In Each Other's Shadow

What has been the impact of human and social capital on life satisfaction in Ireland?

By Tom Healy

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Supervisors: Professor Colm Harmon and Professor Stephen Mennell

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Human Sciences, University College Dublin

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'We do not need a new landscape, but new eyes to see it with' Marcel Proust

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Abstract

This study is about the nature of human well-being and agency. It considers and contrasts various notions of well-being and relates them to various types of human capability, including human capital and social capital. Part A develops a conceptual framework that integrates various notions of well-being and capital under the concept of human capabilities – the capacity to live the good life as valued by the human agent. A number of tensions and unresolved conflicts are identified with respect to the use and understanding of well-being.

The evidence relating to those factors that impact on well-being in the specific cultural context of Ireland will be considered in Part B drawing on one particular cross-sectional data source – the NESF Survey of Social Capital (2002). The analysis of data suggests that some empirical measures of informal social ties and reciprocity are highly associated with subjective well-being. The impacts of marital status, income and unemployment, described in the literature on well-being, are also confirmed in this analysis. However, caution is needed in drawing any general conclusions with respect to 'social capital' and its impact on human well-being more generally.

In Part C, I explore the relevance of both the conceptual framework (Part A) and the supporting empirical research (Part B) for different areas of practice – personal development, families, organisational change and governmental action. In conclusion, I outline a number of challenges for the development of social dialogue around norms and public interests as well as research grounded in community experience to support well-being.

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Part A

A Conceptual Framework

'It is the theory which decides what we can observe'

(attributed to Albert Einstein)

Chapter 1

Introduction and Overview

'It shall be the first duty of the Republic to make provision for the physical, mental and spiritual well-being of the children of the State. Likewise it shall be the duty of the Republic to take such measures as will safeguard the health of the people and ensure the physical as well as the moral well-being of the Nation.'

(from the *Democratic Programme* agreed at the first meeting of Dáil Éireann, 21 January 1919) [1]

1.1 Research questions posed in this study

Individuals desire their own well-being. This self-evident fact can be interpreted to mean that individuals are inherently selfish and that they seek their own satisfaction or utility regardless of the consequences or needs of others. Frequently, it is assumed by social scientists that individuals adopt rationally chosen behaviour to maximise their own utility regardless of its impact on others. Many explanatory models of human behaviour tend to under-rate the role of deeply ingrained emotions and norms – presumably because they are hard to measure, observe and control, especially via public policy interventions.

Force of habit, tradition and inherited culture moderate the impact of monetary incentives. Individuals seek the well-being of others as well as their own – especially those close to them in time, space and family connection. We seek to defend, survive and acquire for ourselves and others. We also seem to be naturally disposed to seek belonging, identity and meaning in bounded communities. A sense of being cared for and sense of care and love for others – especially direct offspring – is the most basic instinct beyond survival. Many evolutionary psychologists claim that these instincts and norms are ingrained because they have worked in preserving and developing the human species over millions of years.

Three inter-related questions are posed in this study:

1. What are the principal ways of understanding human well-being and capabilities in a given social context?

2. What is the empirical evidence for the impact of human and social capital on subjective well-being in Ireland? and

3. What conclusions can be drawn in order to enhance subjective well-being in areas such as: personal development, family cohesion, organisational change and public policy?

My primary interest is to know how individuals and groups can work together in a way that enables them to realise the 'good life' that they, *themselves,* desire and define. The nature of human well-being will be considered in detail in Chapter 2 with a discussion of the important distinction between subjective well-being and what I refer to as objective well-being. Subjective well-being refers to evaluations by individuals of their lives and various social *functionings* in society relative to their goals and values. Objective well-being reflects a communal-level evaluation. The cross-disciplinary research evidence for the cultural, social and biological antecedents of subjective well-being will be considered in chapter 3.

The *capability* or freedom of individuals or groups to live the life they desire or consider as good refers to many different kinds of personal or communal resources. An important distinction is made between human or individual capital on the one hand, and social or collective capital on the other. Together, and in a given institutional and cultural environment, they constitute an important form of human agency. Human agency may be defined as (Barnes, 2000: 25):

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[1] http://www.oireachtas-debates.gov.ie/

> For an individual to possess agency is for her to possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an active entity constantly intervening in the course of events ongoing around her.

Two specific types of human agency are highlighted in this study – social and human capital. These will be explored in chapters 5 and 6, respectively, as factors relevant to the study of human well-being. While some economists have used the term human capital, social capital has acquired currency in disciplines ranging from psychology, sociology to political science as well as in 'hybrid' disciplines such as education, public health or criminology studies. Social capital may be seen as a convenient shorthand for a range of inter-related concepts centering on inter-personal relationships, obligations and shared norms of behaviour. It needs unpacking. Functionings and capabilities lie between primary resources and utility outcomes. Primary resources correspond to goods such as income, health or education, whereas utility outcomes correspond to the hedonistic satisfaction derived from various functionings and capabilities.

1.2 Why well-being?

Why is well-being worth studying and caring about? There are many reasons for individuals and communities to be concerned. And why should subjective well-being, in particular, be relevant to that mysterious and invisible group known as 'policy-makers'? I suggest four inter-related reasons for caring about well-being:

- Individuals matter as well as societies because each individual is not a mere product of a million divided by a million;
- Societies function better when their members are happy and positively evaluate their lives; and
- Well-being is more than a flow of measurable economic income or wealth; and
- Public policy has paid less attention to the potential of human *capabilities* as distinct from needs, deficits and social *pathologies*, to enhance well-being a key point that I will discuss in chapter 13.

The promotion of well-being for others – including those outside our network or particular community – reflects a value judgement that it matters not just for me or us but also for others who do not belong to 'our group' (ethnic, national, social etc.). This reflects a moral judgement that Governments, societies and other institutions in civil society ought to value the well-being of their members as well as those who are not members. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence that people tend to be more creative, open-minded and adaptable when they feel happier and more positive about their lives: they are less likely to be tunnel-visionaries or rigid thinkers.

My interest in the subject of well-being stems from research that I carried out while at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the 1990s and continued since my return to Ireland in 2000. A more detailed account of my motivation and interest in this area is contained in Appendix I of this study. I am conscious that in undertaking this research my prejudices, assumptions, beliefs and values intersect with the questions I pose, the evidence I chose to consider and the interpretations I draw.

Throughout this research I will seek to state and acknowledge the underlying 'values' assumptions where these influence the analysis. However, as much as possible I try to provide an analysis and conceptual clarification that 'respects the evidence' as well as the plurality of values systems and interpretative systems that exist. That said, I posit that no analysis is, or needs to be, entirely 'value-free'. We just need to be more explicit about these values and acknowledge diversity of value systems.

Writing in the 1960s, Theodore Schultz (1961: 2) remarked as follows:

> Although economists are seldom timid in entering on abstract analysis and are often proud of being impractical, they have not been bold in coming to grips with this form of investment [human capital]. Whenever they come even close, they proceed gingerly as if they were stepping into deep water. No doubt there are reasons for being wary. Deep-seated moral and philosophical issues are ever present.

I am seeking to step into deep waters.

A useful way in which to explore the concept of well-being and its observation is in the context of a specific country and a unique set of diverse values. Ireland is an interesting case for me to study for at least two reasons: (i) I live and work there, and (ii) Irish society is undergoing rapid change to such an extent that it constitutes a potentially fascinating social laboratory.

1.3 Social change in Ireland

Many observers lament the speed of change and the claimed weakening of shared meaning and connectedness in Ireland. Stories of alcohol abuse, frayed social support and the pressures of competition abound. However, some of these concerns reflect an age-old feeling that community life together with public and private morality is not as good as it used to be; that somehow a price had to be paid for recent economic growth. The reality is that Ireland like every other European society has changed and will continue changing – for better or worse. The shackles of social conservatism and conformity to a single set of values have been, or are being, largely thrown off. Growth in income has opened up huge opportunities and choices for people. Absolute poverty has been reduced even if relative income inequality remains high compared with other European countries. However, it is likely that the strength of family and *some* community ties have weakened.

Perhaps people are connecting and committing differently to the way their parents and grandparents did. But, does it matter for well-being in the long-run? We have little by way of firm evidence to answer these questions. Nevertheless, as the story of this research unfolds, it is possible to indicate that Ireland probably has high reserves of social capital; that these have not evidently been eroded in recent years; and that the Irish remain extraordinarily happy with their lives compared with elsewhere. However, the jury is still out on how recent trends in social behaviour and economic performance will impact on personal well-being in the medium to long-term.

Although it would require a separate analysis of data trends, I suggest that the new, more mature, Ireland could be summed up under the following assertions:

- Greater consumer, lifestyle and belief *choice* – individuals tend to chose their communities and lifestyle more than accept their community badge and identity;[2]

- More *autonomy* and less deference to traditional sources of authority – expressed through greater diversity with respect to values, aspirations and attitudes;

- *More diverse social ties* – belonging in communities of shared interest in some specific domain – such as informal social networks, sport, leisure, work etc as well as communities based on neighbourhood or family; and

- *Anxiety* engendered by a perceived gap between heightened expectations and reality. Many of us never had it so good materially and we expect that the party will continue. When the quality of public service delivery or the promises of unbounded happiness from market choice fail to satisfy there is likely to be frustration and deep anger.

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[2] The reversal of migration trends to net inward migration in the latter decade of the twentieth century represents an extraordinary turnabout in fortunes.

An emerging post-modern Ireland is one in which structures are looser and commitments are assumed by individuals rather than imposed on them. Uniformity and predictability are replaced by diversity and fluidity. The artistic symbol of this new Ireland is, in my view, the millennium 'Spire' erected in the main street of Dublin city in 2003. The Spire is not tied to any political, religious or ideological symbol person or cult: it is whatever you make of it. At the exact spot where Nelson and the British Empire symbolically looked down on Dublin the Spire now towers over the GPO – the shrine of national independence; and the Roman Catholic Procathedral on an adjoining street; and the increasingly diverse ethnic ghettoes just off O'Connell Street. It towers over the Department of Education where I work. The Spire dominates the Dublin landscape and it seems to say to Dublin and beyond that no one interpretation or system of meaning dominates any more. Post-modern Ireland has truly been born, even if it remains nascent.

1.4 Plan of this study

In the next chapter, I will discuss the concept of human well-being and its roots in Aristotelian philosophy through to modern theories of desire-fulfilment. The empirical evidence for the impact of various intra-personal, inter-personal and institutional functionings on measures of subjective well-being will be considered in chapter 3. Human capabilities provide the basis for 'living the good life'. Dimensions of human capabilities are discussed in chapters 4 through 6. Three key types of capital are embodied in human capabilities – social, human and institutional capital (chapter 4). I focus, in particular, on social and human capital in the chapters that follow – chapters 5 and 6, respectively. To conclude Part A, I bring together, in chapter 7, various relevant concepts for observing subjective well-being including human capabilities, functionings and needs.

Part B considers the empirical evidence for the impact of some measures of human and social capital on subjective well-being in Ireland. This part of the study is preceded by a consideration of the theoretical difficulties in measurement – either of human-social capital or subjective well-being.

Finally, in Part C, I outline a number of implications of this research for personal development, community practice and public policy in Ireland. The key areas of analysis are: personal development and learning (chapter 10); family cohesion (11); organisational change (12); and public policy (13). In chapter 14, I conclude with some observations on how data gathering and research on subjective well-being might be developed in Ireland. All of the chapters in Part C represent markers for future research rather than definitive conclusions.

Chapter 2

Human Well-Being

'Most noble is that which is justest, and best is health; But pleasantest is it to win what we love' (Nicomachean Ethics - Aristotle [350BCE]: Book I: 8)

2.1 Introduction

What is it to win what we love? And, what do we love? How does anyone know that they have won what they love? In this chapter I explore the different meanings of human well-being. I pay particular attention to what I will call *subjective well-being* (SWB*)* – the sense that we have achieved what we aim for (to win what we love, desire and consider worthy of the 'good life'). This understanding is close to the original meaning of *eudaimonia* or 'flourishing spirit' found in the writings of the philosopher, Aristotle. The prominence given to the topic of well-being seemed to have retreated between the high point of classic Greek philosophy and the period of the enlightenment. The rise of utilitarian philosophies in the eighteenth century brought the attention of philosophy back to the happiness of each individual as a goal and ultimate value in itself. [3]

In more recent times, there has been a further development toward a view of well-being that reflects peoples' feelings, reasoning and moral behaviour. So, for example, contemporary writers on well-being (Annas 1993: 28) pose questions such as:

> Am I satisfied with my life as a whole, and the way it has developed and promises to develop?

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[3] I will explore, below, the subtle, but crucial, shift in emphasis from well-being to hedonic happiness in the writings of the Utilitarians.

David Myers (1993) defines well-being as:

> the pervasive sense that life has been and is good. It is an ongoing perception that this time in one's life, or even life as a whole, is fulfilling, meaningful, and pleasant.

Griffin (1986: 7) has distinguished between 'states of mind' and 'states of the world' understandings of well-being. I find it more useful to speak of objective and subjective well-being. Although 'objective well-being' is not a generally used term in the social sciences, 'subjective well-being' is. Well-being is subjective when it refers to an individual evaluation of life. I understand *subjective well-being* as:

> informed desire-fulfilment by individuals and evaluated as good by individuals themselves.

By contrast, objective well-being may be understood as:

> the realisation of the common good in a community and evaluated by that community or others as good.

Before discussing in detail the concepts of objective and subjective well-being in sections 2.3 and 2.4, respectively, I examine the philosophical roots of the concept of well-being in the next section.

2.2 Philosophies of well-being

2.2.1 Well-being as attainment of the good life

What have been the mean features of an understanding of well-being in ancient philosophy and religion? The pursuit of happiness or virtuous living, the product of which is happiness, is a perennial theme in all of the great world religions and is typically seen in each of these as the fruit of right living and union with a higher Being or purpose. Joy, peace, light, life, freedom and redemption from suffering and oppression are key themes in the writings and sayings of various prophets or holy persons from Buddha to Isaiah, Jesus or Kahlil Gilbrain. The Gospel of Saint John reports Jesus as saying:

> *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full* (John 15: 11) [4]

In the Hebrew Bible (Ecclesiastes 3: 12) it is written:

> I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live.

The thinking of classical philosophers mirrors that of ancient oriental religion. For example, the Lord Buddha is recorded as saying:

> The accomplishment of persistent effort, the accomplishment of watchfulness, good friendship and balanced livelihood leads to happiness.[5]

Aristotle saw happiness as *'an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue'* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I: 12). Hence, for Aristotle, living well and living the 'good life' is the key to happiness. The ancient Greek term for well-being or happiness (ευδαιμονια – *eudaimonia*[6]*)* is difficult to translate. Hence, I am inclined to agree with Ray (2001) who claims that the word *eudaimonia* is poorly translated as 'happiness' in English. *Eudaimonia* literally means having a good 'guardian spirit' or *daimon.*[7] It can also mean to have what is most desirable or to flourish (Book X). More than being a state, well-being is a process or activity. It is a continuous activity, not a possession, and it is easier to be active 'with

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[4] This and all the following quotations from the Bible are taken from *The Holy Bible* (1966).

[5] Sayings of the Lord Buddha http://www.soloseal.faithweb.com/blodge10.html consulted in June 2004.

[6] Related to the concept of *eudaimonia* is *eunomia* – a state of social order and well-being when the various parts of a society are functioning harmoniously. *Dysnomia*, or social lawlessness, is to *eunomia* what *anomie* is to *eudaimonia*.

[7] The author, Nina Fitzpatrick begins her novel, *Fables of the Irish Intelligentsia* , by saying 'Daimons are not demons. Demons are nefarious creatures that skulk and rage in the dark. Daimons are radiant beings that impart a pattern to people, animals, plants and places.'

friends than alone' (Ray, 2001). Likewise, the nineteenth-century economist Henry Sidgwick (1893) claimed that the word 'happiness' is ambiguous. He contested the identification of *eudaimonia* — well-being — with pleasure via an incorrect understanding and application of the term 'happiness'. Sidgwick (1893: 92) identifies *eudaimonia* in Aristotle with well-doing 'of which pleasure is not the element but the inseparable concomitant'.

An interesting feature of the ancient Greek word for joy or happiness — *chara* or *eutichia* — is that it is linked to the word for friend in Gaelic Irish – *cara*[8]. Given that the term *anam-chara* — 'soul friend' — is used to describe someone who is close, spiritually, to another through a bond of companionship, support and guidance, there is likely to be an ancient, root link in meaning and derivation for all of these words. Putting together, *eu* — meaning wellness or goodness in Greek,[9] and *charis or chairein* — grace or joy — gives the word Eucharist in the Christian religion which denotes joy, giving thanks and participation in communion. Gratefulness and acceptance together with an active response to life's opportunities generate a sense of fulfilment and well-being.

Aristotle sees the choice of goods, whether external or internal, as a means towards the end of *eudaimonia*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (I: 7), he wrote:

> we call final without qualification that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else. Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else.

Although bodily health and material wealth are acknowledged by Aristotle as important for well-being, these are means to well-being; not ends in themselves as hedonist philosophers such as Aristippus might have argued. For Aristotle,

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[8] Watkins (2000). *Chara* in Greek is also likely to be linked to the word caritas in Latin.

[9] The opposite prefix is *dys* - – signifying dysfunction.

eudaimonia is the end of human activity and εθοσ — ethics — are the means. As in the contemporary world, Aristotle acknowledged that people disagree on what causes well-being. Aristotle writes (Nicomachean Ethics, Book I: 4):

> Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise.

The Beatles band could have taken the lyrics, 'I get by with a little help from my friends,' from the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle states that friendship is a natural desire of humans and that nobody can live without friends (Book VIII: 1). Mutual friendship is based on a reciprocal desire for the good of the other as well as knowledge that the other desires the good of oneself. Hence, expectation that the other wants one's own good is an inherent part of friendship. Who needs friends? Aristotle gives special mention to the following:[10]

- the rich and powerful so that they can bring benefit to others while protecting their own prosperity;
- the poor and the unfortunate so that they have a 'refuge';
- the young so that they can have guidance;
- the old so that they can be cared for;
- people in their prime: 'to do fine actions' for someone who is 'more capable of understanding and acting'.

[10] http://enlightenment.supersaturated.com/essays/text/carolynray/aristfriend.html

2.2.2 Well-being as satisfaction of desire

Aristotelian philosophy concerned itself with questions such as 'what sort of life should I lead?' and 'am I living a good life?' The underlying assumption in classical philosophy maintained until the eighteenth century was that attainment of happiness was to do with right living, duty, obligation and honour. Ethics was constructed as a system of binding duties and obligations. With the rise of utilitarianism, the focus shifts to the experience of pleasure by the individual. Philosophers such as Hume, Bentham and Mill regarded the pursuit of *pleasure* and avoidance of pain for the greatest number as the chief good.

In *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham (1970a/1789) he proposes an ethical system based on calculated satisfaction or utility. Particular actions are evaluated from the standpoint of the 'greatest happiness of all'. He believed that a consistent application of this principle would solve many difficulties in society by underpinning appropriate norms and sanctions for human behaviour. The results or consequences of actions were what counted. This constituted a utilitarian notion of well-being in contrast with universalist notions of moral good or the categorical imperative found in Emmanuel Kant.

The impact of utilitarianism along with welfare market-based economics in the nineteenth century was set by the convergence of three overlapping streams:

- Happiness of individuals emerged as an over-riding human goal;
- Market-based measures of value took pride of place in economic and social analyses; and
- Scientific progress in measuring, comparing and 'proving' causal mechanisms dominated.

From now on, many saw the role of society, and Government in particular, as striving to identify what made people happy and how to govern in such a way as to maximise the happiness of the greatest number of individuals. With a utilitarian approach arrived a greater emphasis on personal autonomy, liberty of conscience and tolerance of diverse views and behaviour. Provided that one person's behaviour did not entail injury to another, violence or coercion, morality was left to individual conscience. To be potentially immoral, an act needed a victim and some pain. I see two difficulties with such a utilitarian approach:

- Not every type of pleasure-seeking behaviour is good for the individual or society; and
- Utilities or pleasures cannot be readily compared, added up or evaluated at a collective level.

Henry Sidgwick went some of the way to address the first difficulty by modifying the utilitarian position in accepting that individuals might act to maximise pleasure or happiness – but not just for themselves but others as well. Hence, his ethical hedonism tends towards universal principles of behaviour and away from egotistical seeking of one's own pleasure in isolation from others. Taking this approach, 'pleasure' in the full sense is not incompatible with 'virtue'.

Adam Smith paid primary attention to the nature and causes of economic wealth in the form of goods and services. However, he also discussed the nature and causes of well-being. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 1976/1774),[11] Smith wrote:

> Man was made for action, and to promote by the exertion of his faculties such changes in the external circumstances both of himself and others, as may seem most favourable to the happiness of all.

Smith (1889/1776) also referred to the ability of individuals to 'appear in public without shame',[12] – mindful of their need for social status. Smith claimed that

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[11] Part II Section III Chapter 3.

[12] The Wealth of Nations, Book 2, (5): 2.

the desire to maximise happiness is the source of the inexorable trend towards social differentiation and division of labour. Emile Durkheim took issue with this. He countered that social and economic development did not spring from individual psychological traits or desires for happiness. For Durkheim (1952/1897), the road to happiness is through acceptance of social and moral constraints.

2.2.3 Well-being as the freedom to live the good life

I find the approach to understanding well-being by economist, Amartya Sen, particularly useful because of its focus on the choices and freedoms open to people. Outcomes (or 'functionings' according to Sen) are less significant than 'opportunities' or 'social capabilities'. Social capabilities refer to all of the potential *resources* and *opportunities* that individuals or groups can call upon to achieve various ends. They enable people to achieve the life that best suits them and that they have chosen. Societies and individuals can work with different combinations of functionings depending on the choices open to them. The attainment of well-being by individuals or societies is a result of the degree of correspondence between functionings (what they can do based on capabilities) and expectations (what they expect or need).

Sen is not prescriptive or definitive in saying *which* capabilities or functionings should be used or prioritised. The general conceptual framework is deliberatively left open by him to allow for its adaptation in varying circumstances. A crucial difference between *consequentialist* or outcome-utility approaches based on pleasure-happiness as the only object of value or measure, and the broader capabilities approach in Sen is that individuals may have goals or values apart from happiness – or, at least, goals that include happiness but also other ones such as duty, obligation, honour, status, etc.

Practically, capabilities are identified by Sen as freedoms to live the good life on the basis of access to such resources as education, health, income and democratic freedom (or rights of participation). Sen (1999) speaks of five different types of freedom:

- Political (e.g. freedom of speech, press and civic deliberation);

- Economic (e.g. relating to freedoms of ownership, trading and movement of labour);
- Social (e.g. access to income, health, education opportunities);
- Transparency rights (to access information); and
- Protective security (to have social support in times of need, disability).

What shapes a subject's (community or individual) evaluation of her own well-being is the freedom to function in ways that are meaningful, valued and good from the standpoint of the subject evaluating well-being. Hence, growth in economic output or income can enlarge the range of opportunities but is not a primary end in itself. The fact of consumption of economic goods or political and civil liberties is secondary to the capacity of exercising choice based on knowledge, health and access to material resources. Hence, well-being is more a matter of freedom to achieve according to one's goals than the fact of achievement itself.

2.3 Objective well-being

How does a society identify and account for its own common good? Some agreed procedure for the evaluation of that good is required. Through the ages, different societies have developed ways of defining and upholding the common good. Formalised institutions based on kinship, tribe, royalty or organised religion have sought to mark out the limits of human behaviour, as well as provide for the common good. An authoritarian imposition of norms and values was a feature of traditional and pre-modern societies or latter-day totalitarian regimes based on submission to an imposed ideology and set of values.

In democratic and pluralist societies of the West, the rise of the welfare state in the latter twentieth century provided for a *clientalist* approach to well-being. The State, in place of the family or other social institutions, was increasingly the provider of social goods for individual citizens or, in the language of contemporary public administration, customers served by public authority. Increasingly, public authority has seen its role as procedural and managerial more than directive in relation to any sense of shared or objective well-being. Hence, the notion of public administration serving a common good or a vision of the 'good society' has given way to the belief in public administration as a delivery mechanism to provide public services at 'value for money' – taxpayers' money. The question of money for which common 'goods' that a society values is less often raised or debated.

Pushed to an extreme, the argument could be advanced that government has been reduced to that of market analogue efficiently providing services for customers. However, some notion of the common good still prevails to the extent that governments and supra-national organisations provide a framework in which human well-being is pursued, albeit in a very diverse and pluralist setting. Typically, the business of the State is seen as that of not interfering with market or lifestyle choice beyond what is appropriate for the protection of the rights of the weak or vulnerable and the maintenance of public order.

So, what is left of the 'common good' or 'Objective Well-Being'? Two approaches can be taken to defining a minimalist 'common good':

- Focus on the resources, capabilities and freedoms available to individuals and societies to realise their needs (as in Sen's philosophy); or

- Focus on a socially desired set of outcomes.

Both approaches are useful in understanding objective well-being, especially the first for the reasons just discussed. Yet, most measures of 'progress', 'development' or 'social well-being' rest exclusively or mainly on measures of economic activity. An empirical measure frequently used is that of current income or production of goods and services such as GDP. Economic output/income/consumption provides a flow of goods that can be used to purchase other goods and satisfy wants whether these relate to food, education, health or other categories.

Such empirical measures capture current production of those consumption and investment goods and services accounted for in the *System of National Accounts* but exclude non-market household activity or activities such as conservation of natural resources that contribute to future well-being through net additions to the capital stock of society.

The confusion of social goods and human well-being with measured economic activity is frequently lamented but rarely taken seriously in mainstream economic analysis and media reporting. Economists and others typically use the term 'economic growth' (or even 'growth') as a shorthand for growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita. Copious references to 'growth studies' are found in economic journals and analyses such as those undertaken by OECD, IMF and the World Bank or more recently the 'growth initiative' on the part of the European Commission. 'Grow, Develop and Prosper' was the theme of the International Forum of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in April 2003. The question of growth of *what*, for *whom* and *why* is less frequently asked or addressed. These concerns are underlined in the findings of the *Worldwide Watch Institute* (Worldwide Watch Institute, 1999: 10) and taken from earlier research by Angus Maddison (1995):

> growth in total world economic output in just three years, from 1995 to 1998, exceeded that during the 10,000 years from the beginning of agriculture until 1900. And estimated growth of the global economy in 1997, alone, easily exceeded that during the seventeenth century.

However, a number of economists (e.g. David Blanchflower, Andrew Oswald, Lars Osberg and John Helliwell) have begun to address some of these issues by examining well-being in a broader framework. For example, the Index of Economic Well-Being (IEW) was developed by Osberg (1985) and further explained and illustrated in Osberg (2001) with data for a number of economically developed countries. Fred Hirsch (1978) had already pointed out that there were social limits to economic growth by which he meant that further increases in private material consumption would add less and less to human well-being in societies that already enjoyed high levels of economic development. More detailed examples of approaches to the measurement of objective well-being are given in Appendix II.

Many economists now accept that Objective Well-Being cannot be evaluated on the basis of monetary values alone – or on the basis of simple aggregation of individual life satisfactions. Some ethical judgment with respect to the distribution of life satisfaction opportunities and outcomes as well as some objective evaluation of what is 'good' for society is needed. With a growing diversity in beliefs and values who decides what constitutes the common good and how it may be best achieved? Any 'objective account' of well-being is inherently arbitrary to the extent that it reflects a particular view of what matters in the light of prevailing ideas, values and norms at a given time. Any evaluation of collective or social well-being is dependant on the values and ideological position of the evaluator. Monetary based measures of well-being presented as proxies for social well-being merely reflect a particular ethical standpoint that treats, de-facto, measurable economic outcomes as the main or only dimension of human well-being.

2.4 Subjective well-being

2.4.1 Subjective well-being as states of mind only?

Although subjective well-being is closely associated with mental or psychological health, it should not be treated as the equivalent. It is conceivable that mentally ill persons may report high levels of SWB. The concept of health in general has been understood very broadly to include not only physical health but psychological well-being as well. For example, the World Health Organisation (WHO, 1946) has defined health as:

> A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.[13]

A saying attributed to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius[14] points to the importance of how individuals perceive their condition:

> If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you have the power to revoke at any moment

Carried to an extreme, the above view would deny the reality of physical and mental pain as objective phenomena as well as the reality of limitations in the power of human agency to overcome these. Hence, SWB is not to be understood as merely an experience of pleasure or passing feeling. Depending on the values of an individual, there may be a conflict between experiences of pleasure or passing emotion and the evaluation of actions by that person.

However, an account of subjective well-being that rests entirely on current mental state is deficient. Actual desire fulfilment and the associated mental state of satisfaction may be ill-informed or delusive. To experience a stimulus that produces the same mental state of satisfaction as that arising from a particular fulfilment of desire does not represent an equivalent level of well-being. Robert Nozick (1975) discusses a hypothetical situation where an individual can experience any mental state he wishes using a programmed experience machine. He postulates that we desire to do certain things, to be

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[13] No 2. Page 100. This definition has not been amended by WHO since it was agreed in 1946. See http://www.who.int/about/definition/en/ [consulted in June 2004]

[14] http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Marcus_Aurelius_Antoninus/1 [consulted in June 2004]

something and to be receptive to life beyond what can be manufactured by artificial stimulii.

I propose going beyond a purely factual account of SWB as a state of mental desire-fulfilment to considering it as a subjective evaluation of one's life as a whole including the extent to which it represents the attainment of 'good living' as judged by the subject making the evaluation. I propose an understanding of subjective well-being (SWB) as:

> informed desire-fulfilment by individuals and evaluated as good by individuals themselves.

2.4.2 Attaining one's goals

Subjective well-being depends on the relationship between what is desired (or expected) and what is realised. What one wants; had earlier in life; expects now; thinks others have and what one thinks is deserved; constitute key elements of a subjective evaluation of one's own well-being. A multiplicity of desires in any one individual reflects various needs including a need to behave in a socially acceptable and 'moral' way. Frequently, these desires may conflict with one another and individuals make choices from situation to situation on which desire or need prevails.

Michalos (1985) has developed a theory of multiple discrepancy to examine the significance of gaps in expectations and reality in giving rise to SWB. He reports that jealousy and perceptions of unfairness impact dramatically on expectations. A matching of personal goals and needs is, therefore, vital for a positive evaluation of well-being. Hence, individuals with very high, and possibly unattainable, goals are more likely to experience frustration and disappointment. Compatibility of goals and avoidance of 'moral overload' are important.

Although the adjective 'subjective' is used to qualify 'well-being,' the meaning of subjective well-being is partly one of reasoning and partly one of feeling to the extent that it refers to how individuals evaluate their own lives as distinct from what their feelings are at any given moment of time. I suggest five aspects as relevant to such an evaluation of life:

> The *object of evaluation* referring to opportunities or capabilities such as physical health, contact with others, status in a social or power-based hierarchy, access to material goods;
>
> The *subject of evaluation* (this or that particular individual);
>
> The *moral* basis for the evaluation (cultural norms, beliefs and values that are held by particular individuals and possibly shared with others);
>
> The *cognitive* basis for evaluation (reflecting culture, understandings, knowledge, individual mental and intellectual capabilities); and
>
> The *affective* basis for evaluation (reflecting mood, feeling, emotional state, identity).

In light of the above set of criteria, the recent literature on SWB has emphasised an important distinction between the affective and cognitive aspects of well-being and how these are present at the level of the individual. For example, Diener et al. (1999) believe that moods and emotions (which they label as 'affect') are important dimensions of SWB. Bradburn and Caplovitz (1965) suggested that 'pleasant' and 'unpleasant' affects constitute two independent factors that should be measured separately.

However, the sharp contrast between 'cognitive' and 'affective' may be questioned. The term cognitive is normally taken to mean thinking or intellectual activity. However, some writers such as Fritjof Capra (1997: 175) understand cognition as a much wider concept that includes emotion, perception, activity and process. According to this view, cognition is more than thinking. Capra and others would see this approach as holistic – overcoming the duality inherent in Cartesianism, which understands mind, matter and life as separate spheres. All of nature 'perceives', according to Capra.

Can someone be satisfied with their life and yet be leading a 'bad' life in some sense? If life satisfaction is defined to include satisfaction with the state of one's life relative to one's moral evaluation of that life – then someone who is conscious of living a generally 'bad' life cannot be generally satisfied. However, one could be convinced that his or beliefs and actions correspond to the good and yet be immoral from some other moral point of view (e.g. actively racist, violent, deceitful etc.) This is not the same as saying that someone who is not able to live a fulfilling life for reasons such as ill-health, poverty or social exclusion is necessarily living a bad life.

Subjective well-being is relevant to the achievement of 'the good life' to the extent that values, goals, choices and behaviour are largely consistent. However, it is conceivable that one person's behaviour is moral as judged by them while remaining intrinsically immoral to others. Consequently, others may consider high levels of reported happiness in a negative light. In the interplay between individual freedom of judgement and the restrictions placed by social groups there is likely to be some uncertainty about what constitutes a socially acceptable type of behaviour.

Can we suppose that in the long-run, and on average across different population groups within a society, some convergence of subjective and objective well-being is probable through a process of socialisation and internalisation of social norms and shared values? Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) think so:

> It appears that people's SWB is to some degree related to their fulfilment of their values. To the extent that this is true, value-based quality of life and SWB merge. The ideal society socializes its citizens to cherish certain values. In such a society, the citizens are likely to achieve SWB by working toward those values.

It is unlikely that individual or societies can sustain high average levels of SWB if behaviour is seriously out of line with societal values and goals. Much of the impact of external environment on people's well-being is filtered through the socially-conditioned thought processes and learned behaviour of individuals.

2.5 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined human well-being as a process involving more than a mere transitory experience of pleasure or mental contentment. Well-being involves a coherence between the moral ends and chosen values of an individual or society, and the objective circumstances of life as subjectively perceived. Hence, subjective well-being cannot be equated with the mere experience of pleasure or the avoidance of pain. Well-being involves an *evaluation* according to some set of values that are culturally grounded.

Following the writings of classic philosophy and many contemporary philosophers and social scientists, I propose that the concept of human well-being be regarded as an end in itself. Accepting that there are values that go beyond a purely empirical, positive and subjective evaluation of life we need to recognise the limitations of a purely subjective approach to assessing well-being. However, a thoroughly immoral and dysfunctional society of individuals with high achievement levels of SWB would be unlikely to survive for any considerable length of time. We continue to live in hope that some equilibrating mechanisms are at work in pulling societies back from extinction or self-destruction.

It is important to state that a particular focus on subjective well-being represents a strong value statement. Diener and other researchers observe that in North America and much of Europe, culturally prized traits such as self-esteem and personal autonomy are major correlates of measurable subjective well-being. By contrast, in more collectivist cultures, personal feelings of distinctiveness and autonomy are less important in shaping subjective well-being. The accent, there, is on conforming to social norms and expectations and living in harmony with the group.

I have chosen to focus primarily on the measurement of subjective well-being in Part B of this study since it is relatively easier to consider and measure it compared with available indicators of objective well-being (see, for example, Appendix II). At the same time, I accept that this approach represents a severe restriction on the assessment of well-being in societies through, for example, its neglect of distributional issues as well as the capabilities approach found in the work of Amartya Sen.

The key to human well-being is in a fruitful and active combination of capabilities (the freedom to) and functionings (the realisation of). But, which types of functionings and capabilities are most useful to the attainment of well-being? In the next Chapter, I examine what the research literature has to say about the causes of subjective well-being prior to putting some of the research literature findings to the empirical test in Part B.

Chapter 3

Functionings Relevant to Subjective Well-Being

'Res severa est verum gaudium' – (True joy is a serious thing) - Seneca Philosophus, Epistulae

3.1 An overview of the main areas of interest

What makes people experience well-being? Faced with uncertainty about these questions, Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics)[15] commented:

> We must therefore survey what we have already said, bringing it to the test of the facts of life, and if it harmonizes with the facts we must accept it, but if it clashes with them we must suppose it to be mere theory.

A range of factors impinges on subjective well-being (SWB). Physical health, access to essential material goods, satisfying relationships with others and an overall sense of inner contentment evidently matter. But what is the relative impact of different factors? What is the relative importance of genetic, personality and social environmental factors? Caution is needed in interpreting any empirical findings based on partial, one-off or cross-sectional data with respect to the impact of genes or environmental conditioning. As Diener et al. (1999: 279) observe:

> …heritability studies tell us about the heritability of long-term SWB among a sample of people in modern Western society, but they do not provide absolute, unchangeable estimates of genetic effects.

Early empirical work in the 1960s placed considerable stress on social environment. Wilson (1967: 294) concluded that:

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[15] *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 10: 8

> The very happy person emerges as a young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence.

In this Chapter, I group explanatory factors under seven broad headings:

- Genetic givens (3.2);
- Physical attributes (3.3);
- Intra-personal factors (3.4);
- Social relations – Inter-personal (3.5);
- Social relations – Institutional and Cultural (3.7);
- Economic and residential environment (3.6); and
- Interactions among the above.

3.2 Genetic factors

Early studies suggested that most of the variation in SWB could be explained by genetic factors. However, recent studies of identical-twin siblings (monozygotic) suggest that the proportion accounted for by genetic factors is high – but not as high as previously thought. Genetically identical twins report high levels of correlation in SWB even when they are raised apart. For example, Tellegen et al. (1988) found that genes accounted for about 40% of the variance in positive emotions and 55% of the variation in negative emotions (respectively, pleasant and unpleasant affects) in monozygotic twins. By contrast, shared family environment accounted for only 22 and 2% of positive and negative emotional states, respectively.

Neuroscientists believe that genetically-influenced levels of serotonin and dopamine in the brain are correlated with SWB (refer to Donovan and Halpern, 2002: 13). Recent progress in *Magnetic Resonance Imaging* (MRI) has enabled scientists to observe changes in neural activity as moods and feelings change. Feelings of happiness are clearly identified with particular areas of the brain

(Davidson, 2000). Davidson quotes the Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama and Cutler, 1998) who speaks of an optimistic and realist approach to dealing with human problem:

> the systematic training of the mind – the cultivation of happiness, the genuine inner transformation by deliberately selecting and focusing on positive mental states and challenging negative mental states – is possible because of the very structure and function of the brain.

