relationships with both our employing organisation and the work we do has to have significance for us and add purpose to our lives. Finding a balance between who we are, the values of our workplace and our own aspirations is likely to result in us maintaining energy for and enjoyment in our work. This, in turn, contributes to a rich and fulfilling life. An absence of meaning can lead to general dissatisfaction and professional disillusionment.

The seven dimensions (continued)

Self-care

We need to take responsibility to help ensure our employment conditions meet our needs, and to develop work routines that support these. Self-care strategies require self-awareness, assertiveness and self-discipline to manage stress and avoid compassion fatigue and burn out. If our work conditions negatively impact on our wellbeing, we have the responsibility to raise this with our employer and seek resolution.

Practice competency

When we perform well in our professional roles, we achieve real job satisfaction. If conditions exist that do not support competent practice, we each have a responsibility to raise these issues with our employer. Competency brings its own rewards and is an important contributor to job satisfaction. We believe that a lack of competence can lead to feelings of inadequacy and, ultimately, to an avoidance of accountability, cynicism, and dangerous practice.

Professional development

This dimension refers to an orientation to learning that continually maximises opportunities for professional growth. It involves a range of aspects including self-awareness, professional identity, professional knowledge, and career development. Continuing Professional Development can be nurtured through a range of activities. It ensures we remain reflective, innovative and flexible in our approach to our work, and helps us to avoid stagnation and complacency.

The Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool explained

The Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool begins with a questionnaire that supervisees are invited to complete on their own. The questionnaire contains thirty-five questions that cover each of the seven dimensions, with five questions in each dimension spread throughout the questionnaire. Supervisees are asked to rate their satisfaction with each aspect of their professional wellbeing on a scale from one to five, five being 'I am very satisfied' and one being 'I am not satisfied'.

Supervisees are then asked to reflect on their immediate response to their scores before collating them for each dimension and plotting them on a graph to create their own professional wellbeing map.

The map is a visual representation of the seven dimensions, and how satisfied a supervisee is in terms of each dimension in the context of their current professional wellbeing.

Once they have their professional wellbeing map, supervisees are asked to take twenty minutes to think about and record their responses to six questions that help them reflect on it.

Using this information, supervisees are invited to develop a professional wellbeing plan that includes goals, tasks to achieve the goals, and a date when they will review their plan in supervision. The tool is most beneficial when used regularly, for example on a three- or six-monthly basis.

Rate your satisfaction with the following aspects of wellbeing:

5 I am VERY satisfied	4 I am USUALLY satisfied	3 I am OCCASIONALLY satisfied	2 I am RARELY satisfied	1 I am NOT satisfied
01	Looking forward to going to work			
02	Making quiet time to complete tasks			
03	Taking regular breaks during the workday			
04	Getting regular helpful supervision			
05	Having a workspace that is comfortable and comforting			
06	Taking time at work to talk with co-workers			
07	Having influence in decisions affecting my job			
08	Having clear policies and procedures that support my work			
09	Feeling calm			
10	Having helpful support and debriefing available			
11	Enjoying my work with people who draw on care and support, colleagues and other professionals			
12	Feeling safe (physically, culturally and psychologically)			
13	Being clear about my role and responsibilities			
14	Maintaining clear personal-professional boundaries			
15	Having the tools and resources to do a good job			
16	Achieving planned outcomes with those I work with			
17	Work that fits in well with my lifestyle			

18	Being myself at work
19	Having regular opportunities for learning and development
20	Work that meets my needs
21	Having regular breaks from work, including annual leave
22	Being flexible and open to change
23	Having a workplace culture that cares about people who draw on care and support
24	Having energy for work
25	Contributing to prevention, social justice and social change
26	Being professionally connected
27	Values that are aligned with the organisation and / or my profession
28	Getting regular constructive feedback
29	Working professionally, ethically
30	Laughing and having fun at work
31	Being fit and healthy
32	Being accountable professionally
33	Earning sufficient money for my needs
34	Having goals or direction for my career
35	Having personal and social supports

Total

Personal reflection

Having filled out the questionnaire, it is useful to spend some time reflecting on what sense you make of your scores and your answers. You might want to consider the following prompts:

What is your immediate response to your scores?