Happy persons tend to accept, adjust and 'work at' problems. By contrast, unhappy persons are likely to be more fatalistic and more inclined to blame others or external circumstances. Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) suggest that genetic factors may account for as much as 80% of variation in happiness at the individual level. A complex interaction between genetic, social, psychological and other environmental factors is at work. Resilience adjustment mechanisms are also operating so that individuals adjust to adverse life events and shocks to restore balance and constancy of well-being. Notwithstanding the prevalence of large and stable differences in reported SWB across countries, a review of the recent research literature by Diener et al. (1999) suggests that there is no evidence that a particular genetic pool is conducive to higher levels of SWB cross-nationally or over time.

3.3 Physical attributes (including health, age and sex)

Using cross-sectional and cross-country data sources, Veenhoven (2001) concludes that the *strongest* correlations of subjective well-being are at the psychological and physiological levels as distinct from inter-personal or social-comparative levels. Diener et al. (1999), from their review of the literature, conclude that subjective evaluations of health seems to matter more than objective measures of health (such as rates of morbidity). Individuals may return from the extremes of dissatisfaction toward a baseline arising from habituation. Nevertheless, Diener et al. (1999: 287) report that, in cases of *serious* disability or illness, individuals do not recover an initial level of well-being prior to the onset of illness or disability. In this case, habituation is inversely related to the level of seriousness of illness or disability. People generally need a basic level of health at which pain does not interfere with activities.

Expectations and personal values are likely to be significant influencing factors on SWB; however, the detail of these will vary considerably over the lifecycle as circumstances relating to health, work and intimate relationships change. As expected, the inclusion of health in studies of well-being is an important explanatory factor in association with age. From a cross-country study of SWB, Helliwell (2002) found that a 1% increase in average self-reported health status is associated with a 1% increase in measured SWB.

When a broader measure of well-being such as life satisfaction is used, the relationship of well-being to age is more difficult to identify. The correlates of SWB are therefore likely to vary considerably over the lifecycle. Not surprisingly, Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) found that academic achievement and the quality of romantic relationships were major correlates of SWB among young college students in the US, whereas job satisfaction figured as a major factor among working adults. They found that the extent and quality of social participation was relatively more important among the retired.

Differences between men and women in levels of reported SWB are not large. However, there appears to be greater variability among women – possibly reflecting, in part, the influence of closer social and personal ties. Diener and Fujita (1995) report that women are more likely to draw on those resources relevant to goals in the domains of personal relationships. Men, by contrast, draw on resources to reach goals in relation to expert knowledge acquisition or social-status achievement.

3.4 Intra-personal factors

Those with lower levels of reported SWB tend to believe in 'fate' and doubt their own capacity to change and adapt. A sense of self-realisation, goal completion and integration of desire (will), understanding and memory underpin 'self-efficacy'. *Personality* is believed to be an important factor in influencing SWB. Traits such as optimism, extroversion, self-esteem, practical and emotional intelligence and the capacity to adapt have been identified as significant explanatory factors. Confounding factors are at work in any analysis through the presence of unmeasured factors that are correlated with personality, behaviour and attitude as well as outcomes such as SWB. Self-esteem is a strong correlate of SWB – especially in individualistic cultures (Diener et al. 1999: 294). Diener et al. (1999: 283) suggest that variations in personality may explain some of the differences in the impact of social comparisons with more positive and extravert personalities according less importance to social status than other personality types. Individuals who have a greater need to compete with others or attain a status of social respect and prestige are more vulnerable to inter-personal comparison effects.

Educational attainment is related to SWB. However, various studies suggest that the impact of education is slight once other factors are controlled for (Diener et al., 1999). A review of the literature by Donovan and Halpern (2002: 29) indicates that education does not seem to be positively correlated with SWB at an aggregate cross-country level. Positive bivariate correlations between education and SWB can be explained by the intermediating effect of occupation and income. Once these are controlled for, education seems to have little effect on SWB. Diener et al. (1999: 293) suggest that education may even lower SWB if it raises expectations that cannot be met. Evidence from the United States and Britain reviewed by Blanchflower and Oswald (2000) supports the view that social ties may be more important for SWB than education and income – at least for average to above-average levels of income. Myers (1999) finds similar results for the USA on the impact of close personal relations and social ties on subjective reporting of quality of life.

The empirical research suggests that *religious* persons are more likely to be happy even if the causal mechanisms and pathways are unclear. Various studies cited in Myers (1993), Diener et al. (1999: 289) as well as (Argyle, 1999) suggest a generally positive and statistically significant impact for religion. This holds in various studies both of religious belief as well as practice – controlling for income, age and marital status. How religion impacts is unclear. Belief in God may provide assurance, protection and inspiration. On the other hand, it is likely that different kinds of belief may impact differently; excessive or inappropriate guilt, fear or submission to hierarchical control could lower SWB. The frequency and intensity of engagement with religious services may be more effective than a statistical measure of belief in, or stated importance of, God. It may be that social support offered by faith-based networks provides an important clue.

Argyle concludes, from a large meta-survey, that social support seems to be the main avenue by which religion impacts positively on measures of happiness. He (Argyle, 1999: 367) also cites a number of other studies which suggest that belief in an after-life and the maintenance of a direct and personal relationship with God have positive and independent effects on happiness independent of the mediating effect of social support in religious-based communities. However, this positive impact may be stronger for older people than for young people.

3.5 Inter-personal relations

3.5.1 Social support and well-being

'Woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help' says the author of the biblical *Book of Ecclesiastes*. Inter-personal relationship affect subjective well-being in a number of possible ways:

- Presence, attention, warmth, listening, advice and support that reinforce a sense of self-worth and respect;
- Information, norm and sanction feedback that reinforce a sense of respect for others as well as acceptance or affirmation of oneself; and
- Active engagement towards ends that reinforce a sense of belonging, purpose and identity.

In his cross-country meta-analysis, Veenhoven (2001) concluded that *inter-personal relationship* variables such as ties to family, other relatives, friends and others accounted for around 10% of variation in measured SWB at the individual level – just about the same as the amount of variation attributed to positional variables such as income, education and employment. However, the *quality* of inter-personal relationships could matter more the *quantity* of social ties. Halpern (2004: 115) says that it is likely that:

> the perceived quality of support tends to have a greater impact on mortality than the absolute quantity of social interaction, which is a similar result to that found in the literature on mental health (Blazer, 1982)

Blazer (1982: 97) has defined social support as ‘roles and available attachments’ within a social network (e.g. presence of a spouse or partner); frequency of social interaction within the network; perceived sense of support, belonging, intimacy; and instrumental support (specific services provided by others in a network). The quality of social support is also bound up with the nature and definition of social space. My radius of trust and known ‘trustworthies’ is correlated with distance – physical as well as symbolic. Halpern (2004) reports on the impact of neighbourhood concentration effects giving particular ethnic groups health and well-being advantage due to proximity of ethnic or kindred groups. Curran reports similar impacts in a study of Irish migrant communities in Britain (Curran, 2003).

Which kinds of inter-personal relationship are most effective? First, I consider marriage.

3.5.2 Marriage and well-being

Marriage or relationships similar to marriage provide important social supports and buffers favourable to life satisfaction. This emerges in study after study (e.g. Mastekaasa, 1994; Myers, 1999; Argyle, 1999; Diener et al., 1999; Lucas et al., 2003) which confirm that the married are, on average, happier than those who are not married, separated or divorced - although the divorced fare better than the separated to the extent they adjust to a new relationship. Alvin Toffler (1970: 341-2) has referred to ‘personal stability zones’ as areas of people’s lives such as home, job and community.

Marriage is strongly associated with higher levels of well-being and this relationship runs mainly from marriage to well-being rather than the other way around. For example in a study of over 20,000 people from pooled national surveys in nineteen countries, Mastekaasa (1994) reports a strong correlation with marriage compared to other predictors including age, gender or income. Various studies of marriage, gender and happiness cited by Myers (1999: 379) find no overall difference between men and women in reported levels of happiness.[16] Even though they found some statistical evidence for selection effects among the married (the happy are more prone to marry, on average), Lucas et al. (2003) also found evidence for an independent impact of marriage on life satisfaction using longitudinal data. Earlier longitudinal studies (e.g. Lee, Seccombe and Shehan, 1991) indicated that marriage has a strong and independent effect on SWB. Moreover, children of intact marriages also seem to be happier than children of divorced or highly conflictual marriages (Diener, Suh and Oishi, 1997).

De Vaus (2003) reports evidence from US studies suggesting that marriage may be more protective of mental health than cohabitation. However, this cannot be generalised due to the very specific cultural context in which marriage and cohabitation are viewed as well as the difficulties in arriving at a genuinely non-biased selection of cases for study. For example, Diener et al. (1999) report the results of various studies, which show that that in some 'individualist' societies (e.g. Australasia, North America or Northern Europe), those who are cohabiting can experience greater happiness, on average, than the married or single. However, in some 'collectivist' cultures, the reverse held true with cohabitating individuals experiencing lower SWB than either the married or single. In such societies, cultural norms inimical to cohabitation outside marriage may be a factor in lowering levels of SWB for those who are cohabiting.

Myers (1999: 379) sums up the evidence as follows:

[16] However, Myers accepts that a poor marital relationship can be more depressing for a woman than for her emotionally numbed husband. On average, men seem to derive higher emotional well-being (or positive affect) from being married than women; however, there is little difference with respect to the evaluation of life satisfaction or SWB.

> Throughout the Western world, married people of both sexes report more happiness than those never married, divorced, or separated.

The above findings, which involve different countries, survey methodologies, some longitudinal studies and controls for other variables such as personality and social background provide a reason to be sceptical about some of the results in research work by McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003) in their study of Irish families. They suggest that marriage, of itself, is irrelevant to personal well-being once other factors have been controlled for. They reported considerable variation in well-being within all family types studied. From this they concluded that the quality of relationships, including relational competence within a family or couple-relationship, is more important than the mere legal or recognised status of the relationship itself. When controlling for personality, social and other environmental factors, the unmarried (in families or relationships) were found to have similar levels of measured well-being to the married.

The authors conclude that care is needed in drawing any general conclusions about the positive impact of marriage or cohabitation on personal well-being. Even with a generally positive correlation, those who are separated, divorced or single can draw on many other resources including personal ability to seek personal well-being. They conclude (2003: 10-11) that:

> …the physical and psychological well-being of parents and children are shaped primarily by family processes, particularly involving the ability to resolve conflicts and arguments, and by the personality traits of parents. The type of family in which one lives – such as a one- or two-parent household and whether the parents are married, cohabiting, single or separated – has virtually no impact on family well-being.

Myers (1999) points out that ‘ more important than being married is the quality of the marriage’. However, Myers also points out that most marriages are happy ones. The Irish study draws attention to the importance of mediating factors such as inter-personal skills, social support and personality in addressing conflict or loneliness. It also echoed the findings of international research on the importance of the structure of relations, emotional expression and sharing of roles within families (e.g. between men and women). All of these are strongly related to culture and assumed gender roles (Diener et al., 1999: 290).

The apparent contradiction between the findings found in McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003) and other international research may arise from the nature of well-being measurement in the former. The Irish study used four different types of measures: physical, psychological, quality of couple relationships and quality of parent-child relationships. In using a combination of six scales to measure psychological well-being based on 18 question items, in all, they mixed psychological traits of autonomy, the balance of positive and negative emotionality, psychological independence, self-efficacy and self-acceptance with success in relationships with others including the quality of mother-child relationships. Hence, a strong positive correlation between personality traits (causative) and psychological well-being (outcomes) is not surprising. The conflation of causative and outcome latent variables may have obscured the measured impact of other variables including family structure. Looking to the future, longitudinal analysis based on surveys such as the Irish *National Longitudinal Study on Children* would be highly useful in testing, for a given cohort of persons, the independent effect of family status over time.

It is too early to say how changes in patterns of marriage and living together will affect SWB in Ireland in the long-run. If the experience in other countries is indicative, changes in marital stability may have transitory impacts on SWB for some in the population after which adjustment and habituation occurs, including reconstitution of intimacy in a second or further relationship. The well-being of people in second relationships and their children may depend, to some degree, on wider social attitudes based on sanction or acceptance. Hence, the mediation of cultural norms and the presence of significant supportive institutional structures is highly relevant to the impact of family structure and relationships on well-being of family members.

3.5.3 Other social networks and well-being

Mitchell (1969 and 1974) and Caplan and Killilea (1976) have undertaken research in relation to the role of informal social networks in mediating outcomes of interest to social workers. Many writers such as Blazer (1982) have explored the role of social networks in mediating psychological stress and mental stress. After marriage, support of friends and others emerge as the next most important cause of SWB Argyle (1999: 362). However, the nature of social support varies according to group and need. For example, workplace friends are more important in terms of support in relation to work issues and problems. In the case of working class communities, kin and neighbours seem to be relatively more important than friends (Hall, 1999).

Many researchers have also identified a significant role for social support networks in mediating physical and mental health outcomes – but not without some controversy where they have taken opposing views on the significance of evidence in relation to the socio-psychological determinants of health (Kawachi et al. 1999; Lynch et al., 2001). Research on schizophrenia has shown a link between the availability of social support and how well individuals with schizophrenia adapt and function in the community.[17] Not surprisingly such people generally tend to have small social networks. However, there is evidence of increased independence and better adaptive functioning among those who have relatively larger networks, greater frequency of contact and more interconnections among network members. This is especially true if at least one member of the social network is more socially competent than the person with schizophrenia. The point, here, is not that schizophrenia is necessarily caused by absence of social contact, but that the presence, quality and extent of social support may be important for individuals in recovery or successful adaptation.

Brown and Harris (1978) confirmed a positive association, at the micro level, between supportive relationships and mental health. Elderly people living alone and without friends or relatives have a relatively greater risk of developing dementia or Alzheimer's disease, other factors being constant. A survey carried out by the Stockholm *Gerontology Research Centre* showed that, among other factors, an extensive social network protects against dementia (Fratiglioni et al., 2000). The importance of satisfying contact with others, especially immediate

[17] See http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/baschap6.cfm [consulted June 2004]

family and children was highlighted. This seemed to slow the growth in dementia, even if the contact was relatively infrequent.

3.6 'Economic' factors

Disentangling the effects of economic income from other factors, over time and for different groups in a given population is difficult. It is necessary to distinguish between four different types of comparisons:

A1 Comparisons, at the individual level *at one point in time within a country* or social grouping, of income with reported levels of SWB (cross-sectional and within-country data);

B1 Comparisons, at the individual level, *over time within a country* or social grouping, of income level or changes in income with changes in reported levels of SWB (longitudinal data or aggregate-average cross-sectional data *at different points in time*);

A2 Comparisons, at the individual or country-average level, *at one point in time across countries* or social groupings, of income with reported levels of SWB (cross-sectional, cross-country data);

B2 Comparisons, at the individual level or country-average level, *over time across countries*, of levels or changes in national or individual income with changes in reported levels of SWB (longitudinal data or aggregate-average cross-sectional, cross-country data at different points in time).

The evidence for a strong impact of income on SWB at the individual, *cross-sectional* level at one point in time is weak (type A1 comparison). The empirical part of this study will focus on A1. This provides a very limited view of the relationship – but it is the best we have from existing data sources in

Ireland.[18] If data were available at the individual level (through longitudinal studies), it would be possible to test the evidence for B1 type data. Internationally, there is some evidence for diminishing returns to higher income beyond very low levels of income (B1).

At the cross-country level, income and SWB are positively correlated at one point in time across countries (A2) – but mainly for lower levels of income – additions to national-average SWB become less as countries grow beyond a certain level. Inglehart (1997) and Diener and Oishi (2000) have identified a strong curvilinear relationship between level of income (GNP per capita) and life satisfaction. Average life satisfaction by country rises sharply at low levels of average country-level income per capita. However, beyond an income threshold of around $10,000 per capita in the mid-1990s the increase in life satisfaction falls off. There is some variation in levels of life satisfaction for given levels of average income per capita. For example, countries of the former Union of Soviet Socialistic Republics such as Georgia and Azerbaijan record very low levels of SWB compared with Ghana, Nigeria and Bangladesh, which had broadly similar levels of income per capita in the 1990s.

Analysis of growth in GDP per capita through time indicates a poor match with growth in SWB (B2). Fast growth in GDP per capita between 1946 and 1990 in France, Japan and the United States, for example, was not accompanied by any increase in average levels of reported SWB (Diener and Suh, 1997).

The prevalence of poor returns to additional income over time, at the individual and collective levels, suggests the existence of equilibrating factors that cancel out the initial impact of a change in income. This seems to hold true for increases occurring in a medium to high range of income. However, as might

[18] Any sources containing panel data such as the *Living in Ireland Survey* do not contain questions on life satisfaction or well-being.

be expected, individuals at very low or below-average levels of income do seem to show a long term increase in SWB. Above that level, individuals seem to adapt to higher (or lower) level of income eventually. Hence, a convergence to some baseline seems to be at work for these individuals. It is likely that expectations and perceptions of adequacy – within a social setting – shift as incomes increase – suggesting a partial illusory aspect to income growth at the individual level. People's view of what constitutes a necessary range of goods changes as they experience greater wealth change. Layard (2003a) ascribes this to two influences: *habituation* and *jealousy*.

Jealousy is probably related to culture and personality. Some personality types (and some cultures) may be more prone to anxiety of status and inter-personal comparison. Are people generally happier if others are economically better off without any change in their living standards? There is evidence that people enjoy lower levels of SWB if others in their proximate society have higher incomes. This may reflect a jealousy effect; it may also arise from the existence of inequalities that are perceived as unjust.

Habituation describes the natural human tendency to adapt to changed circumstances by adjusting behaviour and expectations. Hence, those who become rich, married or successful in some other domain of life experience transitory gains in SWB only to return to a normal baseline after some time of adaptation. However, a loss of income, marriage or other good would seriously lower SWB at least in the short-term. This is close to the notion of dynamic equilibrium in Headey and Wearing (1989) to be discussed below.

Donovan and Halpern (2002: 18-19) have suggested that the impact of relativities may outweigh the impact of absolute income – especially at medium to high levels of economic development. They also point to the impact of rising aspirations and wants parallel to rising income; the net effect being a dampening of SWB. Rivalry effects are most acutely felt in unequal societies. Conspicuous consumption or raised awareness of other's living standards can engender unhappiness and a desire to compete and over-take others. Putnam (2000: 333) reports that human capital (proxied by formal education) and social capital (proxied by networks and associated norms of reciprocity) yield increases in happiness at both individual and more aggregate levels. Average regional-level income impacts on well-being much less than education, health or social capital. Holding other things constant, an increase in average income at the US state level does not increase the reported happiness of individuals. By contrast, State level increases in human or social capital have positive impacts on happiness.

An important mediator of income is the social status, self-esteem and social access offered by paid employment. The quality of that work environment is also important. These comprise:

- A sense of self-efficacy and individual skill-use;
- The nature of inter-personal interactions;
- Supportive and empowering supervision;
- Status, security and clarity of position within organisation; and
- Physical security.

There is likely to be a strong correlation between work satisfaction and overall life satisfaction. Longitudinal work indicates that the pathway of influence is likely to be in the direction of overall satisfaction to work satisfaction than the other way round. Lack of gainful employment or unemployment is strongly correlated with lower SWB in virtually all studies where such data are collected. For the unemployed, the loss of social status and contact is even more significant than the loss of income (Donovan and Halpern, 2002).

Research by the UK economist, Andrew Clark, indicates that lack of personal autonomy and opportunity for initiative is a major cause of job dissatisfaction and resulting job quitting among women and those under the age of 30 (Clarke, 2001). In general, across all groups, Clark reported a stronger impact of non-monetary factors such as autonomy compared with hours or work and pay. Veenhoven (2001) found that particular occupations such as managers and professionals have higher levels of SWB. This may reflect the beneficial impact of autonomy at work in these occupations.

Finally, a longitudinal study of over ten thousand British civil service ('The Whitehall Study') over a ten-year period found that death rates from cardiovascular disease were lowest in the administrative and managerial grades and highest in the lowest grade (Stansfeld et al., 1999). Those in higher grades felt more in control of their work and better supported by friends and colleagues so that, although their lives appeared more stressful, they were better able to cope. They reported more hobbies and interests outside work. Social support and control over one's work help protect mental health, whereas excessive job demands and the development of 'effort-reward imbalance' (ERI) are risk factors for future psychiatric disorder. An indicator of 'effort-reward imbalance' has been significantly related to the incidence of heart disease (Kuper, et al.2002).

3.7 Other factors

Culture together with institutional arrangements matter for the interpretations of all of the reported findings so far. The case of 'individualist' and 'collectivist' cultures is important. In individualist cultures, for example, individuals are generally freer to pursue their individual interests where there is lower social sanction on self-actuation. However, in these cultures, the price of failure may be high since family support may be weaker. The co-existence of high levels of SWB in Northern Europe, compared to Mediterranean countries, alongside relatively higher rates of suicide and divorce might be explained in terms of greater dispersion around a (higher) mean – implying more casualties for those at the bottom end of the distribution. Cultural norms and public recognition of suicide may also be significant factors in explaining differences. As already suggested, divorce may represent less of a shock in individualist cultures.

Is the process of modernisation inevitably linked to anomie and a long-term decline in SWB? The evidence does not seem to support such a link. Veenhoven concludes from his analysis of developed and developing economies that modernisation, urbanisation, individualisation and what he terms 'informatisation' seem to be associated with higher levels of subjective well-being, controlling for differences in other variables including income. A key conclusion is that capacity to control one's own environment seems to be particularly important – especially in 'modern, individualised western societies' (Veenhoven, 2001: 20).

Institutions – political, legal and administrative – are important mediators of SWB. Although I am not primarily concerned, in this study, about the impact of society's political and legal arrangements on subjective well-being, a number of significant findings emerge from the research literature in this area. As might be expected, citizens of democracies in which there is rule of law and regulatory structures experience higher levels of life satisfaction. Helliwell (2001) reported, from data in the *European Values Survey,* that the quality of public governance and rule of law explain a significant part of the above-average level of SWB in Ireland compared with other European countries.

Various cross-country studies confirm a generally positive association between measures of political stability and democracy and levels of reported subjective well-being (Donovan and Halpern 2002: 30). In addition to the benefits of a stable and fair working environment for all citizens, it seems that the capacity of individuals and groups to change the immediate environment matters. For example, in his study of the practice of direct democracy across Swiss Cantons, the economist Bruno Frey found evidence that 'procedural utility' was at least as significant as 'outcome utility' in explaining life satisfaction. In other words, people's sense of empowerment, participation and access to political decision-making seems to matter as much as other factors in comparisons of life satisfaction across Cantons (Frey and Stutzer, 2000).

Timing factors are important in any empirical investigation of SWB. If we could observe individuals over a long period of time, is it likely that their average levels of subjective well-being would remain similar with short-term fluctuations arising from shifts in circumstances and temporary reactions and readjustments. Recent or current life events can have an important impact on observed SWB, though. The *dynamic equilibrium theory* (Diener et al. 1999; Headey and Wearing, 1989 and 1992) predicts that a shock-event which disturbs SWB (e.g. bereavement of a close relation or loss of job) has a temporary impact that leads to compensatory adjustments. Individuals habituate to new situations arising form change of work, health or relationships. Events such as marriage, obtaining a new job, promotion at work, college graduation seem to have only a transitory effect on SWB. However, adaptation to particularly adverse circumstances such as permanent job loss, bereavement of a spouse, or a severe health breakdown probably do have lasting affects on SWB.

The implication of through-time SWB-variability for individuals is that SWB estimates at one point in time will show much greater variance across individuals in response to influences and events that are short-term in nature. However, were estimates to be based on averages over a long period, there would be much less variability and, in all likelihood, a higher proportion of variance explained by environmental and genetic factors which are relatively stable. Evidence for these hypotheses comes from the weak correlation of age and social factors with reported happiness of life satisfaction. Hence, the elderly may have lower income, less freedom and poor health compared with younger people; yet, their reported SWB is as high (Diener, Suh and Oishi, 1997). Diener et al. (1999) suggest that adaptation to events is the product of natural evolution where humans learned to cope with the extremes of elation and despair through a process of adjustment of goals and behaviour.

It is reasonable to suppose that there are limits to the 'hedonic treadmill'.[19] In the nineteenth century, Durkheim had doubted that the advance of human civilization would inevitably increase happiness or that increases in happiness were limitless. Not unlike Aristotle, Durkheim distinguishes 'pleasure' from 'happiness' seeing in pleasure a particular and momentary experience.

[19] The hypothesis of the 'hedonic treadmill' maintains that individuals experience stable levels of subjective well-being in the long-run because, over time, they adapt to the most extreme positive and negative experiences.

3.8 Concluding remarks

There is no one single factor that produces high SWB. Although genetic predisposition seems to explain much of the variation in SWB across individuals, other factors including social environment are significant. Adaptation, coping strategies and the interaction between inherited disposition, environmental conditioning and self-determining response are at work in every situation. Life events such as *unemployment*, *divorce* or *ill-health* impact in a very significant and negative way on subjective well-being. Their negative impact may be primarily through feelings of lower self-esteem. However, these events are not random. Persons with particular types of personalities or values-orientation are likely to be more prone to adverse life events. Their impact is also mediated through *cultural* conditions and norms. Hence, care is needed in interpreting any of these findings due to the complex inter-play of culture, personality and social environment. Individuals can adapt to change and achieve.

Following Wilson's review of the happiness literature in the 1960s in which he believed the happy person to be well-paid, young, educated, religious and married, Diener et al. (1999: 295) sum up their review of the literature over the past three decades in the following terms:

> We would emphasise that the happy person is blessed with a positive temperament, tends to look on the bright side of things, and does not ruminate excessively about bad events, and is living in an economically developed society, has social confidants, and possesses adequate resources for making progress toward valued goals. Because research in the area is progressing rapidly, however, we know that this description will be rewritten in the decades ahead.

Hence, the capabilities and freedoms to attain well-being are based on many different functions. The evidence suggests that health, friends and fun matter more than fame and money especially if you have enough of the latter to get by! In the next three chapters I will explore the theme of human capabilities as a form of personal and inter-personal capital. In Part B, I will put some of the claims, hypotheses and international research findings described in this chapter to the empirical test using Irish cross-sectional data.

Chapter 4

Human Capabilities: Intangible Capital

... the chief importance of material wealth lies in the fact that, when wisely used, it increases the health and strength, physical, mental and moral, of the human race (Marshall, 1964[1890]: 161)

4.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, drawing on the review of literature on the causes of subjective well-being, the importance of social relationships and individual or psychological traits was stressed. I postulate that human freedom, capacity and relationship to others are fundamental to understanding subjective well-being. I understand human capabilities to refer to:

> the freedoms, efficacies, relationships and norms that enable individuals and groups to act in pursuit of the quality of living best suited to their needs, values and expectations.

Within this broad domain of human capability, particular capabilities reside mainly in individuals; others reside mainly in the relationships among individuals. It is useful to refer these capabilities to forms of personal or inter-personal *capital*. But, why should various types of human capability be considered as forms of 'capital'?

Typically, capital is used in the world of business and economics discourse as a tangible and 'alienable' good. It resides in the value of machines, tools and buildings that can be bought, sold and put to use in association with other 'factors of production' in creating goods and services that have value. In economics, the starting point for a consideration of 'capital' is, symbolically, a physical object that can be consumed both now and in the future to produce utility. Less frequently, the term capital is used to describe intangible assets resident in individuals, organisations or even non-market communities.

Particular social phenomena and individual psychological capacities have the characteristic of intangible capital in so far as they contribute to the well-being of societies and involve choices under conditions of uncertainty and scarcity. They differ radically from conventional physical capital or its symbolic representation in financial capital. In this chapter, I introduce the notions of human and social capital as types of intangible capital (4.4 and 4.5). However, why is the capital metaphor a useful one at all in considering well-being? I deliberately start out with a discussion of capital before considering social capital in more detail, because one of the most significant criticisms levelled at the (supportive) literature on social capital is its alleged lack of attention to the economic nature of capital (Fine, 2001).

4.2 Capital and sustainable well-being

I understand capital to refer to:

> Heterogeneous stocks of goods or relationships associated with a flow of effort over time, which are potentially 'productive' of some personal or social gain in the future.

Hence, relative to some personal or societal goal, effort and sacrifice over *time* are critical to meeting human need. In evaluating the implications of current public policy and community practice for sustainable development, time constitutes a crucial variable.

Sustainable development has been defined by the United Nations' *World Commission on Environment and Development* (Bruntland, 1987: 43) as:

> development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Renewing the stock of human and social capital may be just as important as renewing the stock of natural or physical capital in underpinning long-term trends in well-being. Social concerns have come more to the fore in recent discussions of sustainable development[20] – not just as facilitating factors in adapting to 'green' policies on consumption, taxation and the principle of 'user pays' – but in their own right as legitimate areas for analysis against a background of pressure on natural resources.

In the literature on sustainable development, a 'weak sustainability' perspective, suggests that different types of capital may substitute for each other, at least at the margin: sustainability requires maintaining the total 'stock' of resources, rather than each of its specific components. For example, physical and human capital may substitute, to some extent, for degradation in the natural and social environments. By contrast, a 'strong sustainability' requirement would demand that levels of each form of capital be maintained (Pearce and Atkinson, 1997). So, for example, a 'strong sustainability' requirement would maintain that a preservation of the stock of social capital is essential because substitution by other capitals is not feasible.

Shortfalls in investment in any of the forms of capital can undermine future opportunities for human well-being. Societies seek to invest in physical, human and social capital in ways that do not compromise future needs. An analogy can be drawn between climate change and social change. The saying attributed to native American-Indian sources seems to me to provide a useful understanding of sustainable development:

> Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children.[21]

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[20] The World Bank, OECD (2001) and the European Commission have increasingly championed the notion of social sustainability not just an adjunct of environmental concerns but as an important domain of capital erosion and growth in its own right.

[21] http://www.cinprograms.org/history/1600southwest.html [consulted June 2004]

There is an intricate inter-relationship between biological, cognitive and social dimensions of life. Sustainability is about sustaining what Fritjof Capra calls the 'entire web of life on which our long-term survival depends'. According to Capra (2002: 187), that which is sustained is:

> designed so that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures and technologies do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life.

Due respect for life in all of its forms including the rights of individuals and communities to self-determination and self-organisation is important for sustaining development. Accumulation of capital or maximisation of consumption in the short-term are not ends in themselves. Hence, in contrast to the typical way in which sustainable development is discussed in public debates with its almost complete focus on the natural environment and its associated outcomes (climate, bio-diversity, balanced development of investments), I suggest a broader perspective. We need to make human and subjective well-being and the freedoms individuals and groups enjoy to realise that well-being the target of policy and global interest. Hence, we need to be concerned about a wider range of 'capitals'.

4.3 Different types of capital

A key insight of the economist Gary Becker (1964) – and before him Alfred Marshall and Henry Sidgwick (1901: 126-141) – is that 'capital' does not have to reside exclusively in tangible or physical objects. Knowledge, skills, organisational culture, social culture and networks all matter for the productivity of enterprises or the effectiveness of a given community. An abundance of 'capitals' resides in the literature on business management and organisational theory. Typically, *intellectual capital* is understood by many as referring to:

- Human capital;
- Organisational or structural capital; and
- Customer capital.

Ben-Porath (1980) speaks of the F-connection (families, friends and firms) as critical factors in economic activity. Customer capital refers to the value of an organisation's relationship with customers. Organisational capital refers to the inherent values, relationships and practices of an organisation that contribute to performance. The latter includes such factors as strong internal and external networks based on partnership and trust. Structural or organisational capital is close in meaning to that of social capital and refers to the density, connectedness and linkage of various intra and inter-organisational networks as well as the number and quality of inter-personal relationships based on reciprocity and trust.

Together, various forms of capital contribute to organisational performance or production of value. The well-being of customers, employees and other stakeholders is part of the total value created by an organisation. The extension of capital into domains such as those of individual human skills and social relationships stretches the economist's notion (and imagination) of capital almost to breaking point for two reasons: (i) alienability of capital breaks down (e.g. skills cannot be directly transferred or sold); and (ii) quantifiability becomes difficult due to the nature of what is observed and compared. These issues come to the fore in considering human and social capital, as we will see in section 4.4, below.

Human capital is embedded in the social knowledge and skills of individuals and communities. Taking it one step further, social capital can be incorporated in the relationships among individuals and groups where stores of mutual knowledge and obligation carry the potential to generate useful production of goods, services, ideas and utility for those inside the relevant social networks as well as others (by way of spill-over effects). The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, referred to different kinds of capital – economic, cultural and social. He stated (1986: s242):

> It is in fact impossible to account for the structure and functioning of the social world unless one reintroduces capital in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory. Economic theory has allowed to be foisted upon it a definition of the economy of practices which is the historical invention of capitalism; and by reducing the universe of exchanges to mercantile exchange, which is objectively and subjectively oriented toward maximisation of profit, i.e., (economically) self-interested, it has implicitly defined the other forms of exchange as non-economic, and therefore disinterested.

Bourdieu emphasised that various social groups use economic capital to accumulate other forms of capital as well as to convert economic capital into social or cultural capital, (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Bourdieu never succinctly defined these forms of capital – but he broadened the notion of capital to reflect the role of culture, education, social norms and ties as potentially powerful mediating factors in reproducing social inequality. For him, economic, cultural and social capital become validated and recognised in a given social milieu giving rise to s*ymbolic capital.* The latter corresponds to the social honour, recognition and validity inherent in possession of, or access to, all other forms of capital.

At the interface between sociology and economics, Mark Granovetter writes of the embeddedness of economic transactions in social structures and concrete personal relationships. These have a history, life and continuity of their own (Granovetter and Swedber, 1992). Hence, it is possible to extend the ‘capital metaphor’ to include important dimensions of individual and shared human potential. However, care is needed in avoiding a reduction of human and social processes to mere empirical measures corresponding to marketable goods or symbols. We must know where to leave the metaphor behind when it risks launching into full-scale reductionism and ‘economic imperialism’.

4.4 Introducing social capital

Sociologist, James Coleman, (1988:S98) has defined social capital by its function. He wrote:

> It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – within the structure.

In his description, Coleman located it in the setting of families and surrounding communities and their impact on the development of young people. For example, he cites Glen Loury (Coleman, 1990: 300) as referring to it as:

> … the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organisation and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person.

Coleman underlines three crucial components of social capital as:

- obligations and expectations;
- information sharing in social networks; and
- sanctions and norms in social networks.

Although the term social capital is used by many researchers and some policy makers, it is less commonly used or understood among the general public. The concept is simple to grasp once it is described in terms of ordinary, everyday experience. It may be intangible and difficult to assess but this fact does not make its presence in social relationships any less important for personal or shared well-being.

A parent who can draw on networks of support in times of crisis to mind children or to seek advice knows that he or she has access to a vital resource. People who sense that their neighbourhoods are good places in which to live and in which 'people look out for each other' and help out experience the benefit of social capital at neighbourhood level.

A young person living in an inner city complex may have an extensive network of peers, family and friends that offer support, advice and information. However, he or she may lack contact with people from outside the immediate area or social circle. This may represent an impediment to finding a job or access to wider social opportunities.

A teacher relies on good relationships with students, parents and the wider community around a school to reach higher school standards. Part of these relationships may concern the communication of important shared norms and values such as commitment to learning, self-discipline and the common good. The ‘social capital’ of a learning community or school is more than just the individual knowledge or skill of teachers, students and parents/guardians.

A company CEO who relies on an extensive network of colleagues, acquaintances, old school ties, golf club friends, etc, can draw on crucial exchanges of information to seek out new ideas, check out a potential hire or simply keep up to date with what is going on in her industry or wider social networks. This also constitutes a form of ‘capital’.

A neighbourhood community in which people feel at home, part of some collective identity or pride of place and history and capable of acting together to achieve common aims (‘collective efficacy’) is likely to be a better, safer and happier environment for young and old alike. Such a community can mobilise this ‘capital’ in times of environmental disaster, personal tragedy or economic shock as well as at other times.

More formally, social capital has been defined in the OECD Report, The Well-Being of Nations(OECD, 2001: 41) as:

> networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.

Although differences arise among users of the term in relation to a precise definition, there is broad agreement that trust, norms (of reciprocity) and social sanctions are at the core of the concept.

Robert Putnam and many other writers on social capital prefer a ‘lean and mean’ definition based on social networks and associated reciprocity. Others seem to use a broader definition in which various types of cultural norms and public institutions are included (e.g. Elinor Ostrom). In practice, formal and semi-formal institutions are difficult to disentangle from informal norms of behaviour as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Rather than seeking to provide a precise and universal definition of social capital, it may be more helpful to draw attention to the resourcefulness of self-organised human networks. A description of the exact nature of these resources could be left to local discretion. Consequently, the following open-ended understanding of social capital could help to inform debate rather than prescribe a universal and watertight definition:

Social capital refers to resources inherent in self-organised human networks based on reciprocal

- expectations and obligations (of support, engagement, delivery) [TRUST];
- communication of information, knowledge, informal norms, sanctions and understandings [VALUES]; and
- belonging [IDENTITY]

that facilitate collective action.

The focus of this understanding is on the ways in which resources in self-organised human networks contribute to solving collective action problems (the attainment of shared objectives). By drawing attention to self-organised human networks, it is possible to limit the notion of social capital to particular forms of human interaction. According to this understanding, social capital does not refer to any type of social arrangement. Rather, it refers to those types of relationships that are primarily based on reciprocity, voluntary engagement and self-regulation (even if some of its norms are externally imposed). Networks based on volunteering or cultural obligation in the community provide one example. Networks of informal social support among family members are another. Self-organised networks of mutual support, norm- or information-sharing among internal staff of a Government Department represent yet another type of social capital.

4.5 Introducing human capital

Human capital has emerged as an important concept in various international agencies including the European Commission, World Bank and OECD. The term is not widely used in an Irish public or political context. Where it is used, it is usually associated with the beneficial impact of education or training (as distinct from all types of learning) on economic growth or individual labour market earnings. Hence, 'human capital' finds its home firmly under the heading of *education for economic competitiveness*. This, in my view, is an overly limited application of the term. At the under end of the debate, there is an unease about 'human capital' as a dark Trojan horse seeking a reduction of learning to formal education and formal education to the 'needs' of the economy and/or individual aspirations for employment or gain in earnings (e.g. Sen, 1999: 293). These concerns are legitimate to the extent that the concept is misused or misunderstood.

An expansionist view of 'human Capital' is already in train. For example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, in its publication of *The Well-Being of Nations* in 2001, took a decidedly broad view of human capital. It defined it as (OECD, 2001: 18):

> The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.

The above definition acknowledged the potential of human capital to contribute, not only to what it termed economic well-being, but all aspects of human well-being for which individuals and societies undertake investment in learning. While acknowledging that there were many alternative definitions of 'human capital,' the concept was defined in a more parsimonious[22] way in an earlier

[22] However, OECD (1998) contained a summary of evidence about the broader personal and social impact of human capital, notwithstanding the narrow definition of human capital used in Chapter 1 of that publication.

publication, *Investment in Human Capital*, as 'the knowledge, skills, competences and other attributes embodied in individuals that are relevant to economic activity' OECD (1998: 10).

In its 1998 publication, the OECD rejected the criticism that such terminology debases human dignity by 'likening people to packages of knowledge and skill, little different from machinery components' (OECD, 1998: 10). Instead, it argued that the concept 'powerfully emphasises how important people have become in knowledge- and competence-based economies'. Nevertheless, the very use of the term competence is suggestive of a competitive world in which competence – personal, social and economic - is a key success factor in labour and product markets.[23]

The definition of human capital used by OECD emphasised the importance of a wide range of human capacities including non-cognitive skills and attributes as well as knowledge acquired through informal learning experiences. Other work by OECD (Rychen and Salganik, 2001) on the conceptualisation of skills and key competencies has stressed the need for a wide perspective on the following levels:

- Social demands (competencies viewed as responses to external stimulii and social relevance);
- Social or group context (acknowledging the cultural, local and specific environment in which skills are acquired and used, and by implication, assessed); and
- Mental processes (recognising the interaction between cognitive process, 'learning-by-doing' and relationship to the external environment).

[23] The words competence and compete derive from the same root word in Latin – *competere* – *com-* meaning 'with' and *petere* meaning 'to strive or seek after.'

Agencies such as the World Bank, European Commission and OECD frequently employ the term human capital to emphasise the investment nature of public (and private) spending on education and training. Many commentators have pointed to the need for its integration into a better accounting framework covering key social, personal and economic costs and benefits of such investment (OECD, 1996).

While economists are more keen to measure and use 'human capital' in explaining economic outcomes than in theorising about its nature, it can be argued that all aspects of the natural, physical and human environment that enter into the 'production' of human well-being are candidates for being called 'capital'. Bourdieu has made the case, convincingly in my view, for recognising capital 'in all its forms and not solely in the one form recognised by economic theory'.

4.6 Complementarity of human and social capital

The pioneers of the concept from Hanifan to Coleman and Bourdieu paid particular attention to the complementary role of community and learning in school-family-community networks. However, it cannot be assumed that human and social capital are necessarily complementary in each specific case. For example, strong familial or ethnic ties might inhibit individuals or groups (e.g. women) from pursuing further studies or social advancement through self-directed learning. On the other side of the relationship, a narrow, individual focus on education may isolate individuals and groups from their immediate communities and reinforce a sense of exclusion or isolation.

The balance of empirical evidence (reviewed in OECD, 2001), however, suggests that communities that are rich in social capital (as measured by higher rates of community involvement and trust) tend to record higher rates of participation in education as well as higher school achievement (used as proxy measures of human capital). This finding is also contained in Part B of this Study where a strongly positive correlation between proxy measures of human and 'formal' social capital is reported using the results of the NESF Survey of Social Capital (chapter 8). There are good theoretical and practical reasons for such complementarity. Knowing is essentially a relationship among subjects; knowing is social. We are innately both learning and social creatures by virtue of evolutionary development (Abbott and Ryan, 2000). Relationships of trust and reciprocal engagement presuppose particular skills and attributes of individuals. In the other direction, learning habits and effective learning and knowledge transfer presuppose a social setting in which people can learn in relationship with others.

To know some *thing* is to connect that 'thing' with other 'things'. 'Things' may refer to persons, events, ideas or procedures for achieving some aim. None of these is learned except with reference to prior learning. The subject learns by integrating, connecting and appropriating some object. The 'what' of knowing is part of the person or entity who knows. It is more than propositional knowledge – mere facts or codified knowledge. It also refers to the embodied 'what' in practice and behaviour.

Philosopher and theologian, Jürgen Moltman draws attention to two complementary realities in knowing or learning: persons or subjects who are alike know those who are alike; difference is known only by persons or subjects who are different. Learning is inextricably tied up with *correspondence* (implying affirmation, unity, continuity) among subjects that share similarity of pattern and with *contradiction* (implying pain, conflict or '*agon'* in classical Greek) among subjects that are not alike (Moltman, 1991: 169). Hence, Motlman (1991: 171) is not surprised that the Greek words '*mathein'* (to learn) and '*pathein'* (to suffer) are frequently brought together in many sayings. To know someone is to enter, to some extent, into their world of suffering and constructed meaning.

John Stuart Mill identified a similar relationship between learning and difference when he wrote (1987: 581):

> It is hardly possible to over-rate the value ….of placing human beings in contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar…Such communication has always been, and is peculiarly in the present age, one of the primary sources of progress.

4.7 Strong and weak capital tests

Some have objected to use of the term social or human capital (Fine and Green, 2000). These objections refer to a range of concerns including the risk that social processes and phenomena are extracted from their particular cultural contexts and treated as economic or market-based capital for the achievement of some outcome. Others have pointed to possible confusion around the concepts of 'stock' (capital) and 'flow' (investments). For example, is volunteering part of the stock of social capital or a flow of investment? And, are the notions of investment, stock and returns meaningful as applied to non-market based activity such as learning, schooling, volunteering or trusting?

Investments in skills or social networks may be conscious or unconscious. Unconscious investment may occur when knowledge or social networks and obligations are developed as a by-product of other activities. Sobel (2002) makes a case for a distinction between social capital that is formed consciously as a result of deliberation, calculation and sacrifice and other types of social capital. Calculative, strategising and conscious rational choice behaviour is not an essential requirement for social or human investing-behaviour to add to intangible capital. Much social interaction, trust and reciprocity is non-calculative but, nevertheless, related to people's interests and needs. It would be more appropriate to refer to such behaviour as unconscious calculation based on experience, habit and inheritance.

The figurative or metaphorical potential of social capital should not be under-rated. The first known contemporary use of the term 'social capital' (Farr, 2004) was by Lyda Hanifan, a US school reformer in the early decades of the twentieth century. He used the term, specifically, to describe the importance of goodwill and community in rural renewal. Hanifan (1916: 130) wrote:

> In the use of the phrase social capital I make no reference to the usual acceptation of the term capital, except in a figurative sense. I do not refer to real estate, or to personal property or to cold cash, but rather to that in life which tends to make these tangible substances count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely, goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit, the rural community, whose logical center is the school. In community building as in business organization and expansion there must be an accumulation of capital before constructive work can be done.

The 'figurative sense' in social capital (and human capital) is best appreciated if the notion of capital is subject to a series of verification tests. I suggest that a 'strong capital test' encompasses a full set of requirements for some phenomena to qualify as capital in the sense used by all economists. A 'weak capital test' might dispense, in part or entirely, with particular criteria – for example – quantifiability and alienability. According to what I call the *strong capital test*, some thing, object or relationship is 'capital' if it is:

- *Scarce* as a means to achieve specified goals requiring conscious choice;
- *Productive* in terms of utility, satisfaction, well-being or good – as defined by individuals or groups;
- *Prospective* in offering a flow of benefit in the future;
- *Quantifiable* – so that it can be measured through symbolic reduction to a single and discrete *numéraire* (implying some measure of personal or social observation and control); and
- *Alienable* – so that it can be externalised, separated (implying some measure of exclusive personal or social ownership).

How do intangible assets such as human and social capital pass the above test? They seem to fit, at best, criteria 1, 2 and 3, above. Where human and social capital align with physical capital is in the area of scarcity, prospective benefit and cost. For example, a parent sacrifices scarce time, money and comfort to invest in their children's future. As already stated, the effort may be based on a range of motivations – not necessarily calculative or conscious. A key difference between tangible and intangible capital such as human and social capital is that the latter is never directly 'consumed' with use. The more human and social capital are used, the more they tend to grow. The dynamic inherent in human learning and community changes the relationship between consumption and use.

Some aspects of both human and social capital can be quantified (criterion 4) as will be discussed and shown in Part B. However, neither form of capital is strictly owned by an individual or group. Human capital, which by definition is embodied in individuals, comes closest to being owned. However, in the absence of human slavery, the exchange and application of human capital in markets or household economies involves some element of public good (for those not directly party to a transaction) and autonomy (in the sense that a firm can never entirely control or appropriate the human capital of its workers). Human capital 'can walk' outside from an organisation or firm. Being embedded in the cultural practices and norms of societies and organisations, it can neither be entirely bought nor sold. It can only be used or not used.

Likewise, and even more than in the case of human capital, social capital is embedded in the relationships of whole societies, organisations and groups. Strictly speaking, 'it' can never be adequately observed, measured or alienated apart from its specific cultural context and meaning. Universalist or empirical measures of social capitals are abstractions – possibly useful for some purposes – but limited abstractions at that.

These difficulties in applying the concept of social capital have led some critics to question the meaning and usefulness of the term 'social capital' as a metaphor for capital (Durlauf, 2002 and Solow, 2000). At least some aspects of human capital can be 'externalised' in the sense of identified as a separate entity embodied in rational actors and attracting a 'market value'. The metaphor is stretched to the limit in the case of 'social capital' where relationship and interaction define the subject matter.

The problem of 'under-investment' relative to some social optimum is frequently raised in the literatures on human and social capital. The problem arises from the nature of such investments in ‘public goods’ which are not alienable and the benefits of which are not appropriated by the investor but by others. As a result, ‘club good’ may prevail over ‘public good’. Similarly, communities and individuals may under-invest in social capital (in association with, for example, moving residence many times) because the private gain exceeds private cost (including the cost of lower social capital generally). However, a social cost is incurred and this affects everyone in the group. Individuals, families and organisations may under-invest in social capital because the benefits are not appropriated by the investor. Partly for this reason, social capital tends to be created or destroyed as a ‘by-product’ of other activities purposively carried out for various reasons.

4.8 Concluding remarks

In chapter 3, I postulated the existence of a link between various forms of intangible capital and subjective well-being. However, the relationship is not a static one. To be sustainable, well-being requires adequate investments of time and effort in key resources including various forms of intangible capital. Two key types of intangible capital have been introduced and explained in this chapter. However, the ‘capital metaphor’ is introduced not without some risk and challenge.

The attempt to use and measure the concept of social capital, in particular, is frequently perceived as essentially a reductionist one in which different cultural and psychological phenomena are lumped together as if these can be compared uniformly everywhere. Within the discipline of economics, the adjective ‘social’ can appear as an oxymoron – defying the normal rules of capital measurement and conceptualisation (Solow, 2000). However, I have argued in this chapter for a relaxation of the criteria for considering social relations as a form of capital.

A key consideration for the realisation of well-being, whether at a collective or individual level, is the existence of an asymmetry of costs to an individual and a group. Social capital is ‘generally’ a public (i.e. non-exclusive) good. My ‘consumption’ of social networks is not exclusive – it has benefits and costs for others as well myself. I underline ‘generally’ because some expressions of social capital may be ‘public’ within a personal relationship or bounded community of interest and private to the rest of the world.

An accumulation of ‘credits’ and expectations (stocks) through repeated social interactions (flows) constitutes an important social resource with benefits to individuals, groups and whole societies. These resources may be referred to, figuratively, as social capital. They constitute a real and intangible capital and that capital is ‘social’ in nature because, by definition, it is embedded in social relationships. In summary, social capital helps people to work together through sharing norms and mutual obligations.

The concepts of human capital and social capital will be developed further in Chapters 5 and 6. These may be thought of as constructs or symbols that describe important underlying human capabilities. By expressing these capabilities in terms of a metaphor borrowed from an economics discourse, it is possible to demonstrate the role of intangibles in contributing to social and individual well-being in the context of constrained choice. However, the ‘value’ of human ingenuity and inter-personal relationships is not exhausted in such metaphors. Moreover, these also constitute ‘ends-in-themselves’. We strive to learn for the good of learning and we learn to be connected because being connected can be a good in its own right.

Chapter 5

Human Capabilities: Social Capital

'Kindness is the golden chain by which society is bound together' Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I introduced the concept of social capital as a type of productive resource. In this chapter I explore the nature of this capital and its manifestation in self-organised human networks. The ways in which self-organised networks facilitate collective action are summarised under three headings:

- Trusting (an expectation of others' behaviour);
- Sharing values and knowledge (internalised norms); and
- Sharing identity (a sense of who we are and where we belong).

The notion of mutual obligation and expectation is central to the concept of social capital. One person does a favour to another because of some inherited obligation (whether moral, contractual or cultural). This is associated with an expectation of some return of favour – perhaps not immediate or not from the recipient of the favour initiated. When norms of co-operation become generalised among 'third parties' a habit or expectation of reciprocity is sustained. Cumulative norms of reciprocity, trust and co-operation may be difficult to generate; they may be easily broken if powerful institutions or significant actors defect.

These components of self-organised human networks are highly relevant to sustainable human well-being. Hence, concerns about an erosion in social capital voiced in popular media and discourse is a matter of concern (Bohan, 2002). However, in this study I am not in a position to evaluate long-term trends in social capital in Ireland and their impact on subjective well-being. At best, I can only examine, empirically, the relationship between measures of subjective well-being and social capital at one point in time. Some fragmentary evidence on long-term trends and international comparisons in levels of social capital, here, is provided in Appendix III.

5.2 Contemporary uses of the term social capital

5.2.1 Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam

The concept of social capital has a long intellectual pedigree that has only recently been brought to light in the work of James Farr (2004). In the most recent two decades, three names in particular come to the fore in the development of the concept of social capital: Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam.

The development of the concept has frequently been typified as following two parallel paths: a functionalist approach found in the work of Coleman and Putnam and a social or individual-strategising approach in Pierre Bourdieu. The contrast, as suggested below, is exaggerated. Coleman and Putnam have both drawn attention to the role of social networks and associated norms of reciprocity as facilitating agents for collective action and, frequently but not necessarily, across socio-economic or ethnic divides. Conflict based on class or social interest is possible but not the primary focus of social network analysis according to this view.

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1986: 241-258) has defined social capital as:

> the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word.

The underlying concepts in Bourdieu's understanding are: (i) obligations or credits and (ii) social connections associated with these obligations. Mutual recognition in a given institutional setting is also emphasised. The distinction between actual and potential resources is important since in many cases obligations and social ties are present but not effectively used or channelled. Later, in chapter 13, I will discuss the issue of incomplete or un-actuated social capital – especially the hidden resources blocked, or not recognised, or not valued in self-organised human networks.

Even though social capital inheres in social relationships and networks, Bourdieu understood social capital as an individual or collective property with a strategic use even if not consciously so. Some degree of durability, stability and continuity in relationships is implied in the concept. The volume of social capital possessed by anyone is related to the size of his/her networks as well as the amount of economic and *cultural capital* possessed by those in one's networks. Social capital is combined with (and sometimes transformed into)[24] other forms of capital – human, cultural[25] and financial. An application of Bourdieu's emphasis is found in Robinson and Robinson (2002: 42). They refer to social capital as:

> the collection of resources that an individual or a group has access to through their membership of an ongoing network of mutual acquaintance. The term "resources" refers to a wide range of factors including status, mandate, attention, knowledge, and opportunities to participate and communicate.

The concept of social capital grew in popularity in the early 1990s following Coleman's elaboration of the concept in *Foundations of Social Theory* (Coleman, 1990) and his seminal article in 1988 on the relationship between social and human capital. Even though Coleman uses a rational choice model of behaviour, he stresses the existence of systemic and socio-structural features that shape individual choice.

[24] The term 'fungibility' is used to describe the potential for each form of capital to be converted into other forms.

[25] Bourdieu understood cultural capital as the ideas, practices and artefacts that are highly valued in a given society – presumably a close ally of social and human capital.

A key point in Coleman's approach to social capital is that is defined by its function – what it does. Two dimensions are present in all of Coleman's discussions of social capital: (i) social structure; and (ii) facilitation of social action by individuals within a given structure. Coleman acknowledges that social capital that has value for individuals in one setting may actually harm others. Hence, a functional definition of social capital (what it does) does not deny the possibility of a strongly negative impact in specific cases. Putnam says that 'a society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital' (Putnam, 2000: 19). It is also the case that a well-connected, but immoral, society may be rich in social capital such as was the case in Nazi Germany.

Coleman gave the example of a close community of merchant bankers in the City of London to demonstrate the role of internalised norms of behaviour in a relatively closed community connected by family and social networks. He uses the term 'network closure' to describe inter-connectedness on the boundaries of a social network: for example, the parents or teachers of children in a school-community are connected among themselves. A symbolic rather than a physical boundary is said to exist. Essentially, it is a boundary of expectations, loyalty, confidentiality and, in a family or romantic relationship, intimacy. Fritjof Capra (1997: 207) says that network closure tends toward a shared system of beliefs, explanations, expectations, identity and values in a socially bounded group. Bounded denotes that some are in and some are out. It does *not* necessarily imply exclusion from benefits or discrimination against others.

I would prefer to use a term such as 'internal complete connection' to describe dense networks that are internally 'joined-up'. Networks dominated by hierarchical relationships with poor criss-crossing connections among subjects of the hierarchy are incomplete. The issue of connection to other networks is a separate consideration. 'External complete connection' exists when diverse networks are well connected, one to another. However, external completion of social connection is relative – in so far as there are natural and obvious limits to the extent of familiarity and shared normative systems with a very large number of people and groups.

Robert Putnam (2000: 19) has defined social capital as:

> …connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.

Putnam began his study of social capital in the context of long-term change and distribution in the patterns of civic association, governance and economic development at regional level in Italy (Putnam, Leonardi, Nanetti 1993). In his later work – *Bowling Alone: the Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Putnam, 2000) – he draws attention to powerful evidence on a long-term downward trend since the mid-1960s in the extent to which Americans volunteer, vote, trust and involve themselves in community and civic life generally. This decline indicates a marked shift in patterns of social engagement especially by age-cohort with the 'X generation' (those born since the 1960s) showing much lower levels of social capital. These changes can be tracked through longitudinal surveys covering a wide range of behaviours from formal membership of organisations to informal social socialising.

A key point in the Putnam story is the way in which civic engagement and life help build trust and effective governance. Without realising it, people build trust through mutual acquaintances and experiences of 'working together' around some project or on-going activity. In an approach which echoes the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville in early nineteenth-century America, civic habits are formed and prejudices undermined (or confirmed!). People may not share the same outlook or values on many issues – but through social inter-course they experience some bond of belonging and obligation that sustains co-operation. Citizens learn civic behaviour and attitudes in active associational and community life.

Some researchers, such as Eric Uslaner (2002), emphasise the importance of generalised inter-personal trust as a factor in creating and sustaining social connection and cohesion. Although it is influenced by social change and, among other factors, the prevalence of government corruption and practices of fairness and equality, it stands as a relatively independent factor in shaping people's behaviour and attitude. Bo Rothstein (Kumlin and Rothstein, 2003) emphasises the pathway of influence from institutional or government trustworthiness to habits of civic co-operation and trust.

Although Bourdieu provided important theoretical insight to the nature of social capital in unequal societies, the concept and term has remained difficult to measure or pin down, conceptually. Putnam through his empirical work on the distribution and levels of social capital in Italy and the USA helped to turn the concept into a tighter and empirically recognisable entity. However, he has not been spared criticism for the way in which social capital has been observed as an over-integrating concept for very diverse phenomena. The presence of power-hierarchies, conflict and the role of the State and other public institutions receive less attention in the popularly recognised story of social capital.

As already suggested, the supposed difference between Coleman-Putnam on the one hand and Bourdieu on the other should not be exaggerated. Both sets of writers approach the subject from different angles and concerns. Coleman was concerned about educational performance and equality and the role of various social networks in mediating norms and support. Putnam is mainly concerned about the strength of civic life and social connectedness – frequently at a sub-national aggregate level. Bourdieu was interested in the way that social groups reproduce their status and how the notion of capital can be used to describe many different kinds of advantage and resourcefulness. Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam have all emphasised the way in which social capital complements other forms of capital –especially human capital.

Understandings of social capital may be summarised according to the *level* of analysis, the *unit* of empirical observation and the analytical *scope* of the concept. I attempt to locate some of the better known writers and users of the term social capital according to their *primary* interest or conceptualisation in Table 5.1 – distinguishing level of analysis from unit of observation.

Table 5.1

Location of Interest in Various Applications of 'Social Capital'

Level of Analysis	Aggregated **Units** of Observation	
	Individual	Collective
Micro	***Pierre Bourdieu*** (e.g. strategising individuals) ***Ed Glaeser*** (et al., 2002, e.g. rational choice individual actors)	-
Meso	***Bourdieu*** (e.g. strategising families/social groups) ***James Coleman*** (e.g. families, schools, faith-based communities) ***Robert Putnam*** (neighbourhoods, communities)	***Don Cohen*** and **Larry** ***Prusak*** (enterprises, knowledge management)
Macro	***Putnam*** (nation states, regions)	***Francis Fukuyama*** (nation states, cultures)

5.2.2 Toward a synthesis

At an earlier stage of my thinking on social capital I suggested a parsimonious definition that was taken up by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (2001: 41) and used by some commentators:

> networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups.

In the last chapter I offered an understanding of social capital which builds on that used by OECD. It refers to:

> resources inherent in self-organised human networks based on reciprocal expectations and obligations (of support, engagement, delivery); communication of information, knowledge, informal norms and understandings; and belonging; that facilitate collective action.

This understanding builds on two essential components – the resourcefulness of human networks and the facilitation of collective action. The resourcefulness of networks is difficult to define and observe. However, it is best seen as a process of cumulative obligations arising from transactions among individuals and based on communication and sharing of knowledge, information and identity.

I now consider in more detail the elements of this understanding, which bring together the various strands found in the writings of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam.

Resources – refer to phenomena which have productive value. Objects, relationships and ways of acting or thinking can constitute important assets for individuals or societies. However, social capital cannot refer to all types of assets in groups or individuals. In my view, it refers specifically to those resources inherent in -

Self-organised human networks – implying autonomy and self-regulation as well as dependence among its members as well as with other networks. If social capital is identified too broadly with any type of social arrangement or institution it risks becoming a vacuous term. The capacity and resourcefulness of the network empowers or facilitates it to engage in effective –

Collective action – implying co-operation, co-ordination and solution of common problems or challenges in the context of information asymmetries or conflict of interests. However, the ways in which self-organised networks facilitate this is through repeated and sustained conversations, 'meetings' and exchanges of –

Reciprocal *obligations and expectations* based on a climate of trust that others will reciprocate in a positive way; and

Sharing and *communicating* of information, knowledge, norms and sanctions – which regulate, reinforce, check-out and modify –

A shared sense of *belonging*, inter-dependence and identity – a sense of We.

I have avoided mentioning 'shared values' in the above elaboration of social capital even though it is mentioned in the 'OECD definition'.[26] Norms and sanctions constitute important aspects of how self-organised networks co-ordinate their behaviour. Norms of behaviour associated with social networks are essentially norms based on a shared view of 'this is acceptable behaviour' or 'this is not acceptable'. Societal values based on beliefs that it is unacceptable to cheat, take money not belonging to oneself or treat others, including strangers, with disrespect or violence give rise to important social norms which have value for individuals and communities.

Although the values of human respect and caring are implicit in 'shared values' – these are likely to be critical to the way in which social capital supports human well-being. Szreter (2000: 57) places special emphasis on two dimensions of social capital: its embeddedness in

- relationships based on mutual respect and trust that 'enable a group to pursue its shared goals more effectively than would otherwise be possible' (Szreter, 2000: 57); and
- in 'shared communicative competence'.

This, in my view, is crucial to an understanding of the manner in which social capital impacts on human well-being at all levels. Social capital enables individuals to access self-respect, the respect of others and respect for others through networks of human caring, compassion (*sympathy* in the writings of

[26] Some commentators expressed unease or outright opposition to mentioning 'shared values' in any definition of social capital since it confuses cultural (possibly religious) values with what was essentially a property of group behaviour and associated norms of reciprocity.

Henry Sedgwick, John Dewey and Lyda Hanifan or circles of 'mutual identification' in the writings of Norbert Elias[27]) and communication.

There is a link between social norms (and sanctions) and shared values in a network to such an extent that is impossible, in my view, to try to separate the concept of social capital from the 'shared values' underlying any social network. Values are norms of expected and actual behaviour when they are socialised and internalised by members of a social group. Some values are shared within a group; others are not. In a pluralist and democratic society, values will diverge considerably among groups as well as within specific homogeneous groups. Hence, value-sharing in this context refers to some set of agreed principles and choices at the collective level including the shared value of respecting some diversity in values.

If civic 'habits of the heart' are resourceful for societies and individuals, what of the more formal rules of engagement called 'institutions'? Institutions are merely formalised rules of social engagement. Once again, we are faced with the difficulty and even the impossibility of clearly differentiating 'institutions' from 'norms of reciprocity'. Institutions embody norms of reciprocity by means of formal coding. Norms of reciprocity embody shared societal values and cultural obligations. No clear-cut separation is possible. For this reason some looseness and open-endedness is unavoidable in defining and observing social capital in any particular context. It is more useful to emphasise the *resourcefulness* of social networks in general and leave open the question of how these resources are measured, defined and operationalised at a more specific and concrete level.

To avoid a 'big tent' definition of social capital that renders the concept so broad as to not to be able to refute some hypothesis about its impact or presence, it is desirable to limit it to particular types of social interaction. For

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[27] Mennell (1992: 101-2)

this reason, I have deliberately chosen to focus on the autonomous nature of self-organised networks – be they present in market-based organisations or among networks of individuals engaged in public service delivery. It is necessary to avoid equating 'social capital' with some specific sector of society such as non-governmental, social movement or volunteering organisations (or 'civil society'). At one and the same time, social capital does not refer to some types of public institution or programme. Public and non-public institutions can build social capital, or we may say that social capital is embedded in such institutions.

The approach adopted by the OECD was to treat 'political, institutional and legal arrangements' as different from 'social capital' (e.g. OECD, 2001: 13). These arrangements were defined as 'the rules and institutions in which human and social capital work'. Hence, in contrast to the approach of Ritzen (2001), social capital was treated as different from formal institutions and political arrangements but 'embedded' in the relationships among various actors including public, private and voluntary institutions. Far from neglecting the role of the State and other institutions, a 'narrow' definition of social capital can leave scope for the complementary role of various agents.

5.3 Bonding, Bridging and Linking

Various hypotheses have been advanced in relation to how different kinds of social ties impact on personal and community well-being. Social ties in families or other closely integrated networks are thought to impact primarily on personal needs for survival, comfort and intimacy. Loose or diffuse ties across different social or identity boundaries may be relatively more effective for creativity and risk-taking. Finally, connections across 'vertical' social boundaries of social class or political power may be effective for leveraging information and resources as well as resolving conflicts.

Since the beginning of its inauguration as a term in the social sciences the most significant step in conceptual work on social capital has been the identification of different types of social networks. There is a twofold typology for social capital according to its degree of homogeneity:

- Bonding
- Bridging

where bonding refers to social ties, obligations and trust among people who are 'alike' (by virtue of gender, or ethnicity, or social background or any other dimension); and bridging refers to social ties among people who are 'not alike'. Individuals may find it easier to establish close and mutually supportive ties with others who are alike in some key aspect (especially familial or kinship-based). The level of homogeneity or heterogeneity in a social network is relative. Hence, what might be regarded as bonding social capital from one perspective (e.g. a particular academic or research community) could be regarded as bridging social capital from another (gender, ethnic, etc.). In some cases, different socially-based networks may co-exist in the same immigrant ethnic group such as among Brazilian migrants in Ireland.[28] The Gaelic Athletic Association has been a strong cross-social bridger in both rural and urban settings. However, it does not generally bridge across political-religious identity lines in Northern Ireland.

The concept of bonding and bridging has an analogue in sociological literature where notions of 'weak ties' and 'strong ties' have been used (Granovetter, 1973). Ron Burt (2000) refers to 'structural holes' (distinguishing entities that are not in the same identity-group) as significant for brokering information and influence outside one's immediate milieu. Weak ties may be more important among advantaged social groups (Hall, 1999). In general, loose, diffuse and diverse ties may be more effective than strong ones for social advancement and connection to new ideas and opportunities.

Frequently, confusion arises in relation to the nature of bonding and bridging social capital. The concept of bonding can be confused with 'strong' ties or even exclusive in-group solidarity. It is possible that individuals can be

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[28] Irish Times, 10 May, 2004.

members of a homogeneous network but with weak ties to each other. The presence of bonding does not describe the strength of ties or the absence of ties to people outside a 'bonded' group. Rather, it refers only to the degree of homogeneity in a particular network. Bonding social capital is not necessarily 'bad' in the sense that social ties based on family, ethnicity, religion, etc. do not necessarily lead to exclusion and mistrust of 'outsiders'. Hence, any notion that public promotion of 'bridging social capital' is to be preferred over 'bonding social capital' is over-simplistic

Recent empirical evidence cited by Putnam (2004) suggests that bonding and bridging social capital (from the standpoint of ethnicity) may be complementary. Hence, the more a person bonds with their own group the more likely they may be to bridge to others outside their own group. Putnam (2004) comments:

> Dutch researchers, for example, have found that the Turkish immigrants who are most actively involved in broader Dutch society are precisely those who are also most actively involved in the life of the Turkish community itself. Bonding, in short, can be a prelude to bridging, rather than precluding bridging.

Some writers (e.g. Woolcock, 2001) refer to a third dimension of social capital, viz., linking social capital. The latter refers to ties and networks within a hierarchy of economic, political, gender or religious-based power. Linking social capital might refer to the resources and networks embodied in the relationship of particular communities or individuals to the State or other agencies. It does *not* refer to the delivery of public services. More specifically, it might refer to relationships of obligation and trust among individuals at different levels of power and influence – for example public servants, financial creditors, community leaders, the unemployed, etc.

The aspect of vertical social linkage is very important and – to use a pun – represents a 'weak link' in much of the recent analysis of 'social capital'. One of the criticisms by Ben Fine (2001) is that social capital neglects the context in which powerful actors and institutions impact on social relationships. Power is concentrated in ruling elites or corporate actors – frequently working in partnership with Governments. State power mediates among competing social interests. However, the role of the State is never entirely neutral and the extent to which democracy and genuine equality prevail depends on many factors. States may facilitate an unequal or exclusive access to information, finance and decision-making by powerful social networks.

How could the concept of social capital be integrated with an analysis of power and social conflict? Bourdieu has already presented a focus on the way in which different social groups use their ties and shared habits to strategically pursue their own (group) interests. Perhaps a clue to further theoretical and empirical development is contained with the work on status groups in Cuff , Sharrock and Francis (1998: 51). They describe a status group as:

> a collection of people who recognise themselves as equals, who look upon one another as equally worthy, and who look up to and down on other social groups. A status group involves shared understandings, mutual recognition amongst its members and, of course, acknowledgement from its superiors and inferiors of its standing in the general scale of social position.

One of the practical difficulties in bringing in 'linking social capital' to empirical social capital analysis, is that it is less easily observed or quantified compared with bonding and bridging social capital. A balance of each types of social connection – bonding, bridging and linking is probably inevitable and desirable. Too much bonding without bridging can lead to insularity and cultural ghettoisation as in the case of ethnic minorities. Too much bridging without bonding can leave people vulnerable and without close friends and social support. Bonding and bridging without linking can leave communities isolated from centres of power and influence.

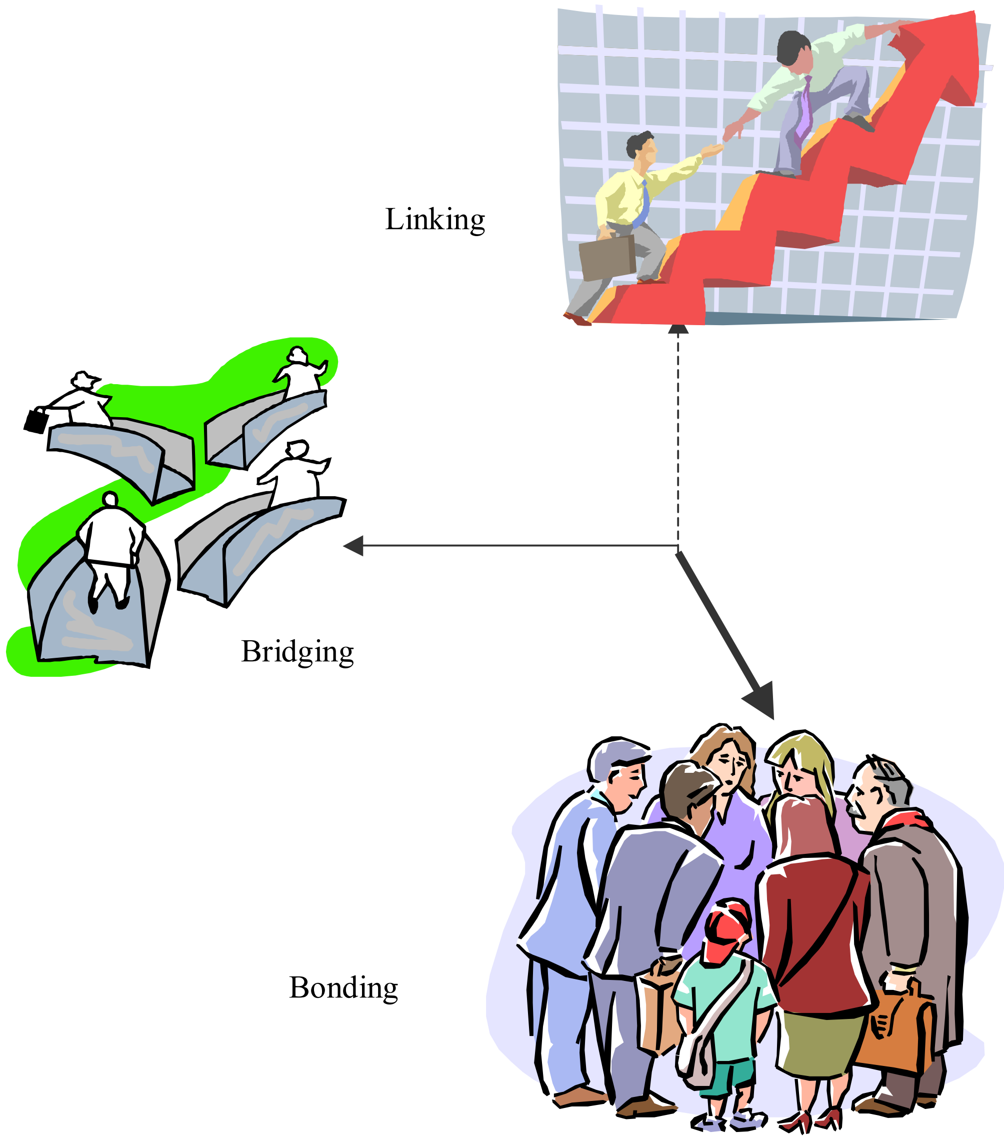
The essential quality of bonding, bridging and linking social capital is the extent of differentiation. Horizontal differentiation relates to ethnic, age, gender and other characteristics of individuals. Vertical differentiation relates to social status and power (which, in turn, correlate with ethnicity, gender and social background). In some cases, horizontal differentiation may also imply some degree of vertical differentiation (when, for example, ethnic, age, gender and other characteristics imply difference in power and access to other resources).

Bridging social capital may be higher in cultures that are based on greater equality and less rigid and strongly hierarchical social structures. In hierarchical cultures, it is difficult to build trust outside immediate family or similarly-bonded groups and social distance between different groups is magnified. In these circumstances, it may also be more difficult to establish consensus to sustain higher levels of public social provision and welfare.

A diagrammatic illustration of bonding, bridging and linking is provided in Figure 5.1, below.

Figure 5.1

Bonding, Bridging and Linking Social Capital



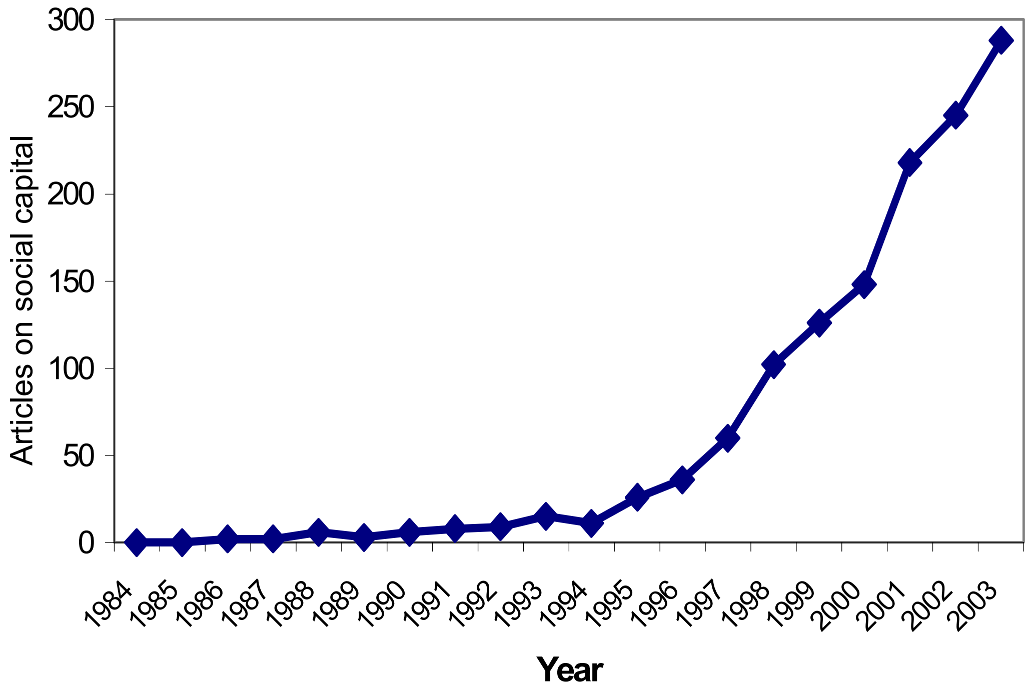
Source: Michael Woolcock, Harvard University and World Bank.