Are there any surprises, confirmations or challenges?

The next stage is to collate your scores for each dimension and plot them on a graph to create your professional wellbeing map.

Score collation sheet for mapping:

Plotting your scores on a graph to create your own professional wellbeing map is useful as it allows you to see if you are balanced in each dimension, or if one stands out as being lower or higher than the rest. This helps you to reflect on why this might be, and to attend to any dimension more specifically.

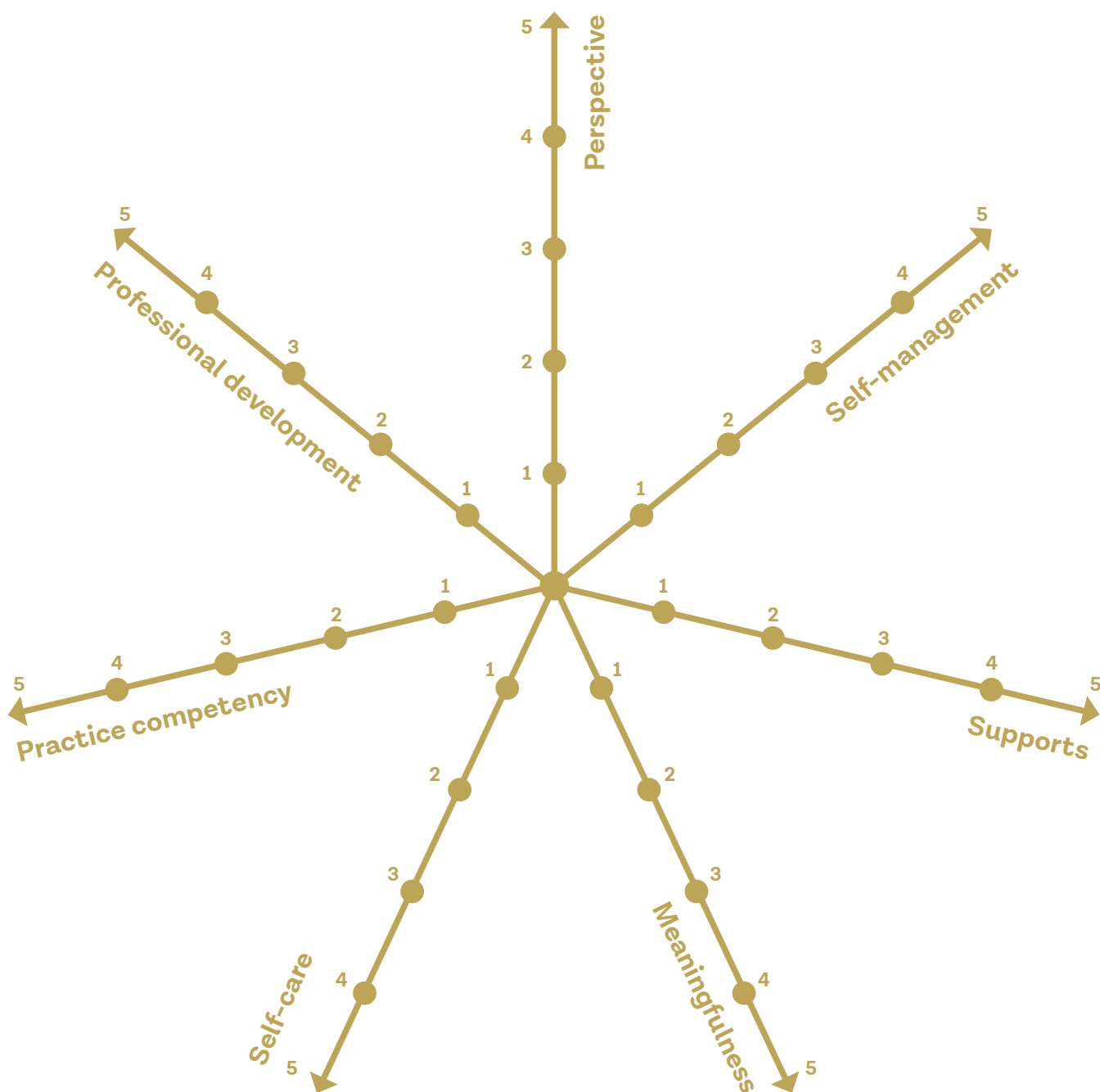
To create your own professional wellbeing map, enter your scores from each question, then average them for each of the seven dimensions.