5.4 Criticisms of the Concept and its Use

There has been a meteoric rise from the mid-1990s in references to social capital across a wide range of disciplines from public health, political science, social psychology to economics. Figure 5.2 shows the increase in the output of scholarly articles on social capital since the 1980s.

Figure 5.2

Trends in Published Academic Journal Articles on Social Capital



Source: David Halpern, Social Capital (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2004, forthcoming).

In my view, there are three broadly inter-connected reasons for the sudden – almost epidemic increase – in interest in social capital which may be summarised as the (i) heightened awareness of complexity in social organization (everything is connected, ultimately, to everything else); (ii) emergence of data about trends in public trust, engagement, voluntarism in the US and elsewhere; and (iii) a rising tide of research evidence about the generally positive impacts of social and inter-personal engagement (which, for example, are summarised in NESF, 2003 and OECD, 2001).

Baron, Field and Schuller (2000: 14) have welcomed the rise in interest around the concept of social capital. They see it as a counter-weight to:

> a debate dominated by bloodless, technical discussions, epitomised by hyper-mathematical econometrics.

But, is the rise in interest a passing fad? A lot will depend on how the term is understood and applied in specific research communities and how it connects to more popular discourse. There are, indeed, risks in the way that a term such as social capital is used and applied. As with any general concept, it could be used to:

- Summarise diverse social phenomena in an over-simplistic and reductionist way;
- Express particular ideas under a flag of conceptual convenience (e.g. civil society advocacy);
- Give empirical and theoretical justification for particular ideological or political standpoints; and
- To make partial use of available data and research to present 'social capital' as a single, universal good – the more you have the better off you are and everyone else.

Fine and Green (2000: 85) question if social capital will become a central and coherent concept and measure in mainstream economics – due in part to its reliance in many places on formal mathematical models in which there is a limited number of explanatory variables.[29] They contest the claim that social capital constitutes a subversive intrusion into the bastion of formalistic and a-social neo-classical economics. They signal a warning that economics might still appropriate 'social capital' and misuse it in a socialised version of utility-maximising *homo economicus*.

Economist, Steven Durlauf, (Durlauf 2002) has discussed the problems raised in relation to measurement of social capital in standard econometrical work. However, some of these concerns also apply in relation to way human capital is conceptualised and applied in empirical studies OECD (1998) and OECD (2001). Some of the more hitherto sceptical voices in the world of economics have recently stated (Durlauf and Fafchamps, 2004: 2):

> We argue that while the social capital literature has produced many insights, a number of conceptual and statistical problems exist with the current use of social capital by social scientists. We propose some ways to strengthen the social capital literature.[30]

A frequently encountered criticism is that users of the concept adopt an overly positive approach to social connectedness (Portes, 1998). Social connection is seen, uncritically, as a universal good without due regard for potential negative results. However, organisations or societies based on rigid command and control structures coupled with a culture of secrecy and paternalism can stifle spontaneous networking and appropriate flows of information and knowledge. James Coleman was aware of the potential for social networks and norms to play a negative role. He pointed to examples where trustworthiness within a group or organisation is 'socially sub-optimal'. A free flows of ideas and innovation can be hindered and various agreements among actors or between groups lead to co-

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[29] I attended a seminar of the World Bank on Social Capital in June 1999 where the results of a range of complex econometrical modelling were presented. Refer to http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/conferen.htm [consulted August 2004]

[30] Full credit is acknowledged by means of the bibliographic reference in this study and the copyright © notice is hereby acknowledged.

ordinated results that are not the general social interest. Coleman observed (1990: 311):

> Effective norms in an area can reduce innovativeness in that area, can constrain not only deviant actions that harm others but also deviant actions that can benefit everyone.

Almost by way of implied critique it is frequently pointed that not every form of social capital is positive. Some forms of community, social connection and normative behaviour can be inherently oppressive, homogenising and hierarchical. It is, therefore, difficult to understand the relevance of Durlauf's critique (2002: 7) that social capital is presented as a universal benefit by proponents of its use in social research.

The potential negative impact of social capital (as well as other forms of capital including human) is acknowledged by most researchers in this field (e.g. Putnam, 2000). Not every use of social capital is positive as evaluated by society at large. But, the same observation applies to human capital where some learning activities and learned skills can be put to negative use in the sense that they undermine social cohesion or the well-being of others. Just as some forms of social capital have the potential to bring social, personal and economic benefits, other forms, particularly those that reside in tightly-knit groups that exclude or mistrust outsiders, may serve to undermine social cohesion. Extreme examples include networks of trust associated with the mafia, racist or criminal activities. It should be recalled that physical and human capital could also be employed for socially destructive purposes. This fact does not rob them of their potential as 'capital' to be used to produce a flow of benefits or results for those investing in them.

Another point of criticism is that neo-liberals and politically conservative forces will seek to use social capital concepts and related discourse to argue for a smaller role for Government in general. If communities, families and volunteers can do the job more effectively, why should Government displace voluntary effort by inducing dependency? There is some validity in these concerns to the extent that the generation of particular forms of social capital was over-identified with traditional notions of the nuclear family as well as the role of women, in particular, in caring for children and the elderly. As a term and empirical concept, social capital arrived on the scene just as many societies had wrestled with the appropriate balance of public, private and voluntary provision as well as the desirability of greater gender equality in the labour market and society more generally.

In practice, the treatment of the subject by the World Bank and OECD has paralleled the work of Robert Putnam. Family – traditional, non-traditional – is important but the focus of interest and empirical investigation has been mainly at the level of secondary associations and socialisation – outside the home, in the neighbourhood, community, town hall or workplace. Moreover, although the role of public authorities has not received as much attention as it could, the 'policy discussion' aspects of World Bank (Woolcock, 1998), OECD (2001) and other writings (Putnam, 2000 and Aldridge and Halpern, 2002) have focussed attention on the positive synergy between public policy, community development and social capital. Far from seeing the role of the State as hostile to the creation of social capital, these have drawn attention to the potential for equality-enhancing approaches in public policy and practice to support social capital. I will return to this issue in Part C of this study.

Approaches that use abstract, general and universally applicable notions such as trust, social networks, norms of reciprocity and interaction without reference to specific context, both cultural and institutional, probably explains little. We need a historical account and one in which other factors including access to power, conflict and specific cultural meanings and interpretations can be reflected. This remains a key challenge for the emerging debate about social capital. Baron, Field and Schuller (2000: 35) sum up their assessment of social capital in the following terms:

> We can sum up our position as follows. Social capital has several adolescent characteristics: it is neither tidy nor mature; it can be abused, analytically and politically; its future is unpredictable; but if offers much promise.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

Social capital is a highly synthetic concept: at one and the same time, it combines a number of concepts under the one roof. Aspects of behaviour, motivation, and attitude are mixed together to a give a resource that has personal, social and economic value. Its power and potential, analytically, is to offer explanations for social phenomena and processes that are complex. Social capital reduces, summarises and synthesises aspects of social relations, trust and reciprocity. Its power of summary and synthesis is, at the same time, its limitation. When applied and measured from individual-level observations at a very global or aggregate level, it abstracts from the particular, the cultural and the local.

Resources reside in social structures. However, the cognitive content of social capital is mediated through shared values, identities and common purposes. At its simplest, social capital enables groups of individuals 'to get things done'. But, what is worthy of being done is a function of the shared values and goals of a community. Hence, what that community defines as useful, worthy of shared effort and resourceful is shaped by its v*alues* function. Forms of capital from human to social to physical and natural cannot exist in isolation from communal values.

Even if social capital is a means towards an end – human well-being – it may also be viewed as an end in itself to the extent that patterns of social inter-dependence and mutual care constitute the good life in a society of happy members.

Chapter 6

Human Capabilities: Human Capital

The world everyone sees is not the world but a world, which we bring forth with others. Maturana and Varela (1998: 245)

Learning is not something that requires time out from being engaged in productive activity; learning is the heart of productive activity. (Shoshana Zuboff, 1988: 395)

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I turn to an exploration of human capability at the individual level under the heading of 'human capital'. As we have seen in chapter 4, the concept of human capital is understood to refer to the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in *individuals* that facilitate the creation of well-being. Human capital, as a specific term, has been used in mainstream economics since at least the early 1960s. However, the idea of human skill and ingenuity as productive factors on a par with physical or intangible capital goes back to Adam Smith (1989/1776) who wrote about the role of 'skill, dexterity and judgment' in the exercise of human labour.[31]

Subjective well-being is closely related to the physical and mental abilities of individuals. Intuitively, a close link may be hypothesised between how individuals interpret and apply diverse information and knowledge on the one hand, and how they evaluate their own lives on the other. Just as 'social capital' provides a useful conceptual umbrella for gathering up the relational and inter-personal features of organisations and communities, 'human capital' provides a means of valuing the unique abilities and dispositions of individuals and their relevance to well-being. However, the act of knowing is tied up with the act of relating to others. All knowledge is, ultimately, *en-action*. We know in doing; we know in relation to others.

Following a definition of human capital in section 6.2, I will consider key dimensions of human capital in section 6.3. Typically, measures of human capital (and cognition) rest on assumptions of linearity and deterministic pathways from innate ability, environment and upbringing to measurable human cognitive ability. An alternative view of human capital investment posits a non-linear, dynamic and complex model in which various aspects of the human organism interact to produce cognition including behaviour and attitude. Hence, different ways of 'knowing' at the cognitive and non-cognitive levels will be explored in sections 6.4 through 6.6 – based on what I term the 'who', the 'what', and the 'how' of learning.

There is a risk, as in the case of social relationships and their incorporation into definitions of social capital, that 'human capital' is employed in a restrictive fashion to draw attention, only, to those aspects of human ability and skill which are recognised in the economic market activity. There is another risk that usage of the concept human capital may be reduced to the measured impact of schooling or formal education. These issues are discussed in section 6.7. I conclude this chapter with a new understanding of human capital that builds on Amartya Sen's notion of human capability. This liberates 'human capital' from a narrow reductionist definition to one in which its place in a wider social and human context is recognised. At the same time, human capital remains capital because it is productive of human well-being including subjective well-being.

6.2 What is human capital?

Using the 'OECD definition' in chapter 4, human capital has been defined as (OECD, 2001: 18):

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[31] *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1, Chapter 1.

> The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being.

This broader conceptualisation of human capital is important both with respect to the range of abilities and attributes included as well as the various settings in which these abilities and attributes are developed and used. Frequently, human capital is identified as a set of intellectual cognitive skills with their bases in the measured ability of individuals to interpret numerical or written information across different contexts. Next, it is typically assumed that human capital is primarily created and developed through formal education, schooling, training and informal experience. Finally, it is assumed that the value of human skill is primarily valued by its actual or realised potential to contribute to marketable economic production. All of these assumptions represent more or less convenient working hypotheses for measurement and, ultimately, control through public policy of the economic and social effects of schooling and training. However, they neglect the nature of learning as a systemic, embedded and relational activity occurring throughout life and with a very wide range of drivers and impacts that go well beyond standard empirical measurement.

6.3 Dimensions of human capital

A key dimension of human capital is its heterogeneity and complexity relative to inanimate forms of capital such as machines, tools and buildings. In practice, measures of human capital have tended to fall back on a reductionist and linear model. This has been reinforced by a strong tendency among educational interests and institutions to view competence as a 'transferable' package of knowledge, skills and attitudes. So, for example, the *Concept Document* of the European Commission Expert Group on the *Key Competencies*, finalised in 2003 (European Commission, 2003: 4), defined 'key competencies' as:

> a transferable, multifunctional package of knowledge, skills and attitudes which all individuals need for personal fulfilment, development, inclusion and employment which should have been developed by the end of compulsory school or training, and act as a foundation for Life Long Learning.

The European Expert Group report went on to define ‘learning to learn’ as:

> the competencies necessary to organise and regulate one’s learning, both alone and in groups; to acquire, process, evaluate and assimilate new pieces of knowledge; and to apply these competencies in a variety of contexts, including problem solving and learning, at home, in education/training, in work and in society. (p. 18)

The reference to acquisition and assimilation of ‘new pieces of knowledge’ provides an image of filling up the ‘tabula rasa’. The analogy seems to be that of mind as a mirror in which segments of knowledge are transmitted. A machine-image underlies this model. The paradigm that seems to emerge from recent discussion of education at the level of the European Union is that learning is about being taught and teaching is about schooling, training and institutionalised provision of knowledge and skill-enhancement.

If investment in ‘human capital’ refers exclusively to the actions of rational choice and strategising activity, then ‘given’ ability (including health) is treated as separate from the core concept of skill-enhancing investment such as describes school-based training or ‘on-the-job’ experience.[32] There are echoes of a nature versus nurture debate here. If something is ‘given’ rather than consciously worked on or invested in (nurture), such as a significant part of one’s health or one’s disposition to learn (nature), should it be regarded as ‘capital’? The ‘tabula rasa’ is ready to be topped-up with ‘education’ (read schooling) and ‘training’ on a relatively fixed base of ‘intelligence’ and ‘innate ability’.

I do not find this type of conceptual separation helpful even if it facilitates empirical analysis of things that are viewed as separable and measurable. In my view, the ‘nurture’ versus ‘nature’ discussion abstracts from an important feature of all human thinking and behaviour, namely, the

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[32] I think that is accurate to interpret this view as approximating to some of the helpful criticisms made by some former colleagues at the OECD in relation to my suggested expansive definition of human capital during the preparation of *The Well-Being of Nations* report in 2000.

impossibility of completely separating endowments or learning predispositions from human behaviour in the present as well as in the past.

Alternatively, it is possible to view human capital as a series of varied and inter-linking capacities or competencies. The human mind may be compared to a pattern-detector or lamp that establishes relationships between seemingly disconnected things. It maps the world according to its own internal structures and experience. Notions of separate and stand-alone knowledge domains and their transfer through standardised teaching or learning modules do not sit easily with the pattern-detector image.

A proponent of a systemic approach to understanding the human brain and learning, Fritjof Capra (1997: 271), has stated:

> Mind is not a thing but a process – the process of cognition, which is identified with the process of life. The brain is a specific structure through which this process operates. Thus the relationship between mind and brain is one between process and structure.

Information and knowing are not strictly transferred into the human mind – essentially we know by forming mental representations of the outside world. Processes and behaviour are *co-ordinated* in complex relationships. In other words, the human brain mirrors society – it is literally a self-organised network that communicates, modifies and co-ordinates – in the context of social practice or embodied social knowledge. However, learning is more than the neural structure underlying behaviour. Unique patterns and system-level properties emerge from the interaction of learning communities. What implications has such a map of human learning for the concept of human capital? In the following sections, I will argue that our assumptions about the 'who', 'what' and 'how' of learning are altered if we decide to adopt a revised notion of human capital.

6.4 The *Who* of learning

The notion of individually-embodied knowledge poses a question about the *subject* of such knowledge. Typically, we imagine knowledge as something objective, 'out there', separated in specific fields and codified – an object to be compared, transferred or measured by some common yardstick. A more helpful perspective is to imagine knowledge as embedded in, and inseparable from, human activity and consciousness of the subject.

Consciousness – *con-scire* in Latin – denotes 'knowing together'. The world cannot be adequately described without reference to the observer or the subject of knowing since the latter is part of the world being observed. In the language of Fritjof Capra (2002), a world of meaning is 'brought forth' in trying to describe objective facts, behaviours and attitudes.

The seventeenth-century French philosopher René Descartes (1999/1637) is specially known for his summary dictum: *cogito, ergo sum*[33] –'I think; therefore I am'. This has led some contemporary writers such as Antonio Damasio to suggest an alternative dictum on the lines of: 'We are; therefore I think' (Gonczi, 2002 and Damasio, 1996 and 2000). In the writings of Norbert Elias (Mennell, 1992: 189), the concept of *homines aperti* ('open man') is contrasted with that of *homo clausus* ('closed man'). *Homines aperti* is not some self-contained thinking being who observes the social world 'out there'; *homo aperti* is seen as the description of one open to the inheritance of social norms and ways of viewing others. *Homo clausus* is, by contrast, a shadow residing in a completely detached thinking being dealing with detached knowledge and truth – as objectified realities understood by the self – without social context or relevance.

Rather than seeing the *res cogitans* – the thinking substance – as separate from *res extensa* – the extended substance, we can picture thought as living within society and practice. A further implication of Cartesian dualism is that what is observed remains at the level of pure object – something to be observed, dominated and used by the subject who is completely other. These

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[33] Quatrième Partie, no. 36. http://www.cvm.qc.ca/encephi/contenu/textes/discmet4.htm [consulted in June 2004]

considerations have profound implications for the way formal learning, research and organisational practice is organised – points to which I will return in Part C.

New insights from the cognitive sciences have challenged Cartesian dualism. For example the *Santiago Theory of Cognition* developed by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela in the 1970s (Maturana and Varela, 1980) following earlier work by Gregory Bateson presents mind as a *process* rather than an objective thing. Mind or mental process is immanent in matter at all levels of life. Some users of this theory such as Capra see cognition as inclusive of all aspects of a living organism – perception, emotion and behaviour. Hence, living organisms without a brain or nervous system 'know' (2002: 33). To live is to 'know'. Capra distinguishes between cognition and consciousness. The latter only arises at certain levels of complexity in cognition such as in humans. The implication of this understanding is to radically challenge the notion of 'cognitive ability' as an exclusive attribute of the rational and analytical human mind.

The world 'out there' as we know it is a mental representation we create or share with others. The world has meaning and structure as we give it such. We see the world in terms of our inner world of understandings, memories and structures. Hence, the notion that knowledge exists apart from our experience and waits to be transferred into our minds is, in my view, false. Information does not exist in some ready-made or pre-given state apart from the meaning we give it. Essentially, we do not extract information; we create it by interacting with a complex world in which meaning emerges. Meaning resides not in the item of information itself but in the context in which it is generated, used and changed.[34]

Some types of knowledge may have no subject in the strict sense of individuals. For example, collective knowledge embodied in organisations and

[34] The question of objective meaning can never be entirely resolved with reference to subjective interpretation. Many believe that meaning and morality have an independent existence apart from the subjective meaning we attach to things, people or actions.

communities is knowledge without a subject. Does such knowledge constitute human capital? If knowledge cannot be synthesised or located in a single place, person or object that would contain a community's total knowledge, then it lacks a readily identified referent. Such knowledge can only be inferred indirectly from stories and other representations of norms, values, practices and relationships. It cannot be measured or observed from studies or tests of individuals (Canto-Sperber and Dupuy, 2001: 71). At this point, human capital merges into social capital since human capital is viewed from the standpoint of a society, community and group.

6.5 The *What* of learning

Typically, the 'what' of learning is presented as a series of discrete skill or knowledge domains. However, human potential is diffused over many generic capacities. Canto-Sperber and Dupuy (2001) refer to five generic types of capacity (which they refer to as 'competence'):

- Narrative ability;
- Normative capacity;
- Coping with complexity;
- Perception; and
- Co-operation.

Narrative capacity relate to the human capacity for telling stories. Stories connect events and impart meaning and connection to those who tell, listen and act within the stories. Story-telling is also a way of imagining alternatives including possible endings, unfoldings and what Canto-Sperber refer to as 'counterfactual scenarios'. The capacity to communicate is also closely allied to the capacity for sympathy.

Normative capacity receives less attention in many traditional competency frameworks that are focussed on supposed 'basic' skills of reading, writing and interpreting quantitative information. Yet, the capacity to judge and act wisely are basic life skills and intrinsically linked to the exercise of all other skills. Exercising normative and narrative capacity entails some degree of detachment from circumstances to perceive the connection, running thread or pattern of a situation or flow of events. It entails sensitivity to these circumstances including the complex human emotions, needs and non-explicit signals communicated in an interaction. It also entails the exercise of sympathy and care – the capacity to see and feel another person's needs and to act on this in appropriate ways. In this sense, active sympathy realised through particular types of human capital is a prerequisite for the norms of reciprocity that constitute social capital. John Dewey (1975: 294), remarked:

> all that we call society, state, and humanity are the realization of [the] permanent and universal relations of persons which are based upon active sympathy.

The capacity to feel and exercise sympathy is also the cornerstone of Adam Smith's work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*. He makes the case that moral judgement is founded on the *sympathy* felt by the one making such a judgement. By entering into the feelings and motives of another in carrying out an action as well as the consequences of that action on others, we develop a judgement of the propriety of that action.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) has defined six stages of moral development through which an individual can pass (refer to Table 6.1). In his view, these stages are hierarchical in so far as individuals cannot 'jump' a stage between one and six.

Table 6.1

Lawrence Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Reasoning

Level	Stage	Social orientation
Pre-conventional	1	Obedience and punishment
	2	Individualism, instrumentalism and exchange – '*what's in it for me*'.
Conventional	3	'good boy/girl' – seeking others' approval.
	4	Law and order
Post-conventional	5	Social contract
	6	Principled Conscience

What is referred to as pre-conventional moral thinking is characteristic of pre-adolescence or adolescence. Conventional moral thinking is more characteristic of adult society. In Kohlberg's view, post-conventional moral development extends to a minority in society. Stage 6 morality relating to principled conscience is probably very scarce.

Higher-order moral competence is more than norm-following for fear of sanction or conditioned loyalty to a group. It concerns human sympathy in a concrete social and inter-personal situation. It has a number of crucial dimensions:

- The known or unknown objective facts of a specific situation including the nature of any action or choice;
- The subjective understanding and beliefs of the subject(s) including its capacity to learn from experience and apply principles of moral behaviour; and

- The probable consequences of an action, known or unknown, at the time of a choice on the part of a subject(s).

To summarise the various types of skills and competencies that are useful in a modern, Western liberal and free-market democracy, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development undertook a major cross-disciplinary examination of 'core competencies'.[35] Rather than provide a definitive and comprehensive list of competencies, a framework was developed with the following three over-arching competencies:

- Functioning autonomously (including critical thinking, judgement);
- Capacity to use tools interactively (including language and symbols); and
- Joining in socially heterogeneous groups (including acceptance of diversity and democratic values).

In my view, the framework suggested by OECD is sufficiently generic and flexible to accommodate a number of perspectives. The capacity to function in socially-heterogeneous groups rests on skills of communication, norm-sharing and moral knowledge. Much of the attempts to measure human capital have been in relation to the capacity to use tools interactively – especially linguistic, mathematical and scientific symbols. Social interaction and autonomous functioning have received less attention in formal methods of assessment and ranking of educational achievement. In table 6.2, I consolidate the concepts used by other writers in providing a three-way view of human capital: rational, normative and self-reflective. Rather than seeking to identify some set of 'basic' or 'core' skills upon which other skills rest, I think it more useful to see human

[35] The results of the project, which was referred to as the *Definition and Selection of Competencies* (DESECO) were presented in Rychen and Salganik (2001).

capital as a set of inter-related capacities – all of which contribute to human well-being.

Table 6.2

Dimensions of Human Capital

Domain	Components
Rational	*Technical competence* - to know *how* to use 'tools' such as language, symbols as well as physical tools.
	Propositional knowledge - to know *what*.
	Epistemological knowledge - to know *why* – including the capacity to reflect critically on what one knows and experiences.
	Knowledge of others - to know *who* – to be able to co-operate with others and work in functioning teams, groups and societies.
Normative	*Integrity* including compassion – the capacity to suffer with and care about others – to see as others see and feel, to know who in the sense of capacity to share in the knowing of others. These are based on views of what constitutes right and wrong behaviour in a given context and situation.
	Desire - the well-springs of purposeful human action.
	Vision, imagination and intuition beyond the immediate context of personal history (informed by cognitive, emotional and moral intelligence).
Self-reflective	*Knowledge of oneself* in relation to others
	Critical Reflection on learning processes.
	Self-reliance/autonomy – the capacity to know, think and act on the basis of one's own best judgement.

6.6 The *How* of learning

Three concepts are critical to understanding the 'how' of knowing: language or conversation, community, and practice. Learning as social activity is embedded in conversations and relationships. The Latin words, *Communio* (community) and *Communicare* (communication), are intimately inter-related. Learning is an activity that connects us to others through conversation, reflection and trying out. We seem to learn best in small groups orientated towards the accomplishment of shared tasks and goals in everyday life (Abbott and Ryan, 2000).

Language is typically the means by which human knowing occurs. Language is a set of symbols that connect and embody truths and particular meanings. Through language shared identities are created as well as destroyed. Language can serve many purposes including procedures to exclude others from a shared sense of 'we'. More than the mere exchange of ideas and information; language continues to be the means by which we create ourselves and others. The Christian evangelist, John wrote: 'In the beginning was the *Logos*' (John 1: 1-18). -In the fifth century, Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote in his *Confessions:*[36]

> This I learned without any pressure of punishment to urge me on, for my heart urged me to give birth to its conceptions, which I could only do by learning words not of those who taught, but of those who talked with me; in whose ears also I gave birth to the thoughts, whatever I conceived.

The role of face-to-face conversation, interaction and their associated non-verbal cues provides a strong rationale for the continuing role of the teacher and schools as distinct from solitary reading or virtual communication through the internet (for example). However, some approaches to formal education are associated with a 'de-contextualisation' of the learning process. Writing about adult education in Britain in the 1940s, Richard Livingstone (1941) commented:

> We lead a life of action without thought; or we think in a vacuum, without contact with the realities and problems of the world. Neither form of isolation is satisfactory.

Ideas, theories and facts remain at an abstract and un-experienced level; they are not 'tried out' or connected to the lived experience of the learner. The learner-

[36] Book 1, Chapter 4 of http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/augconf/aug01.htm [consulted July 2004]

subject needs to be helped to construct and appropriate his or her own learning. Individuals may perform poorly in a 'context-free' environment of class-based tests or instruction but perform very well in environments and tasks that are familiar. Margolis (1987 and 1993) makes the point that the capacity of individuals to recognise patterns already encountered in past experience is the major part of cognitive skill rather than the capacity to follow rules and apply them to known facts.

Although we may begin earlier on with abstract rules and facts we develop, over time and through experience, an intuitive sense of how to apply these and even move beyond them. In the process of learning, we operate with a growing sense of intuition and efficacy to grasp the meaning of many facts and observations considered *as a whole* - combining knowledge and experience from different contexts. Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus summarised this when they wrote (1986: 108):

> ...One has to abandon the traditional view that a beginner starts with specific cases and, as he becomes more proficient, abstracts and interiorizes more and more sophisticated rules….Skill acquisition moves in just the opposite direction – from abstract rules to particular cases. It seems that a beginner makes inferences using rules and facts just like a heuristically programmed computer, but with talent and a great deal of involved experience the beginner develops into an expert who intuitively sees what to do without applying rules.

6.7 Criticisms and synthesis

The concept and term, human capital, has been frequently used by labour economists and macro-economists to examine, empirically, the impact of human capital formed through education, training and labour market experience. Impacts are analysed at two levels – micro-economic with reference to labour market earnings or macro-economic such as in growth of Gross Domestic Product. Economists have used a very partial proxy measure of human capital (e.g. years of schooling or age, qualifications or cognitive test achievement) and have focussed on a narrow outcome (earnings or macro-level productivity).

I would accept that an object which is disconnected from all human purpose and activity is not capital. It is humanly useless. However, once an object, a relationship or set of human values and institutions are connected to any type of purposeful human activity, then they are candidates for ‘capital’ in the sense used by economists. If they fail to pass the *strong capital test* referred to in chapter 4, this does not disqualify them from playing an important role in supporting purposeful (and economically productive) human activity.

In the literature on the economics of education the contributions of ‘schooling’ are distinguished and measured empirically as distinct from ‘innate ability,’ which is assumed to be fixed and given. Hence, the investment role of organised education and training is seen as adding value to a fixed and innate endowment of ability. The contribution of home and other ‘extra-school’ effects are isolated by means of proxy measures for age, socio-economic background etc. In more refined analyses, instrumental variables as well as panel data for genetically identical twins are employed to isolate the pure schooling effect. The difficulty in approaching individual human potential in this way is that it tends to ignore the embedded nature of learning as an activity emerging from what people already know by linking together various processes (emotional, cognitive and moral). Much learning takes place in the context of linked conversation, practice and experimentation by individuals in which social norms and expectations play a vital role.

A key assumption behind human capital theory is that an autonomous agent without cultural or social context is free to chose different learning strategies against constraints of income, time as well as explicit or opportunity costs. It is as if such an agent is ‘parachuted into a pre-given world’ (Varela, Thompson and Rosch, 1991: 135) in which schooling, training and experience add to innate ability. Hence, rather than thinking of human capital investment in some pre-given ‘world’ outside subjective consciousness or social context, it seems more appropriate to view human capital as cultural and evolving property of individuals against a particular social context.

What implications have the above claims for an understanding of human capital? Amartya Sen (1999: 293) says:

> At the risk of some oversimplification, it can be said that the literature on human capital tends to concentrate on the agency of human beings in augmenting production possibilities. The perspective of human capability focuses, on the other hand, on the ability – the substantive freedom – of people to lead the lives they have reason to value and to enhance the real choices they have. The two perspectives cannot but be related, since both are concerned with the role of human beings, and in particular with the actual abilities that they achieve and acquire. But the yardstick of assessment concentrates on different achievement.

He proposes, and adopts, a wider perspective based on human *agency* and *capability* in augmenting human freedom both directly as well as indirectly through increases in knowledge and physical health. What individuals and groups can do is more important than what they can purchase. Moreover, what they can do to meet their own needs is more important than what other individuals or groups can do by way of external help (Saito, 2003).

While acknowledging the validity of Amartya Sen's critique of the standard human capital approach, I suggest a re-definition, and widening, of the concept of human capital in the following terms:

> The attributes, potential and capability of individuals to live a good life as judged by them in accordance with their needs, values and expectations.

6.8 Concluding remarks

Human capital mirrors a world that is both within and outside and which the agent cannot fully know because knowing is embodied in the action of the agent within a complex network of inter-relationships – emotional, mental and personal. In the process of doing and knowing, agents bring forth their own world. Human capital is more than the acquisition of traditionally acknowledged and measured cognitive skills and knowledge in individuals. It refers to the widest possible range of potential attributes including the capacity to work and live with others, make ethical judgements and act accordingly as well as make use of various types of 'tools'. Motivation and the desire to realise personal and social goals is a vital dimension of learning.

The notion of individually embodied human competence in human capital has a social counter-part in the notion of distributed competence. Social networks indicate the emergence of complex competencies in organisations, families and societies. At some level of analysis, human capital merges into social capital. An initially useful conceptual distinction of human and social capital, present from the writings of James Coleman onwards, has had the effect of placing social capital on the 'outside' and somewhat apart from human cognition and agency. Social capital has assumed the role of structure in separation from that of agency or cognition embodied in individual human competence. This is unfortunate, in my view, as it renders the notion of social capital as somewhat above and beyond the tangible world of education and schooling. However, social capital is embedded, for better or worse, in the learning process. Understanding its role and interaction with the motivation, behaviour and goals of learning communities is vital.

A key drawback with classical 'human capital' theory, discussed in this chapter, is the assumption that all skills and knowledge are transferable through experience, formal education or training. Capital is 'objectified' as something 'out there' transferable to 'in here'. As a working metaphor, human capital still remains useful provided that we treat it as a metaphor. In this chapter I have argued that it is desirable to avoid treating human learning as:

- uni-dimensional;
- linear and measurable with respect to every facet;
- standing outside personal, social, cultural meanings and relationships; and
- separable into discrete types of ability or fields of knowledge.

Human and social capital cannot be juxtaposed as two separate types of capital – to be completely distinguished empirically. Rather, social capital is a different optic on human capital – seeing it not simply as an attribute of individuals without context, culture or meaning – but a deeply cultural and inter-subjective property of systems in which individual parcels of knowledge and competence are based. Human capital is propagated and reproduced, or more accurately, 'brought forth' in a social context of shared meaning and interaction.

Chapter 7

Human Capabilities: An integrated conceptual framework

'*Knowing and community are mutually related to one another: in order to come together in community, we must know each other; and in order to know one other, we must come into contact with each other and enter into a relationship with one other*' Jürgen Moltman (in Leroy, 1991: 162).

7.1 Introduction

To conclude Part A, this chapter brings together various dimensions of human capability and relates them to human needs and well-being. In chapter 3, the impact of a wide range of human functionings on subjective well-being was considered. Individuals and groups are enabled to function and attain well-being through access to resources including social and human capital. However, the *freedom* to draw on these resources is not the same everywhere. We need to consider the operation of social and human capital in a particular historical and social context. Such a context is characterised by cultures, institutions and shared social values as well as conflicts of interests.

Well-being results from a functioning of various elements in a given social context with an evaluation that is positive from the moral, cognitive and affective standpoint of the subject making the evaluation. A harmonious functioning of various elements arises from (i) internal (to the subject) correspondence between desire, behaviour, disposition and understanding, and (ii) external correspondence between these functionings and the social group or community in which the individual acts. The capacity to enjoy and integrate desire, behaviour and understanding underpin well-being for individuals. A critical dimension to the personal evaluation of well-being is the actual and perceived needs of the one making the evaluation. Some reference to theories and empirical studies of human need is therefore necessary. I will consider a number of broad conceptual issue in relation to human need and how these are related to well-being in section 7.2.

As discussed in chapters 5 and 6, a number of common themes emerge from the discussion of social and human capital. These relate to: belonging; obligations and expectations; trust; communication; and the exercise of power.

In Sections 7.3 through 7.7, I will explore each of these with a view to identifying an integrated conceptual framework for human agency or capability in Section 7.8.

7.2 Human needs

Many approaches to social deprivation start from a consideration of material resources and material resource-deficiency. However, there is enough intuitive and empirical evidence to suggest that the focus should be enlarged to include non-material resources comprising relationships. Human needs may be defined in a very narrow way to refer to a set of objectively-determined set of basic ‘goods’. Subjective evaluation by the subject of her needs in a given context is frequently given less attention than the objectively determined ‘average need’ for basic goods across a whole population.

In earlier chapters, I have placed a strong normative emphasis on the freedom and capability of individuals and groups to achieve their own well-being. Such an emphasis requires that we look at how people define their own needs within a broader framework of generic human needs. How do we know what we really need or think we need as distinct from what others think we need? More fundamentally, how do we know our needs as distinct from our transitory wants and desires? There are no easy answers to these questions. However, Erik Allardt has referred to three crucial aspects of all human well-being (Allardt, 1993: 88). These are described as: having; loving; and being.

Allardt believes that having, loving and being are central to an understanding of human need – whether at a basic level of nutrition, safety and shelter – or at other levels of connectedness and self-fulfillment. He criticises an approach in which well-being is measured exclusively with reference to material resources such as income or other primary goods necessary for survival. From an examination of the Scandinavian *Level of Living* data, he reports that deprivation in love and care is not concentrated on socially disadvantaged groups. Companionship and caring were found to be negatively correlated with the level of material wealth.

Having is defined by Allardt as the need for access to economic resources, housing, health, education and employment. He would also include the quality of the physical and natural environments as a component of having need. A need for *loving* (and to be loved) refers to the importance of attachment, support, friendship, belonging and intimacy in bounded communities. In the classic *Robbers Cave Study*, previously unacquainted boys were assigned to different groups. In-group solidarity and loyalty along with antagonism towards the other group quickly developed among the boys (Sherif, 1967). Finally, the need for *being* is reflected in unity, peace and relationship with others; it refers to the capacity of individuals for inner growth, healing, connection, meaning and joy. It may manifest itself in religious, political or ordinary everyday activity, thinking and relaxation.

Parallel to Allardt's three-way classification of human need, Abraham Maslow (1970) had developed a theory of personal development on the basis of a hierarchy of needs ranging from deficiency needs up to personal growth needs. Higher level needs necessitate prior satisfaction of lower-level ones. With growth in self-actualisation and self-transcendence, the individual develops skills of wisdom and discernment to choose and behave in some consistent way. In spiritual terms, this may be thought of as an act of unity with others and possibly *Another* if the individual believes in a transcendent reality and personal being. The levels postulated by Maslow are shown in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs

Growth Needs	Transcendence (going beyond self)
	Self-realisation (fulfilment)
Intermediate	Aesthetic (symmetry, beauty, order)
	Knowing and understanding
Deficiency Needs	Esteem
	Belonging and loving
	Safety
	Physiological

At the highest level, cultural norms and institutions help integrate individual and social needs and transmit them from generation to generation. Deci and Ryan (1991 and 2000) focus on the sources of human motivation for which they develop a theory of self-determination. A self-determined individual endorses her actions at the highest level of reflection. In pursuing self-determination, individuals 'experience a sense of freedom to do what is interesting, personally important and vitalizing'.[37] Deci and Ryan distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. They argue that higher levels of personal well-being are associated with the pursuit of intrinsic goals (or 'needs') such as autonomy, relatedness and competence. By contrast, individuals who pursue mainly extrinsic goals such as higher income or competitive social status are more likely to experience frustration. They suggest that pursuit of extrinsic goals may represent a substitute for deeper, unmet needs. Social belonging is not only a need, but a capability or resource as well, for which reason it was considered a

[37] http://www.psych.rochester.edu/SDT/index.html [consulted in July 2004]

key dimension of social capital in chapter 6 of this Study. Next, I consider how social belonging can be integrated into a capabilities framework.

7.3 Social Belonging

Each of us belongs to different communities – families, enterprises, sports clubs, whole nations, etc. The nature of this belonging varies from acquaintance to lifelong commitment. Durkheim (1895/1938: 104) said that '*the principle of association is the most imperative of all, for it is the source of all other compulsions*'. The terms 'community' and 'social network' are used interchangeably. However, the meaning of 'community' as a term tends to be more restrictive than 'social network'. Bowles and Gintis (1999: 208) define communities as social institutions '*characterised by high entry and exit costs and non-anonymous interactions among members.'*

Social networks are associated with all types of purposive relationships including market-based ones – they can embrace people who do not share a common identity or space. By contrast, the concept of 'community' tends to be associated with a bounded relationship in which people 'belong' by reason of shared identity, enduring interest or other stabilising factor. Frequently, the term 'community' is used in a very specific way to refer to a geographically bounded community or neighbourhood. However, at its most general meaning, community may be identified on any of the following shared dimensions: spatial, ethnic, social, gender, sexual identity and/or associated collective interests.

In non-bounded community networks, the nature of social interaction and belonging is typically short-lived and confined to a one-off or spasmodic transactions. *Markets* tend to foster ephemeral anonymous interactions; *public authorities* tend to foster enduring anonymous interactions; and bounded *communities* tend to foster enduring personal interactions. *Social Networks* as unbounded communities cut across markets, public authorities and bounded communities. It is important not to confuse the community-social network distinction with a distinction between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies – the *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, respectively, found in the writings of the sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies (2001/1887).

Bounded communities such as families or ethnic and religious-based communities also exist in a modern social context. However, their existence is like that of islands in a wider social archipelago where social connections are much looser than in traditional societies based on deference to authority, generalised homogeneity and uniform cultural obligation. 'Gemeinschaft' societies are based on strong kinship ties and are likely to be much more homogeneous than Gesselschaft societies typically based on 'highly specific and possibly discontinuous' relations (Tonnies, 2001/1887). In the latter, impersonal relationships help immunise individuals against personal claims and obligations.

Traditional societies were characterised by relatively high levels of stability in behaviour and attitudes as well as integration of work, learning and living arrangements. Relationships tended to be more multi-purpose than in modern (frequently urban) settings. A parent, a teacher or a family member might fulfil a number of roles as carer, volunteer and provider of goods and services. In traditional societies, authority was frequently exercised on the basis of local group identity, religious affiliation, political ideology or social status. Social belonging tended to be focussed on the local or immediate kinship or family-based identity.

By contrast, modern (frequently urban) communities are characterised by relatively high levels of:

- Transience and mobility;
- Functional specialisation and division of caring, working and living along class, gender and generational lines;
- Single-purpose relationships (frequently based on market exchange);
- Self-realisation and autonomy with a looser sense of obligation or deference to any particular group; and
- Centralisation and delegation upward of some actions, responsibility and co-ordination.

With the growth of modern society, 'community' has been liberated from a narrow interpretation to become *civil society*. Larraghy (2001) describes civil society as a domain of *secondary* associations distinct from what he calls the *primary* domains of family, market, and State. Larraghy identifies civil society as a distinct sphere characterised by voluntarism and transcendence of both economic instrumentalism (market) and what Durkheim called 'conscience collective' – typically associated with the clan or bounded community or more traditional society. He defines (Durkheim 1964/1893: 79) conscience collective as '*the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average citizens of the same society.*'[38] Finally, Larraghy states that civil society possesses its own legitimacy not based on a legal monopoly of coercive power.

Rather than referring to civil society as secondary and every other form of association as primary, I suggest that it would be more useful to conceive of three levels of social belonging organised in levels of personal or group intensity: primary (close/familial), secondary (loose/non-familial/particular) and tertiary (impersonal, contractual and universal). An illustration of these levels of belonging is provided in Table 7.2.

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[38] The French expression is best retained to convey the notion of moral sentiment and cognitive understanding rolled into one. It is probably close in meaning to 'volonté générale' in Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Conscience* in French has a broader meaning than conscience in English.

Table 7.2 A Typology of Social Belonging by Domain-Level

	Motivation	Personal/Impersonal	Autonomy/Dependence	Particular/Universal
PRIMARY				
Family (primary association)	Intrinsic (convenantal/ mutualism)	Personal	Dependent – frequently hierarchical	Particular, local, idiosyncratic
SECONDARY				
Civil Society (secondary associations)	Intrinsic (convenantal/ mutualism)	Personal	Autonomous – inter-subjective	Particular, local to universal, idiosyncratic
TERTIARY				
Market (tertiary association)	Extrinsic (contractual)	Impersonal	Autonomous – inter-subjective (but also hierarchical and dependent in unequal exchange)	Local to Universal
State (tertiary association)	Extrinsic (contractual/ procedural)	Impersonal	Dependent –hierarchical	Universal, bureaucratic, standardised (especially at Central, National or Supra-national levels)

At the primary level of social belonging, relationships are based on family or extended family/clan/tribe. These are likely to be close and focussed on personal needs, obligations and intrinsic motivation. The principle of non-calculating and caring engagement is likely to be more important than at other levels of belonging. The fulfilment of obligations to each other is likely to be more spontaneous and instinctive than contractual. The term covenant – with its religious overtones – is used by Jonathan Sacks to describe not only relationships among family members, but civil society too. Sacks (2002: 269) states: '*Civil society rests on moral relationships. They are covenantal rather than contractual.*'

Mutualism – or mutual obligation – is more intrinsic than extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation underlying mutualism is based on an inner directed and voluntary action. Extrinsic motivation is based on compulsion or a self-calculating exchange. The metaphor of covenant is applied by Sacks to describe personal relationships based on inner-directed moral virtue rather than an externally imposed set of rules or self-interest based exchange. Secondary associations comprise a wide range of different types of organisations: legal, religious, charitable, advocacy and 'not-for-profit' social enterprises. The term 'social economy' straddles the secondary and tertiary domains since it refers to 'not-for-profit' market activities that meet various social and economic needs

When it comes to the Market or State, the notion of contract assumes greater importance (although family and civil society can also be based on explicit contracts). A contract involves a legal relationship involving mutual agreement to abide by some set of rules and practices. It is frequently associated with some element of compulsion predicated on unequal access to authority. The topic of power-based social exchange is examined further in section 7.8 of this chapter.

The State is the ultimate possessor of civic authority. It mediates conflict of interests and meets social needs not adequately provided for by other institutions. Its *modus operandi* is impersonal, legal and universalist (in the sense that its services and structures tend to reflect the generalised and universal needs of abstract individuals or groups).

Formalised obligations as rules or institutions represent an important dimension of all social belonging. Douglass North defines institutions as ‘rules of the game’ – both formal and informal constraints and conventions of behaviour. They define the way the game is played. More broadly, they may be interpreted as social practices and norms of behaviour continuously repeated, legitimised and maintained by shared norms and values. I understand institutions as:

> decision-making mechanisms or rules that codify and formalise informal social norms and conventions.

7.4 Social obligations and expectations

Social relationships are based on inter-personal obligations and expectations. The exchange of ‘gifts’ or service provides the basis for inter-personal reciprocity. Person A owes person B some favour or service or duty on the grounds of acquired social norms or expectations. Receiving a favour or act of service generates an obligation on the part of B – toward A and still others. A has an expectation that B may (or should) return a favour at some stage in the future. Hence, generalised sets of expectations and cultural obligations arise through social interaction and are re-produced and re-interpreted through time and across generations. Two key elements are present in any relationship based on reciprocity:

- Autonomy or independence; and
- Obligation and inter-dependence.

In the absence of some degree of autonomy in any social relationship, it is difficult to see how reciprocity, volunteerism or assent is present. A very young infant is completely dependent on its parent. As it grows through childhood to adolescence, capacities for voluntary response and self-directed activity grow. In fully developed human networks some element of voluntary agreement, deliberation and autonomy is present so that individuals can chose to engage or not to engage. However, the strength of social norms, ties and obligations will always constrain the exercise of that autonomy. Each one is both the product of society and culture in which social norms constrain our actions and choices as well as a participant in a society where people depend on each other for their well-being.

Hence, the notion of reciprocity is central to all social relationships. But, why should I, as an individual, reciprocate if others do not or if I can take advantage of others' reciprocity to not play my own part? This question arises, frequently, in considerations of human behaviour. A purely rational or self-interested account of human behaviour cannot provide a complete explanation. The 'rules of the game' in human behaviour are partly pre-conscious and taken for granted.

Game theory has been used to examine various possible decisions or actions under conditions of mutual inter-dependence. Game theory provides a basis for rationalising the presence of 'norms of reciprocity' as an outcome of repeated interaction and trial in which, over the ages, humans have learned to co-operate. The theory can also be used to explain why vicious cycles of distrust and non-cooperation are created. In the 1970s and 1980s, Robert Axelrod (1984) pioneered a number of computer-based simulations of decision-making. These revealed the dominance of what he referred to as 'tit-for-tat' as a sustainable strategy in inter-personal relations. Someone starts out by trusting another but thereafter 'rewards' or 'retaliates' another's response. It is a particular application of the well-known '*prisoner's dilemma'*.

The simplest version of the *prisoner's dilemma* is about two prisoners culpable of a crime. Each prisoner is confronted with a choice between informing or not informing on the other prisoner. If they both inform on each other, a sentence of five years in prison is exacted on each for a serious crime. If each does not inform on the other, a sentence of only one year is exacted on each since there is insufficient evidence to incriminate either except for a minor offence. However, if either of the two informs on the other, *without the other informing in retaliation*, then 10 years is exacted on the one who did not inform while the informer is left go without any prison term. The stylised example is given in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3 The Prisoner's Dilemma

(prison sentences arising from inter-related actions)

		Prisoner B	
		Co-operates (B1) (doesn't tell on A)	Defects (B2) (tells on A)
Prisoner A	Co-operates (A1) (doesn't tell on B)	A gets 1 year B gets 1 year	A gets 10 years B gets 0 years
	Defects (A2) (tells on B)	A gets 0 year B gets 10 years	A gets 5 years B gets 5 years

It is in the narrow self-interest of each prisoner to inform on the other while the other will not inform on them. The prisoner who defects (by informing) while the other is a 'sucker' (does not defect) receives the highest gain. However, the result of a purely self-interested strategy on the part of each is to leave each with a sentence of five years. The optimal group interest (for the two prisoners in this example) would have been not to inform at all on the other. However, to realise this it would have been necessary for each to trust the other and to know, in advance, the likely response of the other.

Co-operation on the part of A is a risky strategy – it may backfire if B does not co-operate as happens in cell A1B2. The flipside of this is defection on the part of A while B co-operates. The sentences are reversed while A goes free (cell A2B1). If some collective or joint welfare outcome were defined in this hypothetical case as the sum of all prison sentences, then the socially preferable outcome is A1B1 where the sum of sentences is minimised. However, the outcome will be otherwise if one or both prisoners defects.

A key underlying assumption is that the total reward for reciprocal co-operation exceeds that for reciprocal defection. In other words, a one-year prison for each prisoner is better (from the standpoint of each prisoner) than a five year sentence for each (where both tell on each other). However, if one prisoner thinks that he can get away with telling on the other without retaliation he gets the biggest individual payback –release from prison.

So far, the 'prisoner's dilemma' has been presented as a once-off event. In the so-called 'Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma', the prisoners learn about the responses of the other through successive iterations rather than in one-off events. This iterative process can lead, through time, to a stable equilibrium in which each agent acts in a trustworthy way towards the other.

This stylised story of the *prisoner's dilemma* encapsulates the essence of a general collective action problem – where individuals seek maximum personal gain through 'defection' even though, collectively, people are worse off as a result of generalised defection. Well-being in any individual actor is contingent on the relationship with other actors and the extent to which other actors are willing to co-operate, or not, in actions that directly impinge on the well-being of each. To co-operate, each actor must trust either on the basis of prior particular experience or because of a general innate sense that trusting is a sensible strategy in 'most cases'. But, what consitutes trust?

7.5 Trust

7.5.1 Trust in the context of uncertainty

I understand trust to be:

> a belief or expectation about the good intentions of others (familiars, strangers, specified groups, institutions).

To grow or survive, trust requires reciprocation based on uncertainty and an incomplete immediate fulfilment of an obligation. It is predicated on the basis of perceived or acknowledged risk – where I risk some good or resource on the assumed or perceived good will of others to act honourably. I trust you to reciprocate a favour or service at some future date; you trust another to reciprocate a favour done to you; I trust that person and that person trusts me on the basis of his/her trust in you. Generalised inter-personal trust is the result of a countless number of exchanges over time. If reciprocation is certain then an expectation of future return does *not* represent trust.

Confidence, probability and intuition are, therefore, key to the presence of trust. However, trust is never exercised in a complete absence of information. Trusting is believing that others will behave in a positive or trustworthy way under conditions of *uncertainty* and *some* information – however incomplete. In his *Foundations of Social Theory*, James Coleman (1990) developed a social theory that linked micro-level choice and purpose with macro-level phenomena and behaviour. He assumed rational choice and purposeful activity at the individual level. In Coleman's theory, purposive action does not necessarily imply utility maximisation, however, as in most economic applications of rational choice theory.

Ben-Ner and Putterman (1999: 32) claim that individuals in impersonal and large-scale social groupings may be more prone to co-operate than 'is currently individually rational' in that context. Altruistic dispositions involving a desire to mate, bond and socialise have been ingrained over vast periods of time. Over the ages, individuals survived in small groups that were highly bonded and in which everyone within that group knew everyone else. Altruism seems to be as much an outcome of genetic disposition and evolution as of some in-built trait based on calculation of likely reciprocated benefit.

Some evidence for this is found in the research work of Trevarthen and Logotheti (1989: 182) who suggest that children are born with innate co-operative dispositions. Antagonistic motives gain the upper hand when 'co-operative motives are deceived or frustrated'. Furthermore, they claim (1989: 167) that a newborn baby:

> makes orientations, expressions and gestures and moves in concert with the sympathetic partner…this is primary inter-subjectivity or basic person-person awareness.

Likewise, the return on caring for one's own children may be elusive, difficult to define or measure. A strong and intrinsic motivation is at work that leads most parents to make sacrifices for their children – even in the absence of social sanctions and norms or obvious immediate pay-back. As the US National Institute for Mental Health states:

> The results of millions of years of biological evolution are built into every newborn infant, but the results of millions of years of cultural evolution have to be acquired through social contact.[39]

Hence, trust is based on inherited habits of behaviour that have had standing and validity down the ages. It could be termed an inherited 'prejudice' transmitted from one generation to the next. Writing in the early eighteenth century, Edmund Burke referred to inherited 'prejudice' in the following terms (1993/1790: 87):

> Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit; and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes part of his nature.

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[39] http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/baschap6.cfm [consulted in July 2004]

Similar to Burke, Alexis De Tocqueville (1954/1835: 310) referred to 'habits of the heart' as linked to habits of civic association. It makes sense to care for each other, to fulfil particular social obligations and to co-operate because that is what people did before us and that is what constitutes a social norm worth adhering to because not to adhere would involve disruption and an undermining of some greater social good. Echoing John Dewey[40] a century later, Burke goes further in speaking of a society based on an *inter-generational partnership* extending over time among those living as well as those who have gone before (Burke, 1993/1790: 87):

> We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations, and of ages.

One can surmise that this 'capital of nations' is the inherited mores, values and expectations of an evolving society giving rise to a pervasive, enduring, even if fragile, reality of generalised inter-personal trust. In their separate ways, Burke and Dewey seemed to anticipate the notion and term, social capital.

7.5.2 The radius of trust

The *radius of trust* defines the range of persons in someone's trust-circle. Individuals living or working in bounded 'trustworthy' communities or organisations are more likely to enjoy the status of trustee on foot of reputation in the group. In these cases, the community to which one belongs and in which trust is placed is acting as an intermediary of good repute and reliability. This type of trust – which may be referred to as 'thick trust' is present in relatively small and bounded communities based on kinship, tribe or creed. However, it would be misleading to characterise such communities as necessarily limited in

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[40] 'Through this unconscious education the individual gradually comes to share in the intellectual and moral resources which humanity has succeeded in getting together. He becomes an inheritor of the funded capital of civilisation.' (Dewey, 1897: 77)

the radius of trust. There is enough evidence from philosophical and religious traditions to indicates that norms of reciprocity do not stop at familiars.

As already discussed in section 7.3, a key dimension of modern societies is extent to which social relationships are mediated through markets and institutions that are impersonal and universal. Societies have developed formal rules and institutions to facilitate co-operation among larger groups of people – thus reinforcing extensive but 'thin' trust. Characterised as they are by complexity, differentiation and specialisation of knowledge, modern societies require high levels of 'thin' trust. Informal rules of reciprocity and co-operation persist in modern societies – even if the calculative pay-back to individuals is low or co-operation involves persons who are not alike or not immediately known by the one who trusts or co-operates. Expert systems are required, for example, to get someone from one destination to another by plane based on specialised skills, knowledge and networks of flight control and safety procedure. We have little option except to trust in many different situations!

Mediating 'thin' trust relationships requires third-party enforcement or validation. A third party may be involved especially where it involves strangers or those who are 'not alike'. A trusts B and B trusts with C. Hence, A and C can enter into a trusting relationship for a particular purpose or transaction without necessarily having to know each other in advance.

The radius of generalised inter-personal trust (probably a close proxy to 'thin' trust) is likely to vary considerably from culture to culture. Although international survey questions on inter-personal trust such as those used in the *World Values Survey*[41] may be questioned on grounds of cross-cultural equivalence, the evidence points to the existence of very different patterns and radii of trust even among economically developed societies in the West.

[41] The question asked in the World Values Survey is: 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?'

Interestingly, 'individualist' and historically Protestant cultures in Northern Europe seem to sustain higher levels of reported generalised inter-personal trust and civic co-operation, whereas in more 'collectivist' cultures in Southern Europe and South America, generalised inter-personal trust is low (OECD, 2001: 102). However, the latter societies are likely to show higher levels of trust within closed networks of families and close associates – something that is not measured in international surveys such as WVS.

7.5.3 The antecedents of Trust

What are the antecedents of generalised inter-personal trust? High-trust equilibria require a number of properties in the relationships among trustors and trustees. These include: frequency of contact; durability of relationships; communication; and shared norms and values. Repeated contact and familiarity can foster trust (as well as mistrust!) through a flow of information about the other and about oneself. This may signal distrust or trust – but assuming that individuals share broadly similar values, familiarity is likely to generate trust in the long-term.

Trust is fragile. It takes a long time to build – possibly generations. It may be quickly dissipated through a major disjuncture or social crisis. A cycle of falling trust can be quickly set in motion through a breakdown in some crucial factor which underlies a trusting relationship. Distrust may become self-reinforcing by feeding a low-trust equilibrium among individuals. As trust contracts, processes are set in motion to further reduce trust. Reciprocated distrust then becomes the norm in a particular group or setting. The likely response, in this context, is to protect one's own interest in a non-trusting environment by not trusting.

In relationships based on *durability,* actors are less likely to default because the social sanction and personal loss due to severance of commitment is likely to be higher than in more transient relationships. Durability raises the incentive threshold for trustworthy behaviour since the penalty for defective behaviour is higher among familiars. One is more likely to act well so that a favour is not refused in time of need in the future. Along with stability, the size and density of a network are also important considerations in shaping trust. In a bounded community based on mutual acquaintance, people are less likely to defect and more likely to co-operate, ceteris paribus. The benefits in trust of small teams or project groups nested within larger social organisations are not to be under-estimated. However, group norms and sanctions may also inhibit their members from contact with others outside the group or from deviating from group-imposed identities or expected behaviours.

7.6 Shared norms

In the discussion of social capital in chapter 6, considerable stress was placed on the role of communication of values and norms. Communication involves a transfer of information, knowledge or values. It opens up a series of expectations inviting reciprocation. Complete shared value systems are not always essential for the existence of inter-personal trust. For example, individuals can trust and interact with others who do not share similar values across a range of life choices and belief systems. Trusting someone to deliver on a promise or contract or to behave in some generally acceptable way springs from generalised norms of reciprocity that parallel diversity in value systems. However, some minimum level of shared values is essential. Values shape how individuals are likely to respond or behave to a perceived favour received. Values are beliefs about 'what ought to be' in general or in any given situation. Scott (1995: 37) defines values as:

> conceptions of the preferred or the desirable together with the construction of standards to which existing structures or behaviour can be compared and assessed.

A reliance on shared values and common norms, as seems to be the case in the writings of Talcott Parsons (1937) and Emile Durkheim, may not be strictly necessary for social cohesion. Norms or reciprocity may suffice. Scott (1995: 37) states that norms:

> specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends.

Coleman (1999: 242) characterises norms as rules specifying 'what actions are regarded by a set of persons as proper or correct, or improper'. He related *norms* to *sanctions* in the following terms:

> Norms are ordinarily enforced by sanctions, which are either rewards for carrying out those actions regarded as correct or punishments for carrying out those actions regarded as incorrect.

Norms becomes reciprocal within a social network when they give rise to an exchange or communication of information and expectation. They prescribe *how* certain ends or preferred outcomes are achieved. Values are about the ends we chose, whether individually or collectively. In practice, the distinction is not entirely clear-cut since norms of behaviour become, themselves, ends. Likewise, values refer to means and strategies of behaviour as ends in themselves.

Norms and shared understandings can be internalised by individuals as expressions of right and wrong. It is also possible that such internalised views, when widely shared, may give rise to external rules of behaviour. An internalised norm is more than just a 'belief statement' of right and wrong (values): it is an integral part of an individual's behaviour and thinking where mental representations and cognitive understandings are aligned with feelings, motivation and external behaviour.

Informal norms of reciprocity constitute un-written and tacit codes of behaviour. It is expected, for example, that people will look out for each other, sweep in front of their hall door or pathway, take in post, avoid making loud noise at night, etc. These are similar to what Anthony Giddens (1984) refers to as 'practical consciousness' in which particular routines are established and re-produced. They offer some level of stability and security even if participants cannot fully rationalise or explain them. They emerge from the collective practice, interaction and communication among subjects. Unwritten, unconscious or semi-conscious, routines, codes and acquired ways of doing things are embedded in social structure and normative systems. They are more written in the hearts of people than in the pages of a book.

7.7 Communication

Knowledge is embodied and communicated in purposeful conversations within various human networks. The nature of such knowledge is highly tacit, contextual, relational and open to varying interpretations. It is a mixture of unconscious imitation and conscious reasoning. An understanding of human community that I find particularly inspiring is that offered by Lillis (2001: 72):

> a network of purposeful conversations about issues that concern them.

Such an understanding emphasises the role of *dialogue* in establishing belonging and mutual obligation using simple everyday conversations and reflective practice to communicate the nearly non-communicable dimensions of real community. Social cohesion is achieved through an interaction and communication among autonomous self-reliant sub-systems.

The medium of communication is through the use of symbols or signifiers that are relatively simple and that connect to things that are more complex. *Symbols – Symballein* in Greek meaning *to throw together* – are the external representations of internalised beliefs about 'the world out there'. They embody constructs, metaphors, language, codes and rituals – each with their own meaning. They provide a key to the *mental maps* we use to interpret and evaluate the world and its relationships. Symbolic information can be bodily, oral, visual-artistic, musical-artistic, numeric or written. [42]

So, for example, numerical information is symbolic. Empirical evidence captured in statistics or quantitative information is a symbol or 'throwing together' of diverse phenomena. In this sense, every representation of a complex world through statistics, indicators or mathematical modelling is a symbolic

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[42] For a discussion of symbol theory in the work of Norbert Elias see (Mennell, 1992: 277).

abstraction – more or less useful in understanding diverse phenomena across different settings but nevertheless an abstraction and a simplification.

Written and oral language are also symbolic. The evidence thrown up in recent research in the cognitive sciences and evolutionary psychology (e.g. Capra, 2002) suggests that language developed from bodily movement, gesture and touch which contained elaborate sets of meanings, syntax and signposts to abstract thought. If limbs and arms along with primitively acquired objects were the first human tools, bodily movement assumed a critical role as a means of communication, meaning and transfer of information and values.

Language represents a highly symbolic process of interaction and co-ordination of behaviour through a mediation of interpretations, understandings and shared mental pictures of the world. It shapes how we interpret reality. Hence, language negotiates between social facts and cultural; between cultural meaning 'out there' and subjective meaning 'in here'. It pushes us to think in a certain direction and create meaning from our picture of social reality.

An important corollary of this is that our identity and belonging – who we think we are – and our understanding of the world out there are shaped by language. 'Social facts' are, essentially, negotiated through linguistic interaction and brokered social meaning in webs of networked conversation. We live in this web of conversation and linguistic meaning. By weaving such a web, Capra (2002: 136) maintains that we 'co-ordinate our behaviour and together bring forth our world'. Hence, language, dress, demeanour, expression, appearance constitute important sources of symbolic meaning. They are the *habitus* in which we establish and bring forth our identity. Pierre Boudieu (1990: 54) wrote:

> The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with the schemes generated by history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the correctness of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms.

Hence, ways of speaking, acting, bodily movement, concepts of beauty, propriety and identity are cultivated and transmitted inter-generationally. The *habitus* is the culture in which unspoken, implicit, tacit and 'taken-for-granted' attitudes and behaviours are formed, sustained and propagated. This has huge significance for social institutions such as schools which retain a predominantly 'middle-class' *habitus*. In using the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu wished to acknowledge symbolic, and not just economic, power in the way social networks operate. Hence, beliefs and attitudes about gender, sexuality, religion, race, civic duty, tolerance, etc are formed in an evolving habitus.

Significant others – for us – interpret our behaviour and disclosures of self. A 'narcissism of small differences,' to use a phrase of Sigmund Freud, frequently grows up around in-group identity. Our language, our accent, our dress and demeanour makes us different to the others – we mark out our territory and our shared sense of common identity. Hence, communication is a key builder of social belonging and through its establishment of shared meanings and identity a form of human capability unique to each concrete and particular community. But, each community is based on relationships of unequal access to authority and exercise of power.

7.8 Mediation of conflict

The issue of *power* arises in all social relationships. Differences in power and status are typically discernible along the four main lines of sex, social class, race and religious/political creed. However, these lines of inequality sub-divide into others such as sexual orientation, occupational group, age or membership of various minority communities which share unique identities or shared interests (e.g. linguistic, cultural, residential). To be a member of a social network is to be a member of a network differentiated within itself as well as with respect to other networks on lines of power and control over resources.

Some members of a social network are likely to occupy positions of authority, privilege or advantage either by way of ascribed social status or acquired positional advantage due to access to important knowledge or skill. Differential access to information, power and control may be correlated with differences in value systems and expectations. Hence, the concept of 'shared norms' or 'shared values' is always relative to the existing structure of power and symbolic dominance. We may ask 'whose values?,' 'which norms?' and 'why these particular norms?'

In his critique of the social capital literature, and the pioneering work of James Coleman in particular, Ben Fine (2001) is incorrect in associating functionalist approaches such as in Coleman with a sidelining of power issues. Coleman characterises a social system as having three components: actors, resources/events and initial distribution of resources. According to Coleman, power resides in actors' control over resources while 'value' (or utility) – in the eyes of the powerful – resides in the interest that powerful actors have in events. Typically, power is unequally distributed in social systems while value is related to the distribution of interests of powerful actors. If member A is less interested in the resources of B than B is in A's resources – A has greater leverage and power over B in the relationship. This produces an imbalanced relationship based on dependence. B may submit to the authority of A in exchange for protection against risk. But, to begin with, the initial allocation of resources of interest is possibly the result of past or cumulative coercion and even violence.

Rights to control are crucial for norm-enforcement. There is a general social consensus in any situation on the existence of these rights– not necessarily enforced by law. The right to control over actions of others stems from social structures in which authority is invested in someone (sometimes in the context of a social exchange such as in the sale of labour services). According to Coleman, some surrender the right to control over particular events and actions of interest to others in exchange for anticipated benefits. Determination of rights and their allocation stems from a social consensus on what is right. Thus, Coleman (1990: 53) writes:

> What is right is defined within the system itself by the actors' interests and relative power in that system. The theory implies that moral philosophers searching for the right distribution of rights are searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

However, Coleman states that power is not necessarily manipulative or disempowering of one actor. For example, authority can spring from ‘a firm basis for knowing and acting’. As a response to unequal relationships, actors with less access to power (e.g. children, women, students etc) may form strong and internally complete social networks – *there is strength in internal unity*.

7.9 Concluding Remarks

The capability of groups to achieve shared goals based on some shared values is more than a series of formal rights or externally available goods. It is fundamentally a question of freedom (and responsibility) to realise the ‘good’ life. As already stated in chapter 4, I understand human capabilities as:

> The freedoms, efficacies, relationships and norms that enable individuals and groups to act in pursuit of the quality of living best suited to their needs, values and expectations.

Progress in human well-being is as much about tackling various types of ‘unfreedoms’ as in increasing capacity or productivity of resources in groups or individuals. In this chapter, I have brought together a number of concepts and linked ideas that lie behind notions of human and social capital. Located in a capabilities framework, these concepts of belonging, obligation, trust, norms, communication and power assume vital importance in terms of enabling groups and individuals to realise their own well-being. Together with human needs for having, being and loving, discussed in section 7.2, human capabilities shape how we live in society (functionings) and what we expect as just, rational and realistic in the light of perceived needs and capabilities.

However, conceptualisation based on relatively fixed distinctions, differentiations and linkages is a messy business. Unavoidably, terminology and language present difficulties. The extent of confusion and multiple meanings is evident to me from the absence of dialogue across disciplinary divides. Trying to define and measure some of these concepts and terms in empirical research does not solve the problem since all attempts to define precisely and measure from available observations tend to limit and reduce what is largely changing, emergent, and ill-defined. The charge that terms such as human, and especially social, capital are imprecise holds some resonance because the processes and phenomena they describe are systemic, relational and complex, defying easy quantification.

The difficulty of defining abstract concepts and terms has an analogue in the field of ethics. The philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, had the following to say about defining the ethical good (Janik and Toulmin, 1973: 194-195):

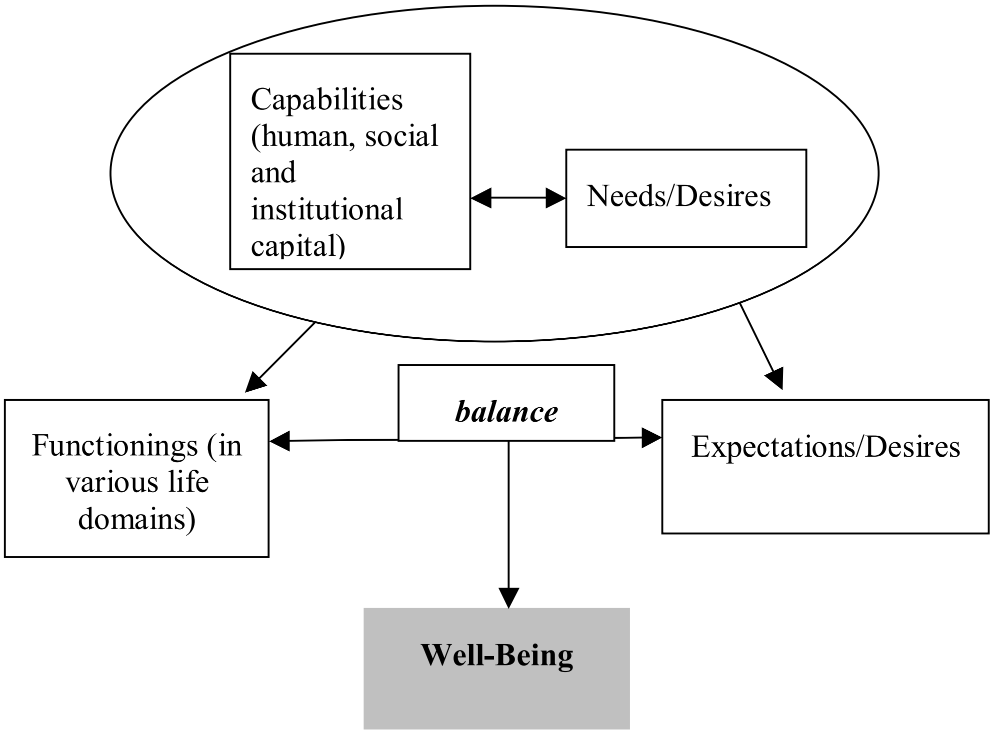
> In ethics people are forever trying to find a way of saying something which, in the nature of things, is not and can never be expressed. We know a priori: anything which one might give by way of a definition of the Good – it can never be anything but a misunderstanding.

I believe that it is best not to over-define concepts. Greater clarity emerges in conversation, practice and reflective experience. This openness to evolution in meaning could be applied to concepts such as human or social capital, or indeed, the meaning of 'well-being'.

Figure 7.1 summarises these over-arching concepts and inter-relationships. The balance between how we function and what we expect – reality and desire – gives rise to 'well-being' or life satisfaction. This conceptual framework forms a starting point for testing and measurement in Part B with one data source in one country for a sample of the adult population.

Figure 7.1

Concept Diagram for relationship of Capabilities, Needs, Functionings, Expectations and Well-Being



Part B

The Empirical Evidence

‘Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.’ (attributed to Albert Einstein)

Chapter 8

Measurement Issues

'The search is now on for the holy grail: a consistent measurement instrument that can be applied without major adaptation across a range of situations, for both research and for policy purposes.' (Fine and Green, 2000: 90)

8.1 Introduction

In referring to the measurement of social capital in the above quotation, Fine and Green drew attention to a more general question in all areas of social science – to what extent can human and social phenomena be described and represented in numerical symbols, which have universal meaning and application? I understand 'measurement' as referring to any activity that represents objects, events or processes by means of numerical information. In measuring any object, event or process, we implicitly assume that these can be represented or symbolised by images of quantities, levels and distributions. To compare, we need to postulate the existence of some observable or symbolic unit of measurement that has universal meaning or equivalence within the relevant sphere.

More formally, Stevens (1959: 19) has defined measurement as:

> The assignment of numerals to objects or events according to a rule – any rule.

In this chapter I seek to explore more closely the conceptual basis for measuring:

- Subjective well-being (section 8.2);
- Social capital (8.3); and
- Human capital (8.4).

In 'measuring' these, I am assuming that it is meaningful to compare 'amounts' of any of these and say that they are 'more than', 'less than' or 'equal to' another amount of the same thing. Furthermore, I am assuming that different observed amounts of human capital, social capital and subjective well-being can be related to each other in a way that enables me to draw inferences about relationships –

especially in the presence of other variables which represent different phenomena. All of these assumptions are open to question, not least because:

- As emphasised in Part A, human and social capital are not discrete phenomena sitting apart from others – knowing, acting and relating to others is interwoven with the total social, cultural and institutional context;

- The concept of degree, intensity, quantity and hierarchy in observations of social interaction or human knowledge is relative to some arbitrary, even if widely agreed, set of human criteria; and

- Feelings and evaluations of well-being are subject to interpretation and may not be valid across situations, individuals or cultures.

Hence, there is an enduring gulf between the theoretical understandings of these three concepts and their measurement in empirical analysis. In Part A, I have attempted to clarify the different meanings of each as well as provide a framework within which they can be applied in research. The key to understanding the role of human and social capital is in (i) de-limiting these concepts and, at the same time, (ii) not treating them as 'stand-alone' concepts but rather useful concepts in a larger and much more complex story of collective behaviour and subjective well-being.

I conclude this chapter with an overview of the main data source used for measuring SWB together with social and human capital in this study (section 8.5) followed by a description of the limitations of such empirical research.

8.2 Measurement of Subjective Well-Being

8.2.1 The multi-faceted nature of SWB

In chapter 3, a review of the research evidence concludes that no single factor explains subjective well-being (SWB). Any attempt to measure SWB or to understand its relationship to various explanatory factors needs to acknowledge the context in which individuals make a general evaluation of their lives. Hence, there is no single state of mental well-being, which can be observed outside context, culture and individual circumstances.

Enjoyment or satisfaction with respect to work, personal relations, eating, sleeping vary in kind and intensity as well as in relationship to the overall goals and moral orientations of an individual. Hence, reducing all experiences of satisfaction to a single metric is problematic. SWB is a multi-faceted collection of domain-specific 'satisfactions' from satisfaction with relationships to satisfaction with health, income, employment, etc. However, I concur with many researchers in believing that it is possible to work with a concept of overall life satisfaction – based on a pooling of specific evaluations in the various life satisfaction domains. There is evidence to support 'top-down' evaluations of life domains where the overall state of life satisfaction impacts on the perception of a discrepancy between reality and expectation in each domain rather than the other way round (Headey and Wearing, 1989).

Domains of life satisfaction may be summarised as:

- Satisfaction in *relationships* with others –partner, family, work associates, fellow-citizens;

- Satisfaction with social *status*, place, or position in a group or hierarchy;

- Satisfaction with psychological and physical *health*; and

- Satisfaction with one's access to *financial* and human capital – in particular income, wealth and accommodation.

In the empirical part to this study, I avoid making any connection between subjective and objective well-being. Even if it remains a vital goal of societies, objective well-being is simply not measurable according to any universally agreed set of criteria or measurable framework. Societal well-being cannot be estimated by means of an aggregation of evaluations by individuals of their own well-being. The moral reasoning or understandings of many individuals may be faulty according to some 'objective' criteria. Furthermore, there may be externalities and public good effects whereby one person's behaviour and self-evaluation impacts positively or negatively on others.

It is easier to measure what we want as revealed in choices and preferences than what we want informed by reflective practice and experience. And, it is easier to measure informed desire than what may be considered as objectively good for us. For example, smoking may induce a pleasant mental state in the smoker who is ill-informed or non-reflective. Equipped with information and reflective reasoning, the smoker may experience less contentment in smoking compared to before. Even with knowledge and reflection, the mental state induced by smoking is not a reliable guide to what is good for the individual as judged by an objective criterion of physical health risk (and associated risks to mental well-being arising from physical ill-health). Griffin (1986: 20) makes a case for using a wide conception of desire-fulfilment well-being (morally informed and not just actual or revealed preference) but seeking to rein it in from desire in general which becomes too large to deal with. He proposes focusing on those desires that may be given weight according to some moral framework at the individual and collective level.

As already stated, a foundational assumption in most empirical studies of SWB is that happiness or life satisfaction is measurable and comparable across individuals, situations and points in time. However, not all social scientists, and economists in particular, sign up to these assumptions. Economists such as Lionel Robbins and, more recently, Amartya Sen, have doubted that happiness or 'utility'[43] could be (i) measured on a cardinal scale for individuals; and (ii) compared across individuals. Robbins discounts the notion of a single preference or utility function across individuals. Utility, according to this view, is unique to each individual's preference function or revealed choice and is probably, at best,

[43] Utility is the favoured term for individual hedonistic satisfaction in micro-economics. It is close, in meaning, to SWB. However, the latter involves a moral evaluation of one's life as a whole whereas utility is associated with immediate satisfaction.

ordinal for each individual. In practice, decisions have to be made between different alternatives based on the likely impact on individuals. A societal decision to take money from one person and give to another is, implicitly a view of how much society values different outcomes. Inter-personal comparisons cannot, and should not, be avoided. The choice of metrics and comparative framework is another matter.