Perspective											
Q.1		Q.9		Q.11		Q.22		Q.23		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Self-management											
Q.2		Q.3		Q.5		Q.7		Q.14		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Supports											
Q.8		Q.10		Q.15		Q.30		Q.35		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Meaningfulness											
Q.12		Q.17		Q.18		Q.24		Q.27		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Self-care											
Q.6		Q.20		Q.21		Q.31		Q.33		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Practice competency											
Q.13		Q.16		Q.25		Q.29		Q.32		Total ÷ by 5 =	
Professional development											
Q.4		Q.19		Q.26		Q.28		Q.34		Total ÷ by 5 =	

These scores can now be plotted on the graph on the following page.

Map of overall professional wellbeing

Mark your averaged score for each dimension on the scale for the relevant dimension. Draw a line to join up the points.



Reflection

Having plotted your scores on the graph, reflect on your professional wellbeing map.

We recommend that you take up to 20 minutes to think about and record your responses to the following questions.

**Look at your map. Is it balanced? Are some dimensions stronger than others?
How does this impact on your professional wellbeing?**

**What aspects of your professional wellbeing are you satisfied with?
These are strengths to be celebrated.**

**What aspects of your professional wellbeing would you like to nurture?
These are areas for growth.**

What challenges do you face in being more satisfied with your professional wellbeing?

How might these be overcome?

What support do you need from others in your organisation to improve your professional wellbeing?

There are no endpoints to the arrow lines, what does this tell you about the opportunities for further developing your professional wellbeing?

Now use your responses to develop a professional wellbeing plan.

Develop a plan that includes goals that will enhance your professional wellbeing, tasks that will enable you to reach your goals, then add a date when you will review your plan in supervision. You may decide to focus on one or two goals in the short term, over the next week or month. Any change can make a huge difference to your professional wellbeing. We also recommend that you speak to your line manager about your experience of working through the Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool, and the plan you have developed as a result, so your line manager can continue to support your development in this area.

The importance of focusing on professional wellbeing

By introducing your supervisees to the Professional Wellbeing Self-assessment Tool, you are effectively giving them permission to talk about this aspect of professional life and to explore issues around emotional resilience. The importance of this should not be underestimated. For this reason, we recommend that you schedule time in a supervision session after this has been completed to talk to your supervisee about their reflections on the process and the content of their professional wellbeing plan. This can then be followed up in subsequent supervision discussions, and might usefully be included within appraisals or reviews of supervision agreements.

Thank you to Natasha Hofmans and Sue Alpass, and our supervisees, all of whom provided useful feedback during the development of this resource. We also invite you to share your experience of using the tool with us so that we may develop it further.

v.g.hirst@xtra.co.nz

rosemarynashc2g@zoho.com

References

Maslach, C. (2017). Finding solutions to the problem of burnout. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69 (2), 143-152.

This tool was originally developed as part of the Practice Supervisor Development Programme (2018-2022) funded by the Department for Education.

Authors: Vicki Hirst and Rosemary Nash