Griffin (1986: 93-94) discusses three types of well-being measures. The first relates to a strict rule of *Ratio Scale* would imply that some value for SWB represents a level of SWB for a particular event or person and that it is twice, half or three times that for another person or event. Formally, this may be defined as:

$Y = a . X$ where Y is some numerical value for SWB for person 1 and X is some numerical value for SWB for person 2. The coefficient *a* is a scale factor. Hence, if person 1 has a value of 8 and person 2 has a value of 4, person 1 experiences twice as much SWB as person 2.

A relaxation of this rule is to say that SWB is comparable on an *Interval Scale* according to the following:

$Y = a . X + b$ where b is some constant value.

In the latter case, we are not in a position to say that person 1 is twice as happy has person 2. However, the difference in an *interval* such as, $Y = 8 - 4 = 4$, represents the same quantity difference as $Y = 4 - 0 = 4$.

Finally, an *Ordinal Scale* ranking (e.g. from 0 through 10) provides a way of comparing SWB over time or across individuals or states so that we can be sure that a value of 8 for person 1 signifies a higher absolute level of SWB than a value of 7 for the same person or another.

For reasons of data availability as well as theoretical objections to a Ratio- and Interval-Scale ranking, I adopt an *Ordinal Scale* ranking to measure SWB according to – the (questionable) assumption of equivalence of ranking scores across individuals. Hence, I am assuming that a given value for SWB on a 10-point scale has the same significance and meaning across individuals in a random sample survey. A value of 8 for person A represents a higher level of SWB than a value of 0 through 7 for any other person in the same survey. However, I am drawing no conclusion with respect to the quantification of strength of feeling or evaluation of satisfaction. The question on life satisfaction was used in the survey of Social Capital undertaken by the *National Economic and Social Forum*. The question was:

> All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days. Where would you place yourself in terms of overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' means you are 'very dissatisfied' to '10' which means you are 'very satisfied'.

Single, direct questions seem to offer reasonable validity with respect to life satisfaction in individuals. However, subtle differences in question sequence, the precise formulation of questions and the context and methodology in which an interview survey takes place can all impact on the validity and reliability of questions on life satisfaction. Most observations of SWB are static in the sense that adaptive processes whereby individuals react to significant increases or decreases in SWB are discounted. A single, one-shot, telephone survey of the adult population, such as that used in the NESF Survey, could not explore and test for these factors.

It has been reported that responses on a multi-point scale can vary considerably in the space of a few days as between adjacent points on the scale. When biases are random, large samples attenuate errors in the estimates of subjective well-being. However, error in correlations may be affected. According to Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997), respondents to survey questions are likely to give additional weight to recent experiences or to the perceived peak or end of a series of experiences. One way of minimising memory and response bias is to develop direct 'on-line' or experience-sampling measures of SWB to assess and quantify states of feeling or evaluations at a sequence of moments in time. However, I am not aware that this type of testing is has been used in Ireland. What evidence is there that survey-based questions such as that used in this Study provide a reliable guide to measurement of SWB? I now turn to consider the question of measurement validity, bearing in mind that I am using a very limited instrument to measure SWB.

8.2.2 Measurement validity

Diener, Suh and Oishi (1997) believe that SWB can be measured and that estimates derived from self-reported interviews or written questionnaires are consistent with objective measures based on incidence of psychosomatic illness as well as the reports of others who know the respondent. Diener et al. (1999) reported that survey-based questions addressed to the target respondent perform well compared with more objective measures. Hence, survey measures based on self-reporting are believed to be generally consistent over time and across cultures. However, the scale used to measure SWB and the survey methodology and sequencing of questions do matter for comparative purposes, according to Diener.

Veenhoven (2001) claims that most people have an opinion of their state of happiness and that non-response is typically low. On the basis of evidence from clinical trials, he discounts any general bias whereby persons judge their state of happiness on the basis of what others think (given their social standing). Other possible biases arising from tendencies to over-report SWB for reasons of social respectability or ego defence are also discounted by him. Veenhoven reports research that examined correlations between reported life satisfaction and actual psychological stress as well as perception of well-being reported by partners, friends and relatives of an individual respondent. These suggest convergent validity.

However, Schwarz and Strack (1999) seem to be less positive about the cross-context equivalence of self-reports of subjective well-being. They claim that there is a weak relationship between objective events and the subjective evaluation of life in general. Temporary moods and events can bias evaluations of life satisfaction at any given moment in time. They also suggest that survey-based reports of SWB may be inflated by self-presentation concerns of individual respondents as well as the order of survey questions and their content.

Furthermore, the presence of alternative cultural interpretations of events, questions and language potentially distort the claimed equivalence of statistical measures of SWB – especially, but not exclusively, in cross-country analyses. For example, cultural norms and habits may impact profoundly on why people are less satisfied on average in some countries than in others although However, Veenhoven (2001) reports much higher variation in life satisfaction across national rather than linguistic boundaries. So, for example, the French-speaking Swiss tend to display greater similarity, in measures of SWB, with German or Italian-speaking Swiss than with Francophones over the border in France.

Veenhoven (1989) suggests that empirical measures of SWB which work best are:

- self-ratings rather than ratings by others;
- anonymous questionnaires rather than personal interviews;
- a questionnaire context which is focused clearly on the overall evaluation of life; and
- survey questions which leave room for 'no answer' or 'don't know' responses.

To the extent that the above criteria are true, the NESF Survey question on SWB is likely to provide a partial, but sufficient in terms of available data, measure of life satisfaction. One can draw some support from what Donovan and Halpern (2002: 7) conclude in their review of the literature: '*… the research is a lot more reliable than first impressions might suggest.'* However, the extent of reliability is an open and unresolved question pending the development of alternative measurements to test the validity and cross-cultural equivalence of survey-based questionnaire items.

8.3 Measurement of social capital

Although there has been a rapid development in conceptual discussion of social capital in the last 15 years, demand for relevant empirical measures has continued to outstrip supply[44]. Less attention has been paid to how empirical measures of social capital connect to theoretical definitions. Rather, 'ready-to-measure' indicators have been used, frequently based on single-item measures (for example questions on the extent to which people trust others in general), or non-specific measures linked to formal membership of associations or participation voluntary community activities. Various writers on social capital have aspired to the establishment of a conceptually sound and theoretically informed measurement framework for empirical investigation of social capital (Stone and Hughes 2002). This work will continue. In the meantime, an associated challenge of developing some – any – measures of 'social capital' has incited a number of recent efforts to compare social capital at the local, national and international levels.

It is important that any measure of social capital (or human capital) should be related to the cultural context in which behaviour or attitudes are measured. The interpretation, meaning and cultural context of 'networks,' 'norms' and 'values' vary within and across countries. Hence, any attempt to measure social capital – especially at the international level – needs to recognise the limitations of universal and un-differentiated categories such as generalised trust, associational membership and reciprocal support and engagement both with respect to the underlying notions themselves as well as the precise measurement construct used to capture the concept. For example, in New Zealand, Williams

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[44] For a review of some recent work on the measurement of social capital at international level refer to Healy (2002) as well as the work of the British Office of National Statistics http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/

and Robinson (2002) explore the specifically Maori understanding of extended family relationships. [45]

The presence of relationships based on power as well as cases of exclusion or discrimination has a crucial significance for understanding the role of social capital in any given context. Although trust and civic engagement are known to be highly correlated at the aggregate level (Putnam, 2000), Galland (1999) finds important differences between different social groups in the way in which individuals exercise their choice of social networks and relations. High levels of trust in one area can co-exist with a restricted radius of engagement or trust in another area. Galland concludes that general and non-context specific measures of trust or civic engagement may offer a very incomplete guide to the quality of social relations or to their role at a macro-level.

Spellerberg (2002) emphasises the importance of including organisational structure, behaviour and attitudes in any attempt to measure social capital. The measurement of social capital is not just about the structure or quantity of social networks; it also refers to shared cognitive, attitudinal and cultural attributes of groups. Spellerberg suggests that attitudinal data are necessary in order to identify common goals, values, beliefs, expectations and norms linked to a sense of group identity, solidarity and belonging. Three broad dimensions are important in attempting to measure social capital in various social networks:

- informal social ties (and norms) of obligation and trust;

[45] In Aotearoa-Maori culture, family and community are not sharply distinguished categories. Relationships reside in an extended family network or tribe which constitutes the actual community for an individual. These tend to be informal more than formal. Community values arise from traditional values in the immediate family which is the nucleus of all relationships. People, place and history constitute the critical dimensions of Maori belonging and self-identity. However, the idea of 'Place' in Maori culture is more than a geographical locality. It is defined by a sense of belonging, attachment and how one relates to others. Hence, linguistic as well as other differences in perception and behaviour inform the meaning of 'networks' and 'shared norms' in a Maori context.

- community (including voluntary) involvement; and
- social contact and communication with others.

Informal social ties including availability of help in the form of advice, service or voluntary time are difficult to measure – especially those that are not counted as part of formal membership of some association. Also of relevance is the extent of informal social contact including frequency of visiting others at home or in other places. Social ties among *family members* are even more difficult to measure in general household surveys and are frequently omitted from community-based surveys of social capital (including the NESF Survey used in this Study).

Community participation refers to formal networks in the community – typically in a broad "civil society" context (membership of residents' associations, sporting, cultural, and religious or special interest groups). Some typical dimensions of community participation include frequency of involvement, time taken, number of groups involved and nature of involvement. Volunteering and other types of altruistic behaviour such as donation of blood, coaching, giving of money to charitable causes may be linked to formal associational membership or not. Political participation encompasses aspects of active civic engagement and interaction (e.g. lobbying politicians for improvements in the local neighbourhood). Engagement may also be linked to prevalence of trust in political structures and institutions.

In the context of measuring family-based social capital relevant to learning or schooling outcomes, some researchers have used questions from large-scale surveys (typically not designed as surveys to measure social capital) on family structure, the nature of inter-generational discussions within families as well as the extent of inter-generational closure with respect to acquaintance, shared norms (e.g. expectation of academic achievement or general behaviour) and mutual involvement.

Although there has been a huge growth in the use of 'social capital' variables in the research literature in such diverse areas as public health, economic growth and crime, the jury is still out on how social capital will be mainstreamed in the way that 'human capital' was in the decades following the pioneering work of Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz. James Coleman (1990: 305-306) wrote:

> Whether social capital will come to be a useful quantitative concept in social science as are the concepts of financial capital, physical capital, and human capital remains to be seen; its current value lies primarily in its usefulness for qualitative analysis of social systems and for those quantitative analyses that employ qualitative indicators.

8.4 Measurement of Human Capital

In deciding to define and measure any aspect of human capital it is useful to recall the view of Franz Weinert (2001: 53):

> … it is necessary to choose a normative starting point, and not an empirical one, when defining key competencies.

A common assumption about human capital is that it corresponds to the 'investment' in human skill and competence arising from conscious, organised training in the course of schooling or life experience. Hence, it implicitly leans on the 'tabula rasa' notion of learning where school, home and community environments fill the blank slate of a young person's mind. This representation, in my view, is theoretically inadequate. Viewing 'innate ability' as conceptually and empirically separate represents an unfounded claim about human ability as separable, transferable and ultimately measurable on a set of simple linear scales. Human capital, in this view, is essentially 'value-added' arising from explicit or implicit rational choice within given incentive constraints.

In practice, and in keeping with its place in labour economics, approaches to the measurement human capital and its impact are typically based on market-based valuations of individual of skills or educational credentials aggregated over a whole population. For example, at micro-economic level, estimated additional lifetime earnings associated with a particular level of educational attainment or literacy are computed and related to the estimated cost of obtaining a given level of attainment (tuition fees, forgone earnings and other costs) to arrive at an estimate of the 'rate of return' to investment in training or formal education. In practice, many of the explicit and implicit costs of obtaining a given level of education are poorly estimated and under-reported. [46] A number of significant conceptual and empirical drawbacks arise in these estimations (OECD, 1998) among which are counted:

- The close identification, in practice, of 'human capital' with formal education and certification of achievement or attainment in the latter;
- The absence, in many empirical studies, of adequate statistical control for factors correlated with schooling and labour market outcomes;
- The neglect of specific, culturally-bound, non-communicative and tacit dimensions of human capital;
- The neglect of personal and social returns to education not reflected in labour market earnings; and
- The omission of important organisational and societal 'spillover' effects of learning.

The last omission is particularly significant given the existence of collective knowledge or distributed competence within organisations and other collective entities. Individual-based measures of human capital provide an inadequate measure of organisational learning and competence. Similarly, single-shot measures of human capital based on completed schooling or testing in some narrow range of cognitive ability provide a very partial view of how much people 'know' and what they can do in various life settings. Progress has been made by economists in addressing the impact of endogeneity – where explanatory variables are related to other variables some of which may not be included in the explanatory model (Harmon and Denny, 2003).

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[46] In relation to private costs, for example, time and money spent by parents on extra-curricular activities and classes is under-reported or not reported at all.

Educational credentials are a simple and readily measured proxy for skills and competence. Their drawback is that they do not necessarily reflect human skill acquired through experience or informal training. An alternative approach is to use questionnaire tests of student achievement or adult skills, such as those used by the OECD *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA), the *Third International Mathematics and Science Survey* (IEA) and the Statistics Canada/US NCES *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) .[47] These measure some aspects of skill and competence in the context of a written test of ability to interpret and use printed information. However, they are subject to survey and test limitations. Notwithstanding these reservations, the measure of human capital used in this study is the level of educational attainment – or highest level of completed formal education by adults. It provides a very limited and imprecise guide to human ability and skill.

8.5 Data Sources Used in this Study

The data source used to test the relationship between SWB, human capital and social capital was the Survey of Social Capital undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute for the National Economic and Social Forum in August 2002. [48] The questionnaire module, which is included in Appendix IV of this Study, was designed to cover key elements of community engagement, social support and inter-personal trust in the space of approximately 11 minutes of interview time in a telephone-based survey. A random sample of household telephone numbers was generated within each primary electoral area sampling cluster. A quota sampling control based on gender, age and broad socio-

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[47] Or the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey which succeeded IALS. The OECD is currently exploring the options for a systematic cross-country programme of adult skill assessment in 2010.

[48] The Economic and Social Research Institute was commissioned to undertake the Survey as module of 'social capital' questions in its monthly EU Consumer Survey Data findings from the Survey are reported in Section V of Report No. 28 of the National Economic and Social Forum at http://www.nesf.ie/publications/nesf_28.pdf

economic composition was used to select respondents within households when the initial call was made. The data were re-weighted on age, gender, household size and county of residence to ensure compatibility with the household population.

Although fragmentary evidence was available on the measurement of some aspects of social capital in various surveys over recent decades, this was only the second time that a conscious and concise attempt was made to measure ‘social capital’ in an Irish context. The first related to a survey undertaken by the All-Ireland Institute of Public Health in Ireland in 2001 to test the relationship between health and social capital (Balanda and Wilde, 2003).

The task of undertaking the NESF Survey provided a useful discipline in (a) clarifying which were the key features to be measured, (b) linking these to given policy concerns and (c) conducting a survey against a tight constraint in terms of survey time and feasibility. Two further issues, which arose as ancillary objectives were:

- the identification of key background and demographic characteristics of individuals and their relationship to social capital; and

- measures of outcomes such as life satisfaction, employment and access to public services in relation to social capital.

A number of background variables were included either in the ‘social capital’ module or the background/context portion of the main survey on which the module was loaded. In all, there were 27 composite variables in 7 variable domains including human and social capital. Composite variables were created in the case of multiple response survey question items or where a range of questions were asked on similar topics. An overview of the variables used is shown in Table 8.1. The representativeness of the NESF Survey sample in terms of known Census of Population distributions is shown in Table 8.2.

The main drawback with the NESF Survey of Social Capital is that it was a one-off survey lacking any comparison over time for the same individuals or for group-aggregates based on common questions. The aim of the Survey was simply to measure the extent of some aspects of social capital in Ireland in a ‘civil society’ context and draw comparisons, where possible, with other countries. Specifically, the presence of social capital within families was not covered. Hence, all questions about volunteering, contact with others and trust related, specifically, to non-family or non-household members. The inclusion of a question on life satisfaction was incidental to the survey design, but proved valuable to this study in exploring the relationship between SWB and various ‘explanatory’ variables including measures of social capital.

The carrier survey for the NESF Social Capital module contained a sufficient number of important contextual variables such as income, educational level, occupation, etc. to make possible a statistically controlled analysis of the relationship of social capital to life satisfaction. However, the unavoidable omission of measures of physical health (whether self-reported or proxied by objective measures) represents an important limitation – especially as we know from the empirical research literature that physical health is a vital determinant of SWB (refer to chapter 2).

Table 8.1 Overview of Variables Used for Analysis of Human and Social Capital and Other Structural Variables[49]

Summary Domain	**Variable Domain** [number of indicators]	**Composite Indicators**	**Survey question items**
Human Capital	Human Capital [1]	Highest level of educational attainment	Categories: Primary level; Junior/Inter Cert; Leaving Certificate; Post-leaving certificate; Third Level.
Social Capital	Social Capital [12]	A Engagement – volunteering B Engagement – active membership of a community organisation	A '*Do you take part in any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside your own home or workplace on a REGULAR basis*?' B '*In the last 12 months have you been actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group such as a sports, residents or professional association, parish group, political party, trade union etc*.'

[49] See Appendix IV for the detailed questionnaire items in the NESF Survey of Social Capital.

		C Civic Engagement D Charity-giving E Voting F1 Social Support (with bringing up children) F2 Social Support (number of close friends)	C ‘*During the last 12 months have you: (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group of any kind; (C3) contacted an appropriate organisation to deal with a particular problem; (C4) contacted a T.D. etc; (C5) undertaken unpaid voluntary work in a political party; (C6) written to a newspaper; (C7) contacted or appeared on TV/Radio?’* D ‘*During the last 12 months have you: ...made a voluntary donation of money e.g. to charities, school, church’* E ‘*Did you vote in the general election in May 2002?*’ F1 ‘*In the past 12 months have you received any regular, practical help in bringing up children under 18 years from any of the following people.....the help I’m referring to would include childcare, transport with children or help with domestic tasks?’* (for households with children<18 years only) F2 ‘*When I talk about, ‘close friends’ I mean people whom you feel at ease with, whom you can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence with, seek advice from or call upon for practical help. So how many close friends would you say you have among your: neighbours, work associates, relatives who don’t live with you and others?’*

		G1 Informal sociability (visited someone) G2 Informal sociability (received a visit) H Absence of feelings of social isolation H1 Absence of social isolation H2 Meets up family and friends as much as liked I Trust	G1 *'In the past 4 weeks have you visited anyone in their home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide them with some form of voluntary help or assistance in their home?'* G2 *'In the past 4 weeks has anyone visited you in your home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide you with some form of voluntary help or assistance in your home?'* H1 '*Have there been times in the last year when you have felt cut off or isolated from people in general or felt that you couldn't socialise or meet people as much as you would like due to, lets say, work commitments, family responsibilities or caring for children or other persons, transport problems etc.?'* H2 '*Do you meet up with your family or friends as much as you would like?*' I '*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people or it depends on the people in question?'*
Other Structural Variables	Demographic [4]	A Gender B Age C Marital Status D Number of children under the age of 18.	A Female/male B Age-groups: 18-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-64; 65+ C Married, co-habiting, separated/divorced, widowed, single. D Number of children under 18 years of age living in the household

	Socio-economic status [4]	A Employment status of respondent B Income of respondent C Occupation of respondent D Housing tenure	A Employment status: employee, self-employed; retired, unemployed, sick/disability, student; domestic duties B Net weekly income of the respondent: Income quartiles = < €130; €130-219; €220-359; €360> C Occupation: self-employed; farmer; professional, manual worker etc. D Accommodation: Owned, rented, etc?
	Living and Working Conditions [4]	A Size of settlement (urban, rural, etc.) B Duration of residence C Travel Time Work-Home D Hours of work	A '*Which of the following would you say best describes the size of the location where you live: open country, village<1,500 population etc…..?*' B '*Thinking about your current address, when did you start living there?*' C '*could you tell me how much time you spend travelling between home and work on an average day?*' D Hours of work
Miscellaneous	Religiosity [1]	Participation in religious services	'*Which of the following would you say best describes how often would you generally attend religious services: more than once per week; once per week, etc.?*'
	Other variables [1]	TV-watching	D '*How much time would you spend watching TV on an average weekday?*'

Table 8.2

Representativeness of the NESF Survey Sample

(adults aged 18 or higher - living in private households, 2002).

	Total number (re-weighted) in sample	Percentage breakdown by category for each variable	
		NESF Survey (August 2002)	Census of Population (April 2002)
Demographic			
Gender			
Male	582	49.1	49.1
Female	603	50.9	50.9
Age category			
18-29yrs	330	27.8	26.5
30-39yrs	187	15.8	20.5
40-49yrs	217	18.3	18.0
50-64yrs	268	22.6	20.1
65+yrs	183	15.4	15.0
Marital status			
Married/living with partner	585	49.6	52.4
Widowed	131	11.1	6.7
Never married	407	34.5	36.1
Separated/divorced	56	4.7	4.8
Socio-economic & human capital			
Educational completion			
Primary level	279	23.5	20.6
Junior Certificate (or equivalent)	339	28.6	21.9
Leaving Certificate (or equivalent)	329	27.8	28.5
Other second level	81	6.8	2.5
Third level (including IOTs)	157	13.3	26.6

Occupier status			
Owns home	1,028	87.1	75.5
Privately rented	54	4.6	11.8
Local Authority rented	82	6.9	9.9
Other	16	1.4	2.8
Employment status			
Paid employment	668	56.6	57.3
Retired	141	11.9	11.0
Full-time student	101	8.6	6.5
Domestic duties	216	18.3	15.4
Unemployed/sick/disability	55	4.7	9.9

Table 8.2 continued

Response rates for selected individual question items		
Variable domain	Question details	Percentage response
Subjective well-being	'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?'	99.6
Income	Net household income – including income from employment, social welfare payments, rents, interest, pensions (after tax, PRSI and other statutory deductions) of all members of the household.	80.6
Voting	'Did you vote in the general election in May 2002?'	98.8
Occupation	'What is your main occupation?: Self-employed; Farmer; etc.'	98.0
Religiosity	'Which of the following would you say best describes how often would you generally attend religious services?'	99.2
Marital Status	'Which of the following best describes your marital status: Married; Separated; etc.'	99.5

8.6 The limitations of empirical research

In this chapter, I have explored possible proxy measures for the three 'core concepts' of this study: subjective well-being, social capital and human capital. Each available measure is limited to a very partial account of some aspect of the underlying concept to be measured. For the purposes of a general empirical approach, Robinson and Robinson (2002: 44) are correct in arguing that:

> The precise measurement of an imprecise concept is of less value than an adequate measurement of a concise concept.

However, the above observation begs two questions:

- What constitutes an adequate measure of a concept; and
- What constitutes a concise concept?

The review of the literature on each of the three core concepts in this study indicates that these concepts are, indeed, imprecise, fluid and evolving over time. Furtheremore, it is not clear to me that the proxy measures for each core concept is adequate for a full understanding of well-being and its relationship to human and social capital. However, they are adequate to the extent that they purport to show important associations and correlations in the presence of other proxy variables *with the available data from large-scale household surveys in Ireland*.

A key difficulty in empirical research lies in identifying the mechanism by which social phenomena can be explained. Frequently, and perhaps unconsciously and under cover of mathematical complexity, social researchers make inferences about social phenomena and processes through analysis of purely individual-level data. This approach – which may be described as 'methodological individualism' has been defined by the sociologist Steven Lukes (1968: 120) in the following terms:

> facts about society and social phenomena are to be explained solely in terms of facts about individuals.

But, the converse may also apply. If I were to say that facts about individuals are to be explained solely in terms of facts about society and social phenomena then I would be close to a position of what might be termed *methodological collectivism* or an ecological fallacy. An association between phenomena measured at some aggregate level does not necessarily explain relationships at an individual level (a point emphasised by Portes, 2000, in his cautionary assessment of the growth in the 'social capital' literature). If, for example, the average level of religious belief and practice in a society is positively correlated with some measure of social cohesion, while controlling for other factors, we still do not know the mechanism by which such societal-level phenomena impact on individuals. Hence, care is needed in the process of aggregating and disaggregating data in different settings. We should take heed of what Durkheim once declared (1938/1895: 104):

> every time that a social phenomenon is directly explained by a psychological phenomenon, we may be sure that the explanation is false.

The limitation of empirical research lies in the way that various goals and tasks are typically defined. But, there are many way of 'knowing truth'. In empirical research and data analyses, a limited number of properties, operations and objects are identified, distinguished from each other, observed according to some objective set of criteria and integrated into a pre-conceived model of causal determination. Underlying all attempts 'to throw together', by means of numeric symbolism, diverse phenomena is the assumption that the phenomena that we are describing can be reduced to some 'numéraire' that has universal equivalence. This is a necessary assumption for the sake of simplicity and pragmatism. However, it remains a working assumption, only.

In the next chapter, I explore the distribution of subjective well-being, human capital and social capital by different demographic and socio-economic characteristics of individuals in the NESF Survey sample. I use cross-sectional, within-country data to examine the distribution of subjective well-being (type A1 comparison as described in section 3.6 of chapter 3). Hence, any analysis of changes over time for the same individuals or for an observed aggregate is missing. Although longitudinal data are not available for tracking measures of SWB over time in the same cohort of individuals, it is possible to describe changes in average reported SWB by broad demographic or socio-economic group.

Two important qualifications of the empirical work in the next chapter arise. First, the unit of survey response is an individual reporting behaviour and attitudes at the individual level. Characteristics of a community, neighbourhood or society in which the individual respondent lives is reported as the individually perceives them. While the phenomena being measured or signified are collective and systemic, the signifier or units of reporting are individuals.

Second, the approach taken is to avoid any *a priori* assumption about the direction or pathway of influence among relevant variables. I draw on the research literature on the causes of subjective well-being in Part A to test the relationship of particular variables to SWB in chapter 9. However, it is not possible to say, in advance, whether factors such as human capital or social capital have a direct impact on SWB or whether their impact is mediated through other pathways. Any *a priori* structuring of the model premised on supposed pathways of determining influence and interaction is avoided.

Chapter 9

The Distribution of Subjective Well-Being, Social Capital and Human Capital in Ireland

9.1 Introduction

International comparisons within Europe provide strong evidence that levels of subjective well-being in Ireland are considerably higher than in most other European countries. I do not seek to explain these differences cross-nationally. Nor do I seek to explain changes over time within Ireland. The latter would require a comprehensive series of individual-level data observations including longitudinal data, which are not available. Rather, this chapter examines the (i) distribution, at one point in time, in Ireland, of three key phenomena: subjective well-being, social capital and human capital, and (ii) their inter-relationship, while statistically controlling for other variables.

By way of setting a context, it is useful to consider briefly two popular beliefs, which seem to abound in contemporary Ireland. The first is that the quality of life has dis-improved; that people are less content and that the fruit of the Celtic Tiger is *mal-aise*. Yet, whatever evidence is available on trends in happiness or life satisfaction from sources such as the Eurobarometer or the *European Values Survey* (see section 9.2 below) suggests that subjective measures of well-being show no marked trends over recent decades.

The second belief is that as a people we are less connected to each other than before: *mé féinism* or *anomie* is more rife than ever before. Stories of financial corruption in business and politics, sex scandals in the Church and a general perception of a growing lack of civility and concern for others fill conversations in many places. An account of trends in social connectedness or associated norms of 'good behaviour' is beyond the scope of this study. However, some fragmentary evidence about trends in 'social capital' (but not to be confused with 'doing good') is contained in Appendix III.

Based on just one data source covering a very limited set of indicators, these suggest that there is no conclusive evidence that people are less inclined to volunteer or join organisations in their community over the 1990s. Neither is there any evidence that overall levels of subjective well-being (which admittedly is only a very partial measure of human well-being in any society) have declined in the closing decades of the twentieth century. This does not mean that some important aspects of social capital are in decline in Ireland. They may be. We simply do not have enough data for a long enough period to answer that question conclusively.

What we do have is evidence on the current distribution of a select number of indicators of social capital by significant demographic and socio-economic characteristics of a representative sample of the Irish adult population. Fortunately, we can compare the distribution of subjective well-being and human capital for the same sample at the same time allowing a comparison of correlations among the key variables of interest without any claims in relation to the presence, strength or direction of 'causality' – if a concept of causality has any firm meaning in relation to subjective well-being.

Cross-sectional studies may give very different results to those in longitudinal studies. At any one point in time, for example, a positive correlation between SWB and other variables may obscure a two-way flow of direction. Given the highly dynamic, adaptive and interactive nature of subjective well-being in relation to genetic, environmental and personality factors, cross-sectional observations provide a very incomplete account of happiness or life satisfaction.

While one may suspect, in the light of evidence reviewed in chapter 3, that many of the social capital indicators will emerge as statistically significant correlates of well-being, we are still left with large gaps in data – not least with respect to the quality of inter-personal relationships and support which cannot adequately be measured in a short survey interview. As always, in empirical research, we need to guard against the temptation 'to find what we are looking for'.

In the next section, I describe the distribution of subjective well-being (9.2) followed by that of social capital (9.3) and human capital (9.4). Finally, in section 9.5, I test the hypothesis that human and social capital impact positively on subjective well-being.

9.2 Distribution of Subjective Well-Being

Statistical measures of life satisfaction have been reasonably stable, on average, in most European countries, including Ireland, since the mid-1970s (Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott, 2005: Figure 5.1). There have been short-term fluctuations in SWB, possibly in response to increased economic uncertainty and unemployment, in the early to mid-1980s. As already suggested in chapter 3, neutralising effects may be at work at various levels whereby over-reactions to adverse circumstances induce correcting effects in behaviour and perception leading to a restoration of some equilibrium level of happiness in the aggregate.

Yankelovich (1981) suggests that increased material wealth is a major cause of social turmoil and dysfunction in the initial and middle stages of economic development, while at a later stage of economic development, relative economic security might lead to a return to more traditional values. The implication of these shifts is that social ties may be changing rather than eroding in some absolute sense. A view of social change over a relatively limited period of time (e.g. one human generation) or in just one country cannot provide a basis for universal generalisation.

A key distributional factor in relation to subjective well-being is age. Before assessing the distribution of life satisfaction in Ireland using the NESF data for 2002, data on (i) reported levels of happiness and (ii) life satisfaction (or SWB) are shown in tables 9.1 and 9.2, respectively, based on data from the *European Values Survey*. The questions regarding happiness asked in the EVS allowed for a four-point ordinal scale: very happy, quite happy, not very happy and not at all happy. At the aggregate (cross-country) level, SWB and happiness tend to be closely correlated. However, this does not necessarily hold at the *individual* level (Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott, 2005).

The comparison of happiness shows no definite trend in Ireland between 1981 and 1999. However, there does appear to have been an upward shift in reported levels of happiness by persons aged 50 or more (at the time of the survey) and a possible fall in respect of 18-29 and 40-49 year olds. It is not possible to track the same individuals over time in the EVS. However, some approximate idea of lifecycle change for a given cohort can be obtained by comparing an estimated given birth cohort at each survey. So, for example, most of the 18-29 year old respondents in the 1981 wave of EVS were in the age-group 30-39 in 1990 and in the age-group 40-49 in 1999. By reading downwards, diagonally, it is possible to conjecture that persons aged 18-40 at the time of the 1981 Survey maintained roughly stable levels of happiness in the course of the following 20 years, as they aged. If there are lifecycle effects in relation to happiness, they do not show up in these comparisons. However, many other factors are not identified separately – crucially the impact of health as persons age as well as the impact of transitory changes in the economic cycle.

Table 9.1

Levels of Reported Happiness in 1981, 1990 and 1999 in Ireland

(% of adult population reporting that they are 'very happy')

Age group	1981 N=1,500	1990 N=1,481	1999 N=982
18-29	40	48	35
30-39	41	41	51
40-49	51	39	42
50-64	37	43	44
65 +	25	40	38
Total	39	43	42

Source: European Values Survey: Computer File (2003), Release 1, Tilburg University and Zentralarchiv für Empirische Sozialforschung, Cologne (ZA), Germany.

Turning to an alternative measure – life satisfaction or SWB – it is possible to conclude that there is some evidence that average levels of life satisfaction have increased across all age groups except those who were aged 40-49 in 1981. There are likely to be significant inter-generational and lifecycle differences not captured in cross-sectional data such as those reported here. Considered 'longitudinally', there does not appear to be any *prima facie* case for clear cohort effects. In the case of persons aged 50 and over, the increase in reported life satisfaction was less marked than the increase in happiness.

Table 9.2

Levels of Reported Life Satisfaction in 1981, 1990 and 1999 in Ireland

(% of adult population at a reported level of 8-10 on a scale of 1-10)

Age group	1981 N=1,493	1990 N=1,481	1999 N=988
18-29	60	65	65
30-39	70	61	74
40-49	74	70	71
50-64	70	70	72
65 +	61	64	69
Total	63	66	70

Source: European Values Survey. N=988 (weighted)

The overall picture that emerges from comparisons, through time, is that levels of reported happiness or life satisfaction have not changed significantly, in the aggregate, over the last two decades. However, three caveats are necessary. First, those aged 40-49 in 1981 may have suffered proportionately more than other age-groups during the recession of the 1980s with long-term impacts on their reported well-being (whether SWB or happiness) as can be seen by comparing their levels in 1981 with the levels of those 10 and 15 years older, on average, in 1990 and 1999, respectively. Second, there is evidence that the elderly have experienced increased levels of well-being – especially reported happiness. This may be associated with changes in health status as well as in changed economic circumstances in the 1990s. Third, by comparing 1990 and 1999 we see a drop of 13 percentage points in the reported level of *happiness* of 18-29 year olds. A range of factors may lie behind this – one of which could relate to greater difficulty and stress of transition in early adulthood associated with heightened social expectations and job and academic pressures.

In table 9.3, a direct comparison of life satisfaction ratings in the EVS and NESF Survey of Social Capital is shown. Although the life satisfaction question appears to have been asked in more or less exactly the same way, a significant difference emerges in the overall results to such an extent that neither sampling fluctuation nor the time difference of three years between the two surveys can account.[50] It is possible that slight differences arose in survey methodology (e.g. as between telephone and person-to-person interviews)[51] that may account for these differences. The distribution of satisfaction scores is broadly similar up to level 7. In both surveys, there is a heavy skewing towards the upper end. However, the EVS results show a much higher proportion opting for point 10 instead of 8.

[50] The NESF Survey question on life satisfaction was, deliberately, modelled on the European Values Survey for the purposes of cross-survey comparison.

51 In the case of person-to-person interviews in the EVS, a printed 'show card' was presented to interviewees with a scale of 1 through 10 and boxes 'don't know' and 'no answer' on the far right of the box scale.

Table 9.3

Comparisons of Reported Life Satisfaction in the NESF Survey of Social Capital (2002) and the European Values Survey (1999) in Ireland

(% of adult population at reported levels of life satisfaction on a scale of 1-10)

Scale	EVS (1999)	NESF (2002)	Difference
1 (dissatisfied)	1	0	-1
2	0	0	0
3	2	1	-1
4	2	2	0
5	4	7	+3
6	6	7	+1
7	15	19	+4
8	22	31	+9
9	17	19	+2
10 (satisfied)	31	14	-17
Total	100	100	0

Source: European Values Survey (1999) question: 'All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?'

NESF Survey question: *"All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days? Where would you place yourself in terms of overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' means you are 'very dissatisfied' to '10' which means you are 'very satisfied'"*

To summarise some of the likely key demographic and social correlates of life satisfaction, Table 9.4 provides an average life satisfaction score for a range of variables. At this stage, without simultaneous adjustment for cross-correlation among 'predictor' variables, some patterns emerge: gender, age, educational level, income, location of residence (urban vs. rural) do *not* seem to strongly predict life satisfaction. Two potential candidates do appear, however: marital status and absence of unemployment. These results are only suggestive as cross-sectional correlations do not prove causality and, so far, the analysis is confined to univariate analysis. A multivariate analysis will be undertaken on life satisfaction in section 9.5.

Table 9.4

Levels of Self-reported Life Satisfaction in 2002 (NESF Survey)

"All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days. Where would you place yourself in terms of overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' means you are 'very dissatisfied' to '10' which means you are 'very satisfied'"

	Average SWB score	Standard Error
Gender	7.74	0.048
Male	7.57	0.072
Female	7.91	0.064
Age category		
18-29yrs	7.55	0.088
30-39yrs	7.82	0.108
40-49yrs	7.71	0.118
50-64yrs	7.75	0.112
65+yrs	8.05	0.112
Marital status		
Married/living with partner	8.02	0.061
Widowed	7.69	0.167
Never married	7.50	0.084
Separated/divorced	6.77	0.230
Residential location		
Dublin/large town (10,000 inhabitants+)	7.72	0.067
All other areas	7.75	0.071
Educational completion		
Below leaving Certificate	7.75	0.073
Leaving Certificate or higher	7.72	0.064
Religiosity		
Frequent Church attendance (monthly at least)	7.84	0.062
Less frequently	7.55	0.079

Owner-occupier		
Owns home	7.78	0.053
Does not own home	7.46	0.130
Employment status		
Paid employment	7.68	0.062
Retired	7.91	0.164
Unemployed	6.43	0.263
Domestic duties	8.11	0.103
Full-time student	7.81	0.141
Income (net weekly)		
First Quartile	7.73	0.174
Second Quartile	7.40	0.150
Third Quartile	7.61	0.120
Fourth Quartile	7.81	0.073

9.3 Distribution of human capital

In this section, bivariate associations and multivariate regression models are used to examine whether structural factors such as age, gender, location and employment status are associated with measures of human capital (level of educational attainment) and social capital (various measures). Table 9.5 presents the results of a cross-tabulation of human capital with respect to a selection of demographic and socio-economic variables.

Table 9.5

Human Capital Distributed by Various Characteristics

	Primary level	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post-Secondary
Total	23.5	28.6	27.8	20.0
Demographic				
Gender				
Male	25.5	29.9	24.4	20.2
Female	21.7	27.3	31.0	20.1
Age category				
18-29yrs	-	28.8	43.9	27.3
30-39yrs	8.5	28.0	37.6	25.9
40-49yrs	17.1	33.6	27.6	21.7
50-64yrs	34.0	27.6	19.8	18.7
65+yrs	73.4	24.5	1.1	1.1
Marital status				
Married/living with partner	22.7	31.5	25.1	20.7
Widowed	64.9	22.9	6.9	5.3
Never married	12.1	25.9	38.4	26.3
Separated/divorced	19.6	35.7	26.8	17.9
Socio-economic				
Occupier status				
Owns home	23.4	28.5	27.5	20.6
Privately rented	1.9	37.0	29.6	31.5
Local Authority rented	34.1	28.0	32.9	4.9

Employment status				
Employee	9.5	22.6	36.0	31.9
Self-employed	23.2	43.0	15.9	17.9
Retired	65.2	22.0	6.4	6.4
Unemployed/sick/disability	33.9	33.9	25.0	7.1
Full-time student	1.0	29.0	50.0	20.0
Domestic duties	38.4	36.1	19.4	6.0
Income (net weekly)				
First Quartile	69.9	15.5	11.7	2.9
Second Quartile	49.7	32.8	12.4	5.1
Third Quartile	23.3	33.0	25.5	18.4
Fourth Quartile	4.7	25.5	38.1	31.7
Missing	21.0	33.6	28.4	17.0
Other variables				
Size of location/settlement				
Open Countryside	31.8	29.2	19.9	19.1
Villages < 1,500 population	15.3	15.3	49.2	20.3
Towns 1,500 - <5,000 population	27.7	31.7	24.8	15.8
Towns 5,000 - <10,000 population	11.3	21.0	46.8	21.0
Towns 10,000+ population	25.6	28.8	25.6	20.0
Dublin (city and County)	15.6	29.2	32.7	22.5
Religiosity				
Attends religious services once a month or more often	23.7	28.6	27.5	20.2

The measure of 'human capital' used was the reported highest level of educational attainment. Further and higher education levels were combined into once category of 'post-secondary' education. On a simple bivariate comparison, shown in Table 9.5, there are significant differences in attainment for all of the background variables used. However, some of these differences arise from the interaction or correlation among background variables themselves. For example, a much lower level of attainment among persons who are retired or widowed is to be expected given the near perfect match between age, widowhood and retirement. To see more clearly the relationship of human capital to various background variables, a logistic regression was used in which the binary dependent variable was coded as a numeric value of one for completion of education at Leaving Certificate level or higher and a value of zero for attainment below this level. The results are presented in Table 9.6 below. A numeric value of one for the coefficient on any given independent variable value means that there is an equal probability of 'post-Junior Certificate' attainment and attainment below this level. Given five age-categories, a value of 0.8 for any category (e.g. 30-39 year olds) means that there was a 20% lower probability of having post-Junior Certificate attainment than not having this level of attainment compared with the reference age-group 18-29 year olds.

Table 9.6 indicates a strong positive correlation between attainment and variables such as age, income[52] and location. A bivariate odds ratio of 1.296 for gender, for example, indicates that females were 29.6% more likely thasn men to have completed Leaving Certificate or higher. However, this result is not corrected for the joint influence of other variables such as age, occupation, income etc. When these other factors are controlled for in a multivariate odds regression, the odds ratio is 1.949 ─ indicating that women were almost twice as likely as men to reach Leaving Certificate level and higher if the impact of economic and social differences among men and women are taken into account. Both results, bivariate and multivariate, are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level ($p<.05$).

[52] The income variable is best interpreted as an ordinal measure.

In fitting a logistic model for human capital, it is first necessary to examine the bivariate odds ratios to identify those independent variables that are likely to be significant in explaining variations in the dependent variable. The method used in this analysis was forward stepwise selection. The Likelihood-Ratio test was used to assess statistical significance. When a selection of independent variables are controlled for in the multivariate model shown in column 2 of table 9.6, the main correlates of high educational attainment were: age, employment status, income and location where residence in medium-sized towns or villages is associated with higher attainment – possibly reflecting industrial and occupational characteristics that are not controlled for. Occupation was dropped as an explanatory variable from the multivariate model as it yielded statistically insignificant odds ratios in the univariate model. The results in Table 9.6 indicate a very different pattern of antecedents for human capital compared with social capital. Human capital appears to be correlated, primarily, with socio-economic factors and age; whereas the results in the next section will indicate that social capital is mainly correlated with demographic factors.

Table 9.6

Logistic Regression of 'Human Capital' on Different Background Variables

	Bivariate odds ratios	Multivariate odds ratios
	1	2
Gender [ref: male]	1.296**	1.949**
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]		
AGE1 (30-39 years)	.705*	.995
AGE2 (40-49 years)	.391**	.586**
AGE3 (50-64 years)	.252**	.441**
AGE4 (65+ years)	.007**	.013**
Marital status [ref: married]	.865	.775
Home occupier status [ref: owns]	1.064	1.249
Employment status [ref: employee]		
EMP1 (self-employed)	.242**	.419**
EMP2 (retired)	.070**	.992
EMP3 (unemployed/sick/disability)	.226**	.312**
EMP4 (full-time student)	1.086	.569
EMP5 (domestic duties)	.162**	.312**
Net weekly income	***[ref: First income quartile]***	***[ref: Fourth income quartile]***
INC1 (First income quartile)	-	.319**
INC1 (Second income quartile)	1.212	.209**

INC2 (Third income quartile)	4.487**	.389**
INC3 (Fourth income quartile)	13.283**	-
Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]		
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	3.498**	4.454**
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	1.080	.744
LOC3 (if town 5,000 - <10,000 population)	3.281**	3.287**
LOC4 (if town 10,000+ population)	1.313	.965
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	1.930**	1.124
Occupation [ref: self-employed]		
OCC1 (if farmer)	.520	-
OCC2 (if professional)	1.633	-
OCC3 (if other non-manual)	.970	-
OCC4 (if skilled manual)	.421**	-
OCC5 (if unskilled manual)	.693	-
OCC6 (if never worked)		
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	.449**	.851

* p<0.05   ** p<0.01

9.4 Distribution of social capital

Table 9.7 presents partial cross-bivariate coefficients for 9 measures of social capital (refer to chapter 8 for details):

- Volunteering (indicator A)
- Active involvement in the community (B)
- Civic engagement of at least one type (C)

- Giving to Charity (D)
- Voted in the general election of 2002 (E)
- Eight or more close friends (F2)
- Visited or was visited in last 4 weeks (G)
- Felt socially isolated in previous 12 months (H1)
- Trusted other people in general (I)

When controlling for gender, age, marital status and educational attainment, clear patterns of statistically significant correlation emerged for groups of indicators. Volunteering, civic engagement and community involvement were statistically associated with each other ($p<.01$). The positive association between volunteering and active community involvement was particularly strong with a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.6047.

Surprisingly, the act of giving to charity was negatively associated with volunteering and active community involvement as was voting in the 2002 general election. Measures of informal social support (F2 and G) did not show any significant inter-correlation. Feelings of social isolation were significantly negatively correlated with volunteering and civic engagement (i.e. persons who did not feel socially isolated were more inclined to volunteer or engage in their local community). Visiting or being visited was negatively associated with civic engagement and volunteering. The most interesting result of this analysis is that the correlation coefficient of trust with any of the other eight measures of social capital was not statistically significant.

As an approximation of social capital by broad domains – A through I, it appears that active community involvement, civic engagement and volunteering are likely to pick up most of the variation among the social capital groups of indicators. None of the informal social support indicators or trust displayed a systematic correlation across other indicators of social capital. However, for further analysis these latter indicators will be retained.

Table 9.7 Partial Correlation Coefficients for Selected Indicators of Social Capital

(controlling for gender, age, marital status and educational attainment)

	VOLUNT A	ACTIVE B	CIVIC C	CHARITY D	VOTED E	FRIENDS F2	VISIT G	ISOLATE H1*	TRUST I
VOLUNT	1	.6047**	.2595**	-.1057**	-.0808**	.0447	-.0760*	-.0822**	-.0109
ACTIVE	.6047**	1	.3409**	-.1774**	-.1015**	.0219	-.0477	-.0046	.014
CIVIC	.2595**	.3409**	1	-.2323**	-.1496**	-.0167	-.0899**	-.1845**	-.0183
CHARITY	-.1057**	-.1774**	-.2323**	1	.1608**	-.0017	.1329**	.0359	-.0282
VOTED	-.0808**	-.1015**	-.1496**	.1608**	1	-.0178	-.0177	-.0087	.035
FRIENDS	.0447	.021s9	-.0167	-.0017	-.0178	1	-.0104	-.0411	-.0606
VISIT	-.0760*	-.0477	-.0899**	.1329**	-.0177	-.0104	1	.042	-.0478
ISOLATE	-.0822**	-.0046	-.1845**	.0359	-.0087	-.0411	.042	1	.0681*
TRUST	-.0109	.014	-.0183	-.0282	.035	-.0606	-.0478	.0681*	1

* Compared to Table V.2 in Appendix V, the value on H1 is reversed in the above table. A high value for H1 denotes greater social isolation.

The results for a cross-tabulation of each indicator with demographic and socio-economic characteristics are summarised in Appendix V of this Study. Demographic factors (age, gender, marital status and size of location) have a stronger relationship with social capital measures than socio-economic measures based on income, occupation, employment status or level of educational attainment (as in the case of human capital according to the results in Table 9.6). In Table 9.8, the results of a logistic regression of volunteering on bivariate and multivariate odds ratios are shown.

Table 9.8

Logistic Regression of Volunteering on Different Background Variables

	Bivariate odds ratios	Multivariate odds ratios	
		Active in the labour market only (n=494)	All respondents (with reduced set of explanatory variables) n =1,069
	1	2	3
Gender [ref: male]	1.327*	.682	.661*
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]			
AGE1 (30-39 years)	1.109	.340**	.938
AGE2 (40-49 years)	1.372	.830	.974
AGE3 (50-64 years)	1.066	.499	.833
AGE4 (65+ years)	.311**	^	.608
Marital status [ref: not married]	1.506**	2.282	1.370
Home occupier status [ref: does not own]	1.532	.680	.954
With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref:	1.906**	1.943*	1.579*
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour	1.711**	-	.977
Employment status [ref: employee]			
EMP1 (self-employed)	1.036	2.282	-
EMP2 (retired)	.486	^	-
EMP3 (unemployed/sick/disability)	1.400	-	-
EMP4 (full-time student)	.9810	^	-
EMP5 (domestic duties)	.465**	-	-
Average daily travel time home-work [ref: less			
TRAVEL1 (45-90 mins)	.802	.875	-
TRAVEL2 (90 mins+)	.767	.679	-

Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: one			
TV1 (1-2 hours)	.813	.853	.898
TV2 (2 hours+)	.422**	.864	.588*
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at current			
RES1 (13-25 years)	1.450	1.726	1.848**
RES1 (25 years+)	1.458	6.386**	3.005**
Hours of work [ref: <= 30 hours per week]			
HOURS1 (31-39 hours)	1.685*	1.443	-
HOURS2 (40 hours+)	1.230	.947	-
Educational attainment [ref: primary level only]			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)		13.182	2.969**
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)		26.197**	4.772**
EDUC3 (further education)		12.158*	5.774**
EDUC4 (tertiary level)		33.807**	7.161**
Net weekly income	***[ref: First income quartile]***	***[ref: Fourth income quartile]***	
INC1 (First income quartile)	-	.210**	-
INC1 (Second income quartile)	1.145	7.319	-
INC2 (Third income quartile)	2.039*	7.539	-
INC3 (Fourth income quartile)	3.038**	-	-
Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	1.100	3.640	1.109
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	1.160	1.266	1.586
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	.673	1.630	.922
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	.760	.725	1.056
Occupation [ref: self-employed]			
OCC1 (if farmer)	.305**	^	-
OCC2 (if professional)	.978	1.826	-
OCC3 (if other non-manual)	.554	1.205	-
OCC4 (if skilled manual)	.371	.788	-
OCC5 (if unskilled manual)	.310*	.524	-

OCC6 (if never worked)	.096**	-	-
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	1.518*	1.510	1.496
Nagelkerke R Square	-	0.330	0.152

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

Note: An Odds Ratio of 1.0 indicates that there is equal probability of volunteering or not volunteering.

In the following tables (9.9 and 9.10) I seek to identify which are the key 'predictor' variables associated (positively) with measures of social capital. It is possible to distinguish between mainly 'formal' measures of social capital based on membership of community organisations, organised volunteering, voting and other types of civic engagement on the one hand, and 'informal' measures such as number of close friends and lack of feeling of social isolation. Indicators of '**formal**' social capital used in Tables 9.8 and 9.9 indicate a strong predictive role for:

- level of completed formal **education** (for volunteering, community engagement, civic participation and voting);
- number of **children** in the household (for volunteering, community engagement, and voting but *not* for civic participation);
- being **married** (for community engagement, civic participation and voting but *not* statistically significant for volunteering);
- **length of residence** at current address (for volunteering, community engagement and voting but *not* for civic participation); and
- the least amount of time spent **watching TV** (for volunteering, community engagement and civic participation but *not* for voting).

Education emerges a strong predictor of social capital – at least 'formal'. Higher education graduates, other things equal, were 7 times more likely to volunteer in the community than those whose education was completed before Intermediate or Junior Certificate level. Higher education graduates were more than twice as likely to volunteer as those who have not completed second level schooling. These results appear to be similar to those found by Schuller et al. (2001) in the United Kingdom. They report that higher education graduates were three times more likely to be a current or active member of a voluntary organisation than those without upper secondary completion (below A-Levels) and about twice as likely as upper secondary completers.

It is not surprising that the level of completed education is one of the most important predictors of many forms of political and social engagement. From analysis of European data in the 1950s, Almond and Verba (1963: 276) reported a strong link between various types of political engagement (discussion of politics, voting, sense of competence to influence government) and level of completed (formal) education. Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995) found that education, other things constant, increased political participation. Moreover, literacy skills among adults have shown a positive relationship with participation in voluntary community activities for several OECD countries (OECD and Statistics Canada, 2000).

Schuller et al. (2001), using UK data, report higher levels of 'social skills' for higher levels of education. These cover organising, advising and counselling skills – all of which have the potential to enhance the quality of civic engagement. They also report higher tolerance of diversity, commitment to equality of opportunities and resistance to political alienation. Data analysis from the UK *National Child Development Study* (NCDS) reveals a strong positive correlation between levels of education and membership of political organisations, environment or women's groups and charity, residents and parent-teacher associations, (Schuller et al., 2001). These findings need to be treated with caution, though. An apparent link between length or level of formal education and social capital may arise from other influences that are not measured here. The content and process of learning inside and outside formal schooling is likely to be critical to long-term patterns of behaviour and civic attitude.

It is possible that the positive association between the number of children in the household (under the age of 18) and volunteering is linked to volunteering for educational, sporting and youth-related activities at local level. Other data sources – notably the *European Values Survey* – indicate higher than average rates of participation and active membership coupled with volunteering in sporting organisations in this country compared with other European countries (NESF, 2003). Age was not related to indicators of 'formal' social capital (except for voting where the older age-groups are much more likely to vote). Women were less likely than men to volunteer, engage in the community or undertake civic activities – when other demographic and social variables were controlled for). Home ownership made no statistical difference to measures of 'formal' social capital except in the case of civic activity where, interestingly, respondents who did not own their home were more likely to be involved in civic activity. Participation in the (paid) labour force is regarded as an important area for analysis in relation to social capital. The evidence in Tables 9.8 and 9.9 suggest that it is neutral with respect to 'formal' social capital (at least volunteering, civic engagement and voting). However, labour force participation is positively associated with community engagement when other variables are controlled for (Table 9.9).

Active engagement in the labour market was *positively* associated with volunteering (although the relationship was not statistically significant). Female participation in the labour market does not seem to be generally associated with lower levels of community engagement and volunteering. However, active labour market engagement is statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level) as a predictor of community involvement – other things equal. Hours of work has a weak (and not statistically significant) negative impact on volunteering, however (refer to column 2 where a range of labour market variables are added to the explanatory model). These results bear some similarity to those found by Putnam (2000) who showed that the impact of increased working time and female labour force participation in the United States has not been associated with a fall in social capital as measured by community engagement or volunteering. However, Putnam found evidence that part-time employees, other things equal, are more likely to engage in communities or volunteer.

The hypothesis that length of residence is positively correlated with community engagement and volunteering, other things equal, is confirmed. It would appear that people who have put down roots in a place or community are more likely to get involved locally. They may also be more likely to 'get to know' others locally and establish relationships of mutual help and trust. However, as the analysis in table 9.9 shows, length of residence is not significantly correlated with measures of civic participation. Hence, caution is needed in concluding that there is a positive impact of length of residence on social capital generally.

Size of location seems to be invariant with respect to 'formal' social capital – once other factors are statistically controlled for. In the case of 'religiosity' (as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services in Church), the statistically significant and positive association of volunteering with religiosity in the univariate column (1) of Table 9.8 turns to being not statistically significant in column 3, once other variables are entered into the multivariate analysis. Presumably, the impact of age and its correlation with religiosity dominates this relationship.

Neither community engagement nor civic participation were statistically significantly related to religiosity (although the odds ratio is greater than one). However, even controlling for age, religiosity is still statistically significant for the turnout in the 2002 general election. If this latter finding represents a more general pattern, then 'religious' citizens are more likely to turn up to vote at elections and referenda – with possible implications for the outcome depending on which issues are to the fore. However, this is not to suggest that religiously active persons vote mainly because of specifically religious-based concerns. They simply turn out in greater numbers – even after age and other considerations are taken into consideration.

Two further issues are worth exploring in relation to 'formal social' capital – the amount of time devoted to watching television and the daily amount of time spent commuting between home and work. Both of these factors, especially the former, are thought to be important for long-term trends in social capital (Putnam, 2000). The amount of time spent watching TV was, indeed, negatively related to volunteering, community engagement and civic participation. The length of time spent travelling to, and from, work was entered as an explanatory variable in the regression on volunteering. Not surprisingly, respondents were less likely to volunteer, other things equal, the longer they spent travelling to, and from, work. However, this relationship was not statistically significant.

Table 9.9

Multivariate Logistic Regression (Odds Ratios) of Various Measures of 'Formal' Social Capital on Different Background Variables

	Active in community in last 12 months (n=1,076)	Index of Civic Engagement (n=1,076)	Voted in 2002 general election (n=1,068)
	1	2	3
Gender [ref: male]	.684*	.729*	1.030
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]			
AGE1 (30-39yrs)	.576*	1.120	2.175**
AGE2 (40-49yrs)	.623	.903	3.603**
AGE3 (50-64yrs)	.831	1.345	4.164**
AGE4 (65+yrs)	.573	.597	6.524**
Marital status [ref: not married]	2.046**	1.658**	2.930**
Home occupier status [ref: does not own]	.768	.442**	.637
With children in the household (<18 yrs)	1.476*	.903	.640*
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]	1.553*	1.176	1.215
Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: one hour or less]			
TV1 (1-2 hours)	.622*	.703**	.831
TV2 (2 hours+)	.518**	.660**	.860
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at			
RES1 (13-25 years)	1.706*	.883	.843
RES1 (25 years+)	2.610**	1.211	2.154**

Educational attainment [ref: primary level only]			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)	1.584	1.335	1.421
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)	2.839**	1.726*	1.365
EDUC3 (further education)	3.582**	1.933*	4.116**
EDUC4 (tertiary level)	5.599**	3.114**	2.772**
Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	1.496	1.068	1.194
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	.913	.754	1.750
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	.658	.708	.844
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	1.089	1.100	1.418
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	1.307	1.213	2.302**
Nagelkerke R Square	0.193	0.120	0.330

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

Column 1 Active in community in the last 12 months (indicator B per Table 8.1 in chapter 8).

Column 2 *Index of Civic Engagement* has a value of 1 for each respondent if he/she has responded positively to any one of 7 possible civic activities referred to over the previous 12 months (indicator C1 thru C7 in Table 8.1)

Column 3 Voted in May 2002 General Election (indicator D in Table 8.1).

Next, I turn to a consideration of 'informal' social capital (Table 9.10). Unlike the case of 'formal' social capital, a very different picture emerged in the analysis of 'informal social' capital. There is evidence that those living in urban areas (especially Dublin), home-owners and those living the longest at their current address, were *less* likely to report 'feeling socially isolated'. At the same time, Dubliners were more likely (other things equal) to have less 'close friends' and to receive or pay a social visit at home than their country cousins.

Surprisingly, perhaps, young people under the age of 30 reported having fewer 'close friends' than other (older) age-groups. Active labour market participation was associated with a greater number of 'close friends' – substantiating the hypothesis that paid employment increases the number of social contact points and potential network supports. However, feelings of social isolation (and the extent of social visiting) were not statistically related to labour market participation. Hence, there is no evidence that being at (paid) work reduces time spent visiting others or being visited in the home.

An interesting finding in Table 9.10 is that the presence of children in the household is negatively correlated with the number of 'close friends' reported by the respondent. Being cut off from social networks such as the labour market and without social support in rearing and minding children is likely to be a feature of many communities. However, a word of caution is needed in relation to the measure of 'close friends'. According to Table 9.10 women and men had about the same probability of having 'close friends' to call upon for help and advice. It is possible, but not certain, that men over-report their number of close friends. Moreover, the quality, durability and intimacy of that support may vary between men and women. Such differences are not reflected in this data source.

Whereas the data do not indicate any significant gender difference in relation to 'informal' social capital, they do suggest differences in respect of 'formal' social capital (volunteering, community and civic participation). These results echo findings in Pevalin and Rose (2003) based on UK data, which found that men were more likely than women to report higher levels of social participation but lower levels of social contact. However, it is possible that, in common with many other surveys of social capital, the NESF Survey did not adequately capture the extent and nature of voluntary, caring and community-building activity undertaken by women. For example, Nancy Folbre (1994: 97) has commented:

> Kin/community networks that are maintained by visiting, gift-giving, and meal-sharing often prove crucial for family welfare. Women devote more time to informal care outside, as well as inside, the home.

A more detailed analysis of time-use would help to identify differences in the amount of such activity by gender. Unfortunately, data on time-use is generally not available in Ireland. The NESF, in its report on a Framework for Equality (NESF, 2002: 55) pointed out that:

> ….there are no sophisticated measures developed in our own society for assessing levels of belonging, loving, solidarity in persons' lives, although some work has been done in this area in Northern Europe

Table 9.10

Multivariate Logistic Regression (Odds Ratios) of Measures of 'Informal' Social Capital on Different Background Variables

	More than 8 'close friends' (n=1,076)	Did not feel socially isolated (n=1,074)	Received or paid a home social visit (n=1,076)
	1	2	3
Gender [ref: male]	1.080	.772	1.325
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]			
AGE1 (30-39yrs)	2.279**	.892	1.237
AGE2 (40-49yrs)	1.400	1.280	1.161
AGE3 (50-64yrs)	1.167	1.222	1.169
AGE4 (65+yrs)	1.103	.934	2.018*
Marital status [ref: not married]	.878	.771	1.202
Home occupier status [ref: does not own]	.748	2.016**	.986
With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref: no children]	.616**	1.042	1.057
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]	1.757**	1.053	1.230
Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref:			
TV1 (1-2 hours)s	1.078	.882	1.346
TV2 (2 hours+)	.916	1.012	.867
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at			
RES1 (13-25 years)	.967	1.470	1.258
RES1 (25 years+)	.753	2.101**	1.354

Educational attainment [ref: primary level only]			
EDUC1 (junior cycle of second level)	.700	1.055	.831
EDUC2 (senior cycle of second level)	.754	.938	.959
EDUC3 (further education)	.914	1.287	.822
EDUC4 (tertiary level)	.644	.974	1.531
Size of location/settlement [ref: open countryside]			
LOC1 (if village < 1,500 population)	.725	.661	1.345
LOC2 (if town 1,500 - <5,000 population)	.737	1.435	.640
LOC4 (if town 5,000+ population)	1.559*	1.660*	1.526*
LOC5 (if Dublin City or County)	.660*	3.028**	.553**
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	.945	1.226	1.437*
Nagelkerke R Square	0.094	0.092	0.11

* $p<0.05$ ** $p<0.01$.

Column 1 Respondents with 8 ‘close friends’ or more (indicator F2 in Table 8.1).

Column 2 Did not feel socially isolated or cut off (Indicator H1 in Table 8.1).

Column 3 Received a social visit in one’s home or paid such a visit to another in their home in previous 4 weeks (Indicator G in Table 8.1).

The level of formal education had no significant impact on 'informal social capital' (Table 9.10) even though it was strongly associated with measures such as volunteering, community engagement and civic participation (Table 9.9). Hence, the supposed positive relationship between social and human capital is likely to be specific to which dimension of each is being measured as well as the population group under consideration (in this case the adult population). It is also possible that those aspects of social capital that are most conducive to learning – particular social norms and inter-personal ties are poorly reflected in many of the indicators of social capital used in this Study and elsewhere. Nevertheless, the data analysis in this chapter does support the view that formal education probably constitutes one of the strongest 'policy' correlates of social capital – typically observed as 'positive' civic behaviour. The direction, local specifics and size of 'causality' remain elusive, however.

The results of the NESF survey indicate widespread differences in levels of community engagement and inter-personal trust as well as access to social networks. The Survey indicates that active community engagement or volunteering is lower, particularly amongst the poorly educated or those living in large cities. Surprisingly, perhaps, active engagement among the unemployed is higher than for other groups in the labour force. These Survey results confirm the findings of the Central Statistics Office (2003) which indicate lower voter turnout among the young and the unemployed. Groups which seem to be at greatest risk of social isolation and disengagement are the elderly, the unemployed and those who are ill or disabled.

9.5 Correlates of Subjective Well-Being

In addition to genetic, personality and health characteristics of individuals, the review of the empirical research literature in chapter 3 highlighted the importance of such factors as personal relationships – especially in long-term or intimate relationships such as marriage or cohabitation; the number and quality of close or supportive friendships and a person's system of religious beliefs and practices. Participation in voluntary associations does not generally emerge as a highly significant predictor or SWB (Veenhoven, 2001). In this section, I test some of these hypotheses by modelling a measure of SWB derived from the

NESF Survey of Social Capital while controlling for the simultaneous effects of structural factors, social capital and human capital. An odds ratio for subjective well-being was defined in respect of each individual respondent on the basis of a value of one for scores 8 through 10 on the 10-point SWB scale and 0 for lower scores.

Table 9.11

Multivariate Logistic Regression of Subjective Well-Being on Various Background Variables

	Bivariate odds ratios	Multivariate odds ratios n =825
Gender [ref: male]	1.257	1.459*
Age category [ref: 18-29 years]		
AGE1 (30-39yrs)	1.267	.772
AGE2 (40-49yrs)	1.079	.882
AGE3 (50-64yrs)	1.297	.958
AGE4 (65+yrs)	1.627*	1.463
Marital status [ref: not married]	1.925**	2.120**
Home occupier status [ref: owns]	1.319	1.233
With children in the household (<18 yrs) [ref: no children]	1.055	1.049
Active in labour market [ref: not active in labour market]	.909	.699
Unemployed [ref: not unemployed]	.217**	.291*
Average daily amount of TV-watching [ref: one		
TV1 (1-2 hours)	1.126	.622*
TV2 (2 hours+)	.937	1.080
Length of residence [ref: < 13 years at current		
RES1 (13-25 years)	1.016	.671
RES1 (25 years+)	1.243	.737
Volunteering [ref: did not volunteer]	1.084	1.250
Civic engagement [ref: was not engaged]	1.000	1.156

Active in community [ref: was active]	1.177	.999
Urban [ref: not living in Dublin or town of	.990	.759
8 close friends or more [ref: less than 8 friends]	1.487**	1.602**
Visitor [ref: was not visited or did not visit	1.412**	1.418*
Did not feel socially isolated [Ref: felt socially isolated]	2.261**	2.509**
Trust [ref: most people cannot be trusted]	1.352*	1.661**
Leaving Cert. or higher [ref: below Leaving Cert.]	.833	.750
Net weekly income [ref: 1st quartile]		
INC1 (First income quartile)	-	-
INC1 (Second income quartile)	.659	.413*
INC2 (Third income quartile)	.760	.565
INC3 (Fourth income quartile)	.853	1.029
Religiosity [ref: attends service less than once a month]	1.572**	1.425
Nagelkerke R Square	-	.183

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01.

An apparent paradox of the findings on income is that, whereas, people place a high priority on money income for the realisation of well-being, the results of this analysis suggests money is invariant with respect to SWB. The variables which emerged as showing the strongest and most statistically significant explanatory power were:

- Marital status
- Not being unemployed
- Having strong social support through 'close friends'

- Extent of socialisation (visiting or being visited)
- Not feeling socially isolated; and
- Trusting others.

Hence, in this particular data source, the main factors which seemed to predict subjective well-being better than other demographic and social characteristics of individuals were – marriage, not being unemployed and having strong social support ('informal social capital'). Measures of 'formal' social capital such as volunteering, civic participation and active involvement in the community were not significantly correlated with SWB; neither was one measure of religiosity in the case of the multivariate model.

The importance of informal social support in explaining well-being is also confirmed in two recent Irish surveys of well-being. In a study of Irish parents and children in McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003), the results of multivariate modelling indicated that social support networks was positively related to psychological well-being. Also, the *Institute of Public Health in Ireland* (IPH) confirm, on the basis of an all-Ireland survey (Balanda and Wilde, 2003), that measures of 'informal' social capital had a significant impact on health and life satisfaction – especially general mental health. The consistency of the findings in the IPH Survey across a range of measures (including general health, satisfaction with health, limiting long term illness, general mental health and quality of life) highlights the potential importance of social networks in understanding health outcomes in the population. Even still, socio-economic factors, age and lifestyle behaviours remain as the key factors in explaining health outcomes according to the IPH Survey.

Of particular significance, in the IPH survey, was the impact on mental health of such indicators as: knowledge of most neighbours, frequency of contact with friends, neighbours or relatives, number of people respondent could call upon for help (with a lift, loan of money or in case of illness), extent of trust in most of one's neighbours, perception of neighbourly reciprocity (people watch out for each other), perception of community efficacy (can do things together) and involvement in a local organisation in last three years. The IPH Report also contained an analysis of the predictors of 'quality of life'[53]. However, it showed correlations with underlying demographic and socio-economic variables which were different to the correlation found in this chapter. It is likely that the meaning of 'quality of life' is different from that of life satisfaction used in the NESF Survey.

Layard (2003a: 16) cites research by Kenrick (1989 and 1993) that shows a likely negative impact of television on happiness. The characteristics of immediacy and exposure reinforce desires and perceptions which cannot be met. Saturation with images of body shapes, riches and goods that people do not have heightens desire without a concomitant satisfaction of these in real life. However, the results in Table 9.10 show no clear relationship between the amount of time spent watching TV and reported life satisfaction.

9.6 Conclusions

There is very limited evidence, to date, on how life satisfaction is changing over time in Ireland. Survey questions on life satisfaction have only become a feature of social research in Ireland in the last two decades. However, evidence from one available source indicates that there have been no major changes in life satisfaction. The data reviewed here do not confirm any view that Irish society is undergoing a process of decay in social capital or the emergence of 'anomie' as a prevailing characteristic of people in general. If anything, the evidence points towards enduring levels of high subjective well-being by international standards as well as distributions of SWB in the population that are generally predictable on the basis of other empirical research and the findings of the nascent happiness literature.

Rising economic prosperity in the form of higher income, more rewarding employment and use of various commodities has expanded the

[53] The survey respondents were asked to rate their 'quality of life' as: 'very good', 'good', 'neither poor nor good', 'poor' and very 'poor'.

opportunities for life satisfaction. Similarly, higher levels of education, health and participation in wider social networks have expanded the possibilities for individuals, families and communities to enjoy more satisfying lives. However, the evidence is unclear as to whether additional income has necessarily raised the overall level of life satisfaction in Ireland.

Although the impact of many social changes is unclear with respect to SWB, it is far from obvious that the processes of 'post-modernisation' is leading to social meltdown or widespread anomie. However, there are grounds for concern about the distribution of SWB – especially if low levels of SWB are associated with exclusion from social and economic opportunities as well as poor health and family instability. Also, young people – particularly men – seem to be particularly vulnerable to the impact of changing social norms and expectations. Hence, while a 'gloom and doom' scenario is not justified, neither is complacency in face of relatively rapid and unexpected social change.

The central concern underlying the analysis in this chapter was the relationship of statistical measures of social and human capital to subjective well-being. Predictable results were found on both a simple bivariate and multivariate regression model allowing for simultaneous impact of structural and social-human capital variables. To the extent that valid measures of these concepts were available, the findings confirmed the main points of the research literature:

- Many factors impact on SWB and there is a large unexplained residual – especially in cross-sectional analyses such as this;
- Marriage, lack of unemployment, social support are important positive predictors of SWB;
- Informal measures of social capital are more predictive of SWB than 'formal' ones;
- Human capital – as measured by level of highest completed level of formal education – once other variables are controlled for – does not

appear to be related to SWB (but it is strongly correlated with 'formal' social capital); and

- Human capital is related to socio-economic characteristics while formal social capital is related to demographic factors.

So, the correlates of human and social capital appear to be very different – even thought human capital is highly correlated with formal social capital. If we wish to understand the causes of subjective well-being we need to examine the particular role played by *informal social capital* alongside marriage and employment. However, from the data used in this chapter, we cannot identify a clear set of antecedents for informal social capital.

A key point that emerged from the analysis is that there is likely to be no single measure of social capital that is correlated with well-being. As observed by Furstenburg and Hughes (1995: 589) in their empirical analysis of transition to early adulthood among youth at risk:

> …these varied components of social capital may be differently linked to particular outcomes. Thus it may not be useful to search for a common link between a unitary measure of social capital and a unitary measure of success in early adulthood.

No general conclusions can be drawn about those factors which are likely to impact most significantly on SWB in Ireland. In the absence of a causal model in which individuals are tracked over time and their SWB compared with various conditions, responses and stimuli, we are a long way from having conclusive evidence, let alone specific evidence, with regards to 'social capital'. However, what evidence there is, provides strong hints that confirm other available research and personal intuition.

As emphasised in this chapter and the previous, there are a number of significant drawbacks and omissions with respect to statistical measures of human and social capital. In addition, the analysis presented in this Chapter is constrained by the omission of measures of 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. It is extremely difficult to measure these dimensions in the space of a short module on social capital in a survey of the sort used by NESF. Other difficulties arise in relation to the direction and causal nature of associations between variables. A correlation may represent the impact of other variables omitted from the model, or may arise from the existence of (unmeasured) collinearity among explanatory variables.

In interpreting the impact of social capital at the individual level, an important omission in the analysis has been the absence of 'meso-level' variables relating to neighbourhood, organisation or other bounded communities. The NESF survey questions, on which the analysis was based, were addressed to individuals. Questions were about their perceptions or behaviour without specifying a well-defined 'community' to which they belong. However, social capital at the local community level may represent an important conditioning mechanism. Clusters of socio-economic disadvantage or specific geographical characteristics may moderate the impact of generalised social capital measures such as trust, volunteering, community engagement or the extent of social support.

Resources and capabilities are more strongly associated with subjective well-being when they are relevant to the particular goals and perceived needs of a person or community. Those which are most appropriate to people's needs, motives and context seem to be correlated with subjective well-being. In Part C, I will explore the implications of this observation for the development of an effective personal, family, organisational and public praxis relevant to the attainment of well-being.

Part C

Implications of this Research for Practice

> ‘We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.’
>
> -Albert Einstein
>
> ‘You know what is wrong with the world – the people who act don’t think and the people who think don’t act’ (attributed to Peter Maurin of the Catholic Workers’ Movement in the film: *Entertaining Angels: The Dorothy Day Story*)

Chapter 10

Fostering the Joy of Learning

'Is not living what one has learned at all times the source of great pleasure?' attributed to Confucius

'*A person first starts to live when he can live outside himself, when he can have as much regard for his fellow man as he does for himself. Life is a gift and if we agree to accept it we must contribute in return'* Einstein

10.1 Introduction

The story of human well-being is complex, personal and inter-dependent. A personal journey, including a shared one, is typically uncharted and unpredictable at the outset. The end-point is neither obvious nor pre-determined. Even if genetic inheritance or acquired personality matter a lot for the realisation of subjective well-being, individuals can learn to shape their destiny – but always within some social constraints. At the centre of the search for well-being is the human subject as an active, learning and responsible being working within a context of personal inter-dependency. On the basis of previous chapters, this chapter explores some key areas in which individuals can learn to achieve well-being.

Some of the critical human capabilities identified as relevant to well-being in Part A, and summarised in chapter 7, are: belonging, obligations, trust, shared norms, communication and mediation of conflict. As discussed in chapter 7, Allardt (1993) has referred to three essential human needs: to have, to love and to be. Learning to have, to love and to be is at the core of human well-being. Every personal journey is a learning process. To focus on seeking one's own good and that of others brings us back to the importance of emotions, desire and empowerment as critical success factors. The pressure has to come from within the learner as he or she grows in awareness and relationship to others. Ulich (1954: 557) said of Froebel's approach to pedagogy:

> Froebel's self-activity is necessarily coupled with joy on the part of the child. To him joy is the inward reaction of self-activity.

Within learning, the role of formal education is about strengthening the bonds of belonging, caring and self-realisation. Even if the aims of formal education and training have been too narrowly focussed on individual success and achievement – at the expense of someone else in competitive academic points and labour market contests – its wider goal of equipping people to live in societies and to think for themselves remains. Compassion[54] – to suffer with – is as important as competence[55] – to strive and seek after.

Part A of this study has postulated – and the evidence reviewed in Part B confirms or suggests – that we are capable of attaining well-being as responsible and inter-dependent agents. However, as the argument unfolds in Part C, the realisation of well-being depends, critically on three factors:

- Inner capability summarised in the short-hand metaphor of human capital;
- Effective relationship to others summarised in the short-hand metaphor of social capital; and
- A facilitating environment in which various institutions – families, organisations and the State support well-being.

As suggested in earlier chapters, the capacity to set and reach intrinsic goals arising from clear and sustainable personal needs is more important than, extrinsic goals for social status and acquisition of goods. Judging by the empirical analysis in Part B, there seems to be a myopia or distortion of information where individuals confuse intrinsic goals with extrinsic ones. We invest most in those activities and goals which yield the *least* gain by way of sustainable personal (and collective) well-being. Layard (2003a) argues that habituation effects with respect to material possessions or social status are

[54] *Compassio*.

[55] *Competere*.

typically underestimated by people. Hence, people work long hours or strive for material gain or increased social standing only to find that the return on their efforts is of little worth.

A discussion of inner capability among subjects follows in section 10.2. It is followed by a discussion of effective inter-subjective relationships in section 10.3. Spirituality – as distinct from organised religion which is only one of its manifestations – is discussed in section 10.4. As indicated in chapter 1, I do not pretend or claim that any analysis of society or personal development in a social context can be free of values or value-judgments. At best, we need to be explicit about our values and how these interact with our analyses. Neither can I subscribe to the notion that the conclusions of analysis or the implications of such analysis for personal or social praxis can only be based on empirical evidence – understood, narrowly, as the results of statistical investigation or factual observation. Personal, subjective experience coupled with reflective reasoning and conversation offer a means of making sense of supposedly objective evidence as revealed in statistical research or clinical trials.

10.2 Inner capability

The capacity to think for oneself and to act responsibly distinguishes humans from other species. Each individual is unique – but each acts within a social setting in which social structure constrains, shapes and enables each one to make rational choices and influence their own future and that of others. I am capable and responsible because I am not alone.

Change is the one constant of life. Acceptance of changed circumstances and adjustment of personal goals and expectations provide an active coping strategy for individuals. Individuals can adjust to adverse change by seeking to change their life circumstances through, for example, a job-move, re-training or a re-constituted relationship with others (referred to as assimilative coping). However, the freedom to engage in assimilative coping may be increasingly circumscribed through the course of a lifetime by one's physical health, capacity for radical change or personal obligations. Accommodative coping involves a reshaping and re-framing of problems and challenges through an adjustment in expectation or goals[56].

Viktor Frankl (1984: 86) wrote:

> everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.

But, how is an individual to choose the right attitude? Nobody can make this choice for him or her. Society may constrain choice for good reason. But, there are limits to the extent of individual autonomy as well as social control. Under conditions of constraint (implying mutually exclusive goods or choice of strategy), the individual seeks a solution by following 'moral behaviour' that minimises damage and maximises the 'good' that they seek. In the absence of certainty with respect to the impact of any form of behaviour, the individual is left to guess her/his way forward. An ethic of individual choice and responsibility yields intrinsic satisfaction, but individuals need some point of reference in society: some symbols or codes of belief and practice to exercise this freedom. We realise our autonomy within society. In the seventeenth century, poet John Donne declared:

> No Man is an Island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main[57].

Important as society is in shaping the values, expectations and goals of individuals, the question can be asked: could there be a tyranny of social norms and sanctions that inhibit questioning, innovation and desirable personal transformation? Social systems need to accommodate idiosyncratic tendencies

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[56] Accommodative copying may be referred to as the 'Triple-A formula' – acceptance, adjustment and achievement.

[57] Meditation 17 in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* written in 1624 (Norton, 1962).

that do not fit the expectations of particular groups. Individual self-realisation needs to be balanced against community responsibility and obligation lest the latter become a tyranny in which undue conformity is imposed at the price of human well-being in the long-run.

Learning to be in a society of many is about drawing out what is unique in each one. The role of parents, teachers and other leaders is essentially that of facilitator to lead the learner to discover truth and beauty within themselves and in others. Education – *educare* – is about drawing out what is within. Hence, teaching involves a graduated and prolonged 'letting go' by seeking to release the sources of self-organised learning within the learner. These sources are located in the desire of each person to have, to love and to be. The learner is increasingly responsible for his or her own learning in a social context defined by relationships among persons who share learning roles in an on-going communication and dialogue. In a Socratic dialogue, the aim of the teacher is to refute falsehood and uphold 'truth' through a dialogue based on questioning. An alternative method is to allow 'truth' to emerge from a conversation in which each participant is open to the truth in the other as well as themselves. Each participants acknowledges that no one has a monopoly of truth and moral right, even if some deference is paid to those with greater experience or acquired respect and competence to guide others in uncovering their truths.

Froebel (Ulich, 1954: 525) made self-activity of the learner the central theme of his pedagogy:

> To stir up, to animate, to awaken, and to strengthen, the pleasure and power of the human being to labour uninterruptedly at his own education, has become and always remained the fundamental principle and aim of my educational work.

Knowledge and learning remains deeply personal and unique. It remains, in a sense, unrepeatable and 'unteachable'. Jonathan Sacks (2002: 65) says that: 'each person knows something no one else does.'

10.3 Effective relationships

This society is characterised by complexities and tensions of a concrete historical situation. Sociologist, Alain Touraine, (1996: 326) claims for all sociologists:

> not only the right but the duty to be both committed and uncommitted, partisan and independent, realistic and prophetic. How could we set apart the unity of our thought from the history of our personal lives and the experience of profound historical transformations? We not only work on our societies; we work on ourselves.

To be committed to an analysis of society is to be engaged with that society – seeking to influence it according to some system of shared or personal values[58]. To be engaged with one's own personal development and fulfilment is also to be engaged with others, with society and with an analysis of that society.

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1979/1762) postulated: '*I conceive, I discern, I act, I learn.*' I suggest three critical areas for learning:

- *Praxis* (doing);
- *Conversations*; and
- *Reflection* through observation and listening.

In section 4.6, we have seen that learning and suffering (equivalent in root meaning to 'undergoing') are linked. To learn is to encounter something or someone that is different. This requires some change to what one knows, possesses or controls. To 'know' another person is to enter, to some extent, into that person's world of constructed meaning which also contains some suffering in itself. The poet Marcel Proust (1921) captured this sense of learning through personal suffering when he wrote:

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[58] To seek social change according to some system of shared or personal values is not necessarily the same as seeking to impose such values on others. Respect for, and

> It is often simply from want of the creative spirit that we do not go to the full extent of suffering. And the most terrible reality brings us, with our suffering, the joy of a great discovery, because it merely gives a new and clear form to what we have long been ruminating without suspecting it.

In a Buddhist religious view, human suffering arises from excessive attachment to (or desires for) fixed forms, categories and objects created by the mind. The way to overcome suffering is to accept the transitory and impermanent nature of all things. According to this view, all fixed forms – things, events, people or ideas – are nothing but illusion expressed in the term *maya* as in Hinduism. Frustration after frustration sets in if we seek to cling to ourselves or others as objects of desire and knowing. Even the idea of a separate, individual self is an illusion, according to this view – a form of *maya*. Varela, Thompson and Rosch (1991: 143) observe that:

> Our grasping after an inner ground is the essence of ego-self and is the source of continuous frustration… This grasping after an inner ground is itself a moment in a larger pattern of grasping that includes our clinging to an outer ground in the form of the idea of a pre-given and independent world. In other words, our grasping after a ground, whether inner or outer, is the deep source of frustration and anxiety.

Regardless of whether we deny or postulate the existence of a 'pre-given and independent world', the anxiety over objects, power and domination represents a major stumbling block to the attainment of well-being. Desires and expectations are inflated and cannot be matched with capability or functionings. This lack of correspondence and balance as indicated in Figure 7.1 in chapter 7 undermines well-being. The way to balance and wholeness is through giving up, denying self and focusing on relationships, inter-relationships and inter-dependency. In this way, asserting identity does not have to mean violence or complete separation; pursuit of individuality does not have to mean pursuit of selfishness and autonomy does not mean lack of care for others or inter-dependence.

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acceptance of, others' choices may arise out of a profound value of humility, reason and tolerance. Respect for diversity of values is, itself, a shared value.

10.3.1 Praxis

Social practice orientated towards the realisation of well-being concerns the fostering of a positive attitude towards life as well as effective relationships with others. The utilitarian philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, recognised the importance of social practice (Bentham, 1983/1834: XIX):

> Create all the happiness you are able to create: remove all the misery you are able to remove. Every day will allow you to add something to the pleasure of others, or to diminish something of their pains. And for every grain of enjoyment you sow in the bosom of another, you shall find a harvest in your own bosom; while every sorrow which you pluck out from the thoughts and feelings of a fellow creature shall be replaced by beautiful peace and joy in the sanctuary of your soul.

Trusting relationships founded on reciprocity is a key element in the pursuit of well-being. Creating virtuous cycles of inter-personal trust involves a decision followed by action to care for others – trusting in the essential goodness of the other. Martin Buber comments that: 'trust is proving trust in the fullness of life in spite of the experienced course of the world'. However, caring without expectation of some imminent pay-back requires something more than calculative self-interest, acquired habit or fear of sanction. It requires some trust and conviction about the value of behaving morally as if others mattered as much as oneself.

The Golden Rule of human behaviour seems to be indispensable. It constitutes the common denominator of most religions and systems of spiritual meaning including non-theistic value systems. The *Rule* specifies that each should act towards others as each would wish others to act towards oneself. It may be interpreted as enlightened and calculative self-interest. But, what if others do not reciprocate, or worse still, continue in the extreme to treat you with contempt and abuse? Many ethical systems propose that individuals should continue to act honourably and not to repay violence or contempt with like.

The *Rule* is applied in concrete behaviour towards others in the here and now. To give expression to this value implies acting towards someone in particular (and not just in general) – *this person*, at *this time,* and in *this place* (and not just universally or in some hypothetical situation in the future). *Love* –

the capacity to desire the well-being of others as much as one's own and to act on this – is the basis for much social belonging. It is love for this person, that child, this spouse, that stranger; it is not merely love for people-in-general. Love implies responsibility as well as rights (to love) and obligation as well as fulfilment.

Philosophy and science typically search for universals; poetry loves the particular. Context-bound morality is 'thick' – embedded in families, cultures and situations. By contrast, universal norms such as duty, sympathy and obligation are context-free. The grammar or syntax of reciprocity in social networks is particular to that network. It is based on universal norms and values and, at the same time, particular loyalties and bonds of solidarity. As Sacks puts it (2002: 58):

> There is no road to human solidarity that does not begin with moral particularity – by coming to know what it means to be a child, a parent, a neighbour, a friend. We learn to love humanity by loving specific human beings. There is no short-cut[59].

We can be absolute in loving someone in particular but such love is not universal. Likewise, Sacks argues, religious truth is not universal but absolute for those who believe.

It is likely that many 'norms of behaviour' – especially in relation to sexuality, family formation and mediation of conflict and power in these contexts are being reinterpreted against a background of common societal values. In other words, some moral 'means' that were seen as absolute or near-absolute ends (thou shall and thou shall not…) are now seen as relative 'means' while the 'ends' have become general principles about areas such as social justice, inter-

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[59] Sacks (2002: 158) comments: 'The power of the great world religions is that they are not mere philosophical systems, abstract truths strung together in strictly logical configurations. They are embodied truths, made vividly real in lives, homes, congregations, rituals, narratives, songs and prayers.'

personal respect and the principle of ‘doing no harm’ in victimless acts of various kinds.

What issues arise for personal development and choice when different options carry conflicting moral ‘goods’ and ‘bads’? The individual is faced with more than one choice that involves consequences that are morally illicit as judged from the standpoint of the individual’s over-arching moral code. To avoid moral overload in these circumstances, some moral prioritising is required based on avoidance of the greatest evil or harm to others and oneself.

10.3.2 Conversations

The role of communication in human capabilities was discussed in Part A. What role does communication play in personal development? Conversations take place along many different fronts of people’s lives from the chance conversation with strangers to sustained conversation with familiars, family members and friends to formalised and structured conversations through, for example, formal education or written presentations.

A key challenge for individuals is to listen to others. Most people hear. But, it is not clear that we listen deeply to the concerns, messages, and needs – articulated or otherwise – of those in our hearing range. Sustained, respectful, informal and formal dialogue through whatever channels are available is important for personal praxis leading to well-being.

Entering into the world of others – individuals, communities, and societies – implies an extended capacity of sharing their thinking, feeling and seeing in so far as this can be achieved through shared and lived experiences, dialogue and feedback. Inter-subjectivity is essential rather than domination by any one subject. Knowing the other implies living their experience through a deep process of listening. The end result of deep listening through respectful conversations may be the discovery of hidden talents and the inspiration to undertake new projects of value to self and others. The opposite of respectful conversation is direct imposition or attack on the views of the other. The philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard, proposed an avoidance of a direct attack on someone else's beliefs or attitudes. He believed that only subjective inwardness could appropriate the truth about questions of moral or spiritual value.

In the worlds of formal instruction and didactic learning, the importance of helping learners to explore their own meanings and developing understanding is worth emphasising. This suggests going beyond a Socratic-type dialogue with the posing of questions and the provision of ready-made answers. Depending on the subject matter, the learner develops or appropriates an answer in terms of his or her own experience and understanding. This also suggests learning conversations where each attempts to start from where the other 'is at'. The interests, background, experience and terminology of the other provides an essential starting point for an evolving dialogue. *We need to try to see the world through the eyes of the other*.

10.3.3 Reflection

Thinking and thinking deeply, openly and critically is a rare skill. Much of what we do or say is not subject to critical reflection by ourselves or others. What thinking does occur is frequently prejudicial, ill-informed or unsustained. In the field of social analysis, for example, thinking is frequently confined to acceptable and narrowly defined lines of inquiry. The professional insider within a given academic, public administration and disciplinary community is strongly encouraged to conform to the accepted routines, practices and modes of thinking. Non-conformists who do not fall within a given framework of thinking and assuming about the world are alienated. There are powerful incentives for reasons of employability, promotion and general social acceptance to adapt to the prevailing paradigms and tastes of the ruling intellectual and power elites. Academia and public administration are no exception to this.

Within the social sciences, sociology has not been spared criticism. Tovey and Share (2000: 94) claim that:

> Irish sociology has avoided an investigation of its biases, including its avoidance of the more critical traditions in the discipline, and has committed itself to a rhetoric of 'objective knowledge' and 'research expertise'. Sociology in Ireland is remarkable for the slight influence it has had on mainstream intellectual life in comparison with of other academic disciplines or of artists and writers. But whatever influence it has achieved has failed to significantly expand the role of intellectual as alienated outsider or as protagonist of human emancipation.

The same could be said of other disciplines within the Irish social sciences even if economics – the contested queen of social science – has had a disproportionate influence relative to sociology (for example). Quantitative research based on methodological individualism has offered a very convenient way of trying to understand and test the way the world works for public policy action.

10.4 Spirituality and religion

Praxis, conversations and reflections find their coherence and meaning in systems of human spirituality. This is not the same as adherence to religious truth or codes – although these frequently provide the main sources of spirituality. Faith has been defined in the New Testament Bible by Saint Paul as 'the assurance of things hoped for; the conviction of things not seen' (Hebrews 11: 1). Stripped of its usual meaning in Judaeo-Christian religion, human faith may be understood as a shared attitude of hope, meaning and purpose that transcends what is immediately obvious. Human faith says that life makes sense and is worth living, even in the face of doubt, loneliness, suffering, sickness and death. Hope is defined by Sacks (2002: 206) as 'the faith that, together, we can make things better'. Vaclav Havel (1990: 181) understands hope as

> not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out.

Faith based on a secular humanism is not incompatible with a theistic or ‘other-worldly’ faith[60]. Faith, religious or otherwise, can nourish human faith and, in this way, help societies to function. However, some manifestations of religious faith – thankfully only a minority – cultivate distrust, separation and animosity.

An apparent decline in traditional religious practice and belief (Cassidy, 2002) has induced anxiety about future social cohesiveness. For example, Wilson (1982: 88) wrote some two decades ago:

> It is by no means clear what sort of society is coming into being as religious values wane. The consequences, not only for the arts and high culture, but also, and perhaps more importantly, for the standards of civic order, social responsibility, and individual integrity, may be such that the future of western civilisation itself may be thrown into jeopardy.

But, religion is not the only basis for moral behaviour as Albert Einstein postulated:

> A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death. [61]

One of the key benefits of human faith is that it can help individuals to find balance and harmony in various dimensions of their lives – intimate relationships, work and the wider community. Goals, expectations and needs can be better aligned than in the absence of some system of belief and meaning that ‘transcends what is immediately obvious’. Hence, the Pauline trilogy of faith, hope and love (the latter being the ‘greatest of these’)[62] still provides an important basis for personal well-being.

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[60] Martin Buber declared: ‘The atheist staring from the attic window is often nearer to God than the believer caught up in his own false image of God.’

[61] http://www.humboldt1.com/~gralsto/einstein/quotes.html [consulted in June 2004]

[62] The Holy Bible: 1 Corinthians 13: 13.

Organised religion remains an important reference point – among others – by which people make sense of their faith, hope and love. Andrew Furlong, (2003: 155-160) believes that the key attributes of religion are:

- *Creeds* (or beliefs) about what is, why and for what purpose;
- *Codes* of behaviour for how to live;
- *Cults*, rituals and symbols to connect to different realities within and beyond the immediate world of sense and human reason; and
- *Community (or gathering) of shared meaning, belief and practice.*

Running through all of the above is the role of *narratives* and *symbols* that connect (in Greek – *Symballein*). They mediate beliefs and the external world 'out there' as well as 'in here' – connecting the universal and timeless with the here and now. In this sense, all of human life is potentially symbolic and sacramental to the extent that it draws together outward and visible things with inward and spiritual realities. A repository of symbols corresponds to the lived experience and collective memory of generations.

Stories, myths and collective as well as personal experiences can carry deep, symbolic and normative significance for those telling and listening to the stories. The social significance of religion lies as much in what it does and in what it means here and now as in its literal truth from a strictly historical or human scientific perspective. Definition and precision in the content of beliefs and practices (especially ritual or liturgical) gives way to what particular beliefs and practices mean for those who are engaged as listeners and 'doers' of the underlying belief system. Together, all of these components of religious or spiritual practice can help sustain a sense of purpose, connection and meaning conducive to well-being.

Religion is a social functioning as signified in its Latin origin, *religare* – to bind together. Hence, in functionalist accounts of religion and society, sociologists such as Malinowski (1944: 26) coined the phrase 'magic is as magic does' from which others have coined the phrase 'religion is as religion does' (Bilton et al, 2002). Religions codify altruistic dispositions and acquired habits in terms of rules of moral behaviour that give precedence to duty, obligation and putting the interests of others before, or on an equal footing, with those of self.

Karl Marx is well known for his dictum that religion was the ‘opium of the masses’. But, his reference deserves a more complete context (Marx, 1844:i):

> Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.

He goes on, immediately, to champion the cause of human well-being:

> *The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo.*

The cruel fate of human history has not been kind to Marx’s prognosis or call for emancipation from what he viewed as illusion and objectification of human need in an alienated world. Moreover, the presence of religious belief and practice has not withered in response to the deeply personal quest of many millions to find happiness, meaning and purpose in life.

It is an open question as to how institutionalised, organised religion will adapt in a post-modern culture in which there is thought to be no verifiable or known objective truth ‘out there’ (of person and society). The same dilemma confronts various modernist experiments and projects where linearity in progress was assumed thanks to human reason and societal organisation. The challenge for personal development is to re-create identity, meaning and unified purpose in a post-modern world where ideas, positions and views are seen to be relative and not subject to independent verification or legitimisation. This challenge needs to be deeply personal, voluntary and meaningful.

10.5 Dealing with power and conflict

We live in a society characterised by inequality and injustice. Inequalities which may be viewed as the product of chance, effort or freely chosen options are complemented with different allocations of power, resources, status and knowledge. Various institutions including schools, families, trade unions, business networks, the legal system as well as informal social networks prevent equality of access by excluding outsiders from particular circles of shared benefit. It is beyond this study to analyse the nature of power distribution and injustice in Ireland. However, the pervasiveness of unequal power relationships poses a challenge for personal development and learning. To live the 'good life' it is not sufficient to say that all we need is religion, friends and virtue. We are challenged – possibly invited - to struggle within power-full organisations and networks for a more just society. My brothers' and sisters' well-being is just as important as mine – if we decide to take the *Golden Rule* seriously.

It is incumbent on practitioners in the field of education, for example, to analyse the nature of various types of exclusion and how they interact with existing distributions of power. Alongside these distributions a trend towards excessive individualism and socially disruptive forms of competition based on a utilitarian or economistic understanding of education needs to be critically examined. A constructive resistance to change which reinforces inequality in the name of freedom and choice requires an intelligent critique of existing structures and relationships. Formal education may undermine social justice by reinforcing attitudes and norms of behaviour based on compliance and acceptance of social inequality and discrimination.

10.6 Conclusions

The key conclusion of this chapter is that each of us is responsible, in the first place, for our own well-being. We are not entirely at the mercy of genes, culture and prevailing circumstances. At the same time, we are also responsible for the well-being of others – not just others in general but those nearest to us in space, time and radius of commitment. Learning to be well is about learning to be and to love as well as to have. True learning is grounded in experience and practice. It enters the heart and the mind and not only the mind.

In this chapter I have laid heavy emphasis on the role of spirituality and religion in re-connecting individuals and fostering well-being. Even if a return to traditional and organised religion in the immediate future is unlikely and would represent a mixed blessing, what seems necessary is a rediscovery of all that is valuable, true and relevant in established religious tradition and practice as well as in value systems that have sprung from religion (e.g. liberal democracy, socialism, secular humanism in the enlightenment tradition). These need to be set in a very different context characterised by:

- Personal autonomy balanced with personal responsibility toward others;
- Respect for individual conscience, liberty and diversity of interpretation;
- A spirit of openness to inquiry, searching and humility in the face of uncertainty; and
- A rediscovery of our common humanity and obligations to each other regardless of creed, class, race, sexual orientation or gender.

The supposed polar opposites of collectivity and individuality fail to capture the nature of personal responsibility and inter-dependence.

Martin Buber (1970) correctly captured this point when he said that we do *not* need to move from an *I-focussed* society to a *We-focussed* one, but from a polarised one where the choice is posed as that between I and We, to one in which I and We are considered together. Ultimately, we are all responsible for our own learning and for our own well-being. The poem of Sir Henry Wooton (1568–1639) – which made such a deep impression on me 25 years ago and which I rediscovered having mislaid it then – seems to offer intuitive appeal even in a contemporary context.

Table 10.1

The Character of a Happy Life (Henry Wooton)[63]

Words of the Poem	**Connecting themes in this Chapter**
How happy is he born and taught That serveth not another's will; Whose armour is his honest thought, And simple truth his utmost skill!	Personal autonomy and self-knowledge.
Whose passions not his masters are; Whose soul is still prepared for death, Untied unto the world by care Of public fame or private breath;	Practice of virtue and positive outlook. Social status is not as important as other factors.
Who envies none that chance doth raise, Nor vice; who never understood How deepest wounds are given by praise; Nor rules of state, but rules of good;	Balance of expectation and reality. Contentment in what is beyond control.
Who hath his life from rumours freed; Whose conscience is his strong retreat; Whose state can neither flatterers feed; Nor ruin make oppressors great;	A personal code of behaviour.
Who God doth late and early pray More of His grace than gifts to lend; And entertains the harmless day With a religious book or friend;	A personal sense of meaning, belonging and destiny.
This man is freed from servile bands Of hope to rise or fear to fall: Lord of himself, though not of lands And having nothing, yet hath all.	Self-mastery, detachment and engagement.

[63] Taken from http://www.bartleby.com/101/179.html [consulted in July 2004]

Chapter 11

Strengthening Families

'Caring for each other is the most basic form of civic participation. We learn to care in families, and we enlarge our communities of concern as we mature.' (Deborah Stone (2000)

'As the main source of economic and social welfare for its members, the family is the first building block in the generation of social capital for the larger society,[64]'

11.1 Introduction

In chapter 7, families were described as a primary form of social belonging providing space in which a personal, intrinsic-motivational and particular engagement is possible. They can neither be reduced to collective entities composed of one voice and uniform interest, on the one hand, nor aggregations of atomistic self-interested individuals bargaining with each other, on the other. Rather, they are communities in which, typically, individuals are held together through some degree of mutual inter-dependence and affection as well as, rational individual choice. The assumption, frequently made, of there being a strict division between altruistic behaviour in families and self-interested behaviour elsewhere is questionable (Folbre, 1994).

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is reputed to have said in the magazine, *Woman's Own,* in the 1980s, that: '*There is no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women, and there are families*.' One wonders if she, or one of her advisers, was reacting negatively to a reading of Emile Durkheim's *Rules of Sociological Method* (1938/1895: 102): *When the individual has been eliminated, society alone remains,'* or *'societies cannot exist if there are only individuals.'* For Durkheim and for classical sociology, society is complex and systemic defying the simple rules of aggregation or de-

[64] Taken from http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/sources/fam1.htm [consulted in July 2004]

composition. Society is a specific reality with its own emergent properties and rules and families are no exception.

In the previous chapter, I placed a strong accent on the role of spirituality and personal values in helping individuals to find a sense of purpose and connection in their lives. From infancy to old age, individuals need safe havens and personal stability zones in a 'heartless world'. Families in all shapes, sizes and contexts can provide such havens and zones. Social change notwithstanding, they remain an important area in which individuals can take responsibility and effect change in a way that is deeply personal. I may not be able to change society, organisations and neighbourhoods as much as I can change myself and in a way that impacts on those nearest to me in my social networks including family.

Families or 'The Family' has been a disputed territory for a long time. Conservatives have championed the cause of 'The Family' against the onslaught of the intrusive State or the permissive society. Among social radicals, there has been some uncertainty, bordering on nervousness, about focussing on the family or families precisely because it has been seen as a dominantly conservative policy preoccupation. Family sits, uncomfortably, between the State, civil society and the individual. Some fear that too much emphasis on family will lessen the role of the State or society in general in facilitating greater social equality – and possibly, also, perpetuate forms of patriarchal and oppressive social organisation.

These concerns are, in my view, well founded. However, many on the left need to go beyond these concerns to identifying what can be positively done to support families through a synergy of public and family cooperation based on principles of equality, freedom and care. At the same time, many on the right of the political spectrum need to accept, acknowledge and validate the diversity of family and intimate relationship forms while pointing to the special role of marriage as an important social institution for the well-being of many adults and children.

More recently, 'family' has emerged as an umbrella term for many different types of living arrangements and commitment from the familiar ‘nuclear’ family based on heterosexual marriage with children to a variety of living arrangements and relationships. Interestingly, the term used for family in the Irish constitution is rendered as *teaghlach* in the Irish Language (which assumes priority in case of contested meaning of a term or article). Kennedy (2001: 7) draws attention to the fact that Dineen’s dictionary provides the following explanation for teaghlach: ‘*a family or household, familia or monastic family, an ethnic family or group, followers, escort; a house*.’ This provides, indeed, a very broad definition of family! Kennedy goes on to say that (2001: 7):

> Family may be one of the most commonly used words in everyday language, but there is no single common understanding of the term. The concept has evolved from a broad notion of a household under a common head, to that of a nuclear family based on lifelong marriage, to a wide diversity of family forms, including solo parent families, and families that have been reconstituted following the breakdown of an earlier family.

However family or families are defined or treated in a society, they remain important for the survival and growth of individuals at all stages of life. Family, caring and well-being usually, or hopefully, go together – even if all too frequently they break down or fail to provide the security, caring and growth that its members might expect. A key challenge facing societies is how to nurture family cohesion as a natural supporting environment favouring commitment and stability. This has clear benefits for the well-being of adult partners to a family relationship as well as children associated with it.

In the next section, I discuss the contribution of family life to child well-being. Before considering some practical issues and public policy initiatives that could help families in section 11.4, I consider the historical context in which families – as we know them today – have evolved. As with all other social institutions, families do not reside apart from a particular historical and cultural stage of development in modern societies.

11.2 Families and child well-being

For the vast majority of persons, families are the first (chronological) socialising agent. They can establish identity, self-worth, attachment, sympathy and skills for living. A child’s early interactions with attentive, responsive and consistent primary caregivers are important for the acquisition of social and cognitive skills (McLanahan and Sandefur, 1994). Also, these interactions help reinforce the communication of important values and social skills of learning and coping with difficulty.

A child needs sustained attention and caring by a variety of people – but by its own parents in particular. 'Whole-person' caring by a parent or adult *in loco parenti* (e.g. grandparent) needs to complement caring undertaken by others – child-minders, teachers, social workers, etc. Caring and educating undertaken for payment or other extrinsic reward and mandate is unavoidably of a different kind, duration and purpose than sustained caring by the principal adults in a child's life.

Families' ability to meet children's physical and emotional needs is likely to lay a strong basis for trustworthy behaviour in life as well as their intrinsic sense of trust in others – especially in their own family life as adults. Families are likely to contribute to child well-being in at least four ways:

- Provision of essential life necessities;
- Development of core skills of language, communication and inter-personal ability;
- Giving of attention and love including listening, encouragement, advice, sanctioning; and
- Reinforcement of exemplary roles in support of virtuous habits and disposition for learning throughout life.

However, it 'takes a village to raise a child' as the African proverb says – families provide caring and learning support in the context of a wider community. The question may also be posed: 'who raises the village?'

Coleman depicts different kinds of inter-generational relationships and networks. Each relationship involves at least two 'nodes' (child to adult, child to child or adult to adult). It involves an exchange of 'content' such as care, values, material goods and time. Even in what might be viewed as a small community, the number of permutations of social ties is large depending on the extent to which members are connected to various others. For example, in the case of child-family-school networks, Coleman identifies many types of social connection and reciprocity: parent to parent; parent to an adult friend; parent to a teacher; child to own parent, child to parent of another child, child to a teacher, child to another child. For each of these types of social connection, it is possible to further distinguish those that are 'joined-up' and those that are not. For example, a child might 'know' (or trust, or relate to, or engage with) another child – but not the parents of that child. Or, one particular child might 'know' one of the parents of another child whose parents may not 'know' the parents of that particular child.

Parental and adult models provide a support for motivation and self-reliant learning behaviour. Children learn best through practice in close proximity to adults. Halpern (2004) states that:

> interactions with attentive adults are the key channel through which the child develops emotional and social control, and becomes an attentive and effective self-learner.

Expectations of good behaviour including good learning behaviour are reinforced by criss-crossing social networks and shared norms and sanctions with adults. Social network density (or 'internal complete connection') can facilitate an effective sharing of norms and sanctions on undesirable behaviour. As stated in chapter 5, I prefer the term 'complete internal social capital' to that of 'network closure' in describing the extent to which connections within a given network are joined-up. Connection density and 'thick trust' are probably highly correlated. The more these internal connections cross all of the members of a network, the more internally complete the network connectedness is.

In inter-generational connections, reciprocity of care and expectation is likely to be based on unequal authority to the extent that adults, parents and teachers have greater control over children. However, this control is relative to parenting or teaching styles. As the child grows older, the nature of authority changes towards facilitating rather than directing behaviour. Parenting, like teaching, is the art of gradually 'letting go' at the right pace, intensity and time so that the 'younger' learner can literally learn to learn. Hence, learning to let go as early as possible and as late as necessary is a learning challenge for those who accompany the learner. This, also, has implications for styles of organisational management, public governance and community practice in society at large, which will be explored in later chapters.

Authoritative, as distinct from authoritarian, parenting is about setting a good example, setting reasonable standards of behaviour, providing a supportive environment, fostering reciprocity and involvement, and giving age-appropriate independence to children. Authoritarian styles of parenting tend to stifle initiative and foster passivity or revolt as well as laying the basis for poor social adjustment. However, schooling and parenting approaches that reinforce a growing sense of responsibility, self-regulation and internalised norms of behaviour seem to work best (Abbott, 1999).

The potential for caring is likely to be improved as a result of: (i) more caring adults in the household, (ii) a greater ratio of adults to children, and (iii) a greater quality and quantity of attention, interest and active dialogue among adults and children. A child's interaction with an attentive, responsive, consistent and loving adult is, therefore, critical to the building of self-esteem and ease of relationship with others. The foundations for lifelong and lifewide[65] learning and a lifelong love of learning are laid very early on – even before the child sees the door of a primary school.

11.3 Families in a historical context

The transition, in Ireland, from a mainly rural to an industrial and post-industrial society in the space of two generations has been particularly marked. In pre-industrial societies, families were an important unit of economic activity. The

[65] The term lifewide learning was adopted in the Irish Government White Paper on Adult Education (Government of Ireland, 2000a: 32). The term refers to all types of human learning which take place in a wide range of settings from formal schooling to informal or experiential learning

gradual decline in family-based crafts, farms and enterprises in the industrial era coincided with an increase in out-sourcing (from the family) of education, caring – and more recently - leisure. Intermediary forms of social organisation such as families, extended family groupings, voluntary and charitable groups and faith-based organisations were among the most established channels in traditional societies for meeting the needs of individuals through inter-personal care, education and socialisation. However, many of these channels are now much weaker than before.

In modern society, role differentiation and the absence of cross-links among adults at a local level impact on the experience of young people. Children are frequently connected to other children through, for example, school or shared neighbourhood but their parents are probably less likely, than before, to know each other unless they are specifically involved in school-related activity. With an increased prevalence of part-time working among teenagers and school-going students and the concomitant rise in market-targeted 'youth cultures,' young people have less reason to communicate with, or give account to, their parents. The potential for disconnection among adults in the life of children is accentuated if teachers do not live in the same locality and are at a distance from parents.

Together with increased working hours and labour force participation as well as greater residential mobility and smaller family size, there is, now, less opportunity to call upon family members to help out in minding the elderly and the very young. Other forms of social organisation and interaction have developed – provided in part by the Market and the State. These take the form of more formal, but probably more limited interest-based engagement.

Alongside changes in the provision of care, families have gone from being a naturally evolving entity in pre-modern times to a more legally defined and contractual one in recent centuries. More recently, still, families cover a wide range of living arrangements from marriage to consensual unions. With the development of new lifestyles and a greater emphasis on individual autonomy, serious questions need to be asked in relation to 'what is family?', 'what is the appropriate balance of external support and regulation in times of acute need or conflict?' Social policy on the family is a short-hand for how the State mediates between two concurrent agendas: an individualist rights perspective and the role of the Welfare State as provider and social insurer in response to human need.

There is some tension between notions of the common good, mutual obligations and moral restraint on the one side, and, on the other, notions of individual rights and personal autonomy. Ultimately, meaning and fulfilment may be found as much in duty-fulfilment as in desire-satisfaction. Duty dictates that 'I want because I ought' and not that 'I ought because I want'. But, what 'I can' is frequently wider than what 'I ought' as a former US President, Bill Clinton, recently testified in his autobiography!

The seamless nature of primitive or traditional societies in which generations mixed more readily in well bounded communities (spatially as well as in terms of fixed identities) contrasts with a much more fluid society in which young people are now growing up. The duration and flexibility of (paid) working time has become a key issue in terms of issues around child-care, quality of life and equality of access to the labour market by men and women. The lack of flexibility and the high premium on continuity of paid employment experience presents a major obstacle to those men and women who wish to spend more time in (unpaid) work directly educating and caring for the next generation. The non-recognition of caring work – mainly undertaken by women – represents a strong ideological view of what kinds of 'work' matter in terms of national accounts and tax-welfare systems of family-support.

Folbre (1994) argues that, from a statistical and national accounting point of view, treating caring labour in this way suited those who are eager to show that wage employment increased general economic welfare more than other forms of economic activity. She states (Folbre, 1994: 96):

> The point here is that the image of the unproductive housewife was connected to a cultural norm that portrayed women as dependents who should be grateful for their husbands' support. The devaluation of housework and child care was enforced by the official terminology of economists and statisticians.

Donovan and Halpern (2002: 46) conclude that '*almost half of economic activity takes place outside of the market-place*'. Although I am not aware of systematic cross-national work to substantiate the intriguing claim of Robert Picciotto of the World Bank (Picciotto,1998), the following raises important issues for what appears to be an ideologically and gender-biased focus on measurable and market-based activity:

> The value of women's labor in the home has not been accounted for because it's not part of a market, a mistake worth roughly $8 trillion.

However, various attempts have been made to quantify the contribution to well-being outside in spheres outside market. Work by the UK Office of National Statistics on *Household Satellite Accounts* indicates that the non-market household economy may be as large as the formal, market-based one that appears in national accounts. [66] The ONS has quantified the time spent on various productive activities covering caring, transport, nutrition, clothing, household maintenance and laundry and has estimated the monetary value of these services if they were paid for in a market transaction.

The above parallels the remarks of former Taoiseach, John Bruton in giving a Millennium speech in Dáil Éireann in December, 1999:

> If we try to measure social capital we will then be going some way towards devising a language of political discussion that will lead us to the right conclusions. So long as we continue on using the language of GDP, we will be drawn inexorably to the wrong conclusions…The work of volunteers is ignored in calculations of the Gross Domestic Product. The GDP only counts what is paid for in cash. The voluntary unpaid work of a parent caring for a child in the home is not counted in the GDP. Just being there to listen, to encourage - that is not counted in the GDP. The voluntary unpaid work of someone helping St Vincent De Paul is not counted in the GDP. Yet this work is, by any standard, part of the nation's social capital. Social capital is a network of relationships of trust, and of co-operation between people.

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[66] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hhsa/hhsa/About2.html [consulted in June 2004]

11.4 Practical issues for strengthening families

Social support for marriage and family is an extremely important area given the centrality of these for individual SWB. McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003: 11) argue in their study of Irish families that:

> interventions to support families need to be mindful of all of the factors which operate systematically to influence the well-being of its members and their relationships.

McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003) found that social class is strongly related to family status in a way that suggests that economic and social background factors explain the incidence of 'non-traditional' family structures (one parent, divorced, cohabiting) more than the other way round. The income, educational level and occupational status of single parent households is significantly different to those who are married (for example individuals in two-parent families were three times more likely to have higher educational attainment than single or separated parents not cohabiting). If economic and social inequality leads to greater family instability then policies to address these could help the quality of family life and the well-being of children and parents in the long-run.

Following his earlier work (Bellah et al., 1986), Robert Bellah comment]:

> In *Habits of the Heart* my co-authors and I strongly affirmed the value of the family and in both Habits and The Good Society we argued for renewed commitment to marriage and family responsibilities. But to imagine that problems arising from failures rooted in the structure of our society are due primarily to the failings of individuals with inadequate family values is sadly mistaken. It not only increases the level of individual guilt, it distracts attention from larger failures of collective responsibility. *Center for Anglican Learning & Life (CALL) Issue Forum* [http://www.cdsp.edu/freshthinking/sawp_callforum_rbellah.html
> *28 April 2001]*

There are limits to the extent to which societies can respond to the challenge of dysfunctional families and substitution of public care for private/family care of the elderly/children. A return to a society overwhelmingly composed of nuclear families based on lifelong marriage is not possible and would not be desirable as an imposed norm for many. Policy responses are suggested at a local and organisational level to enhance choice and flexibility. However, in addition to changes in working arrangements, ‘hard supports’ in the form of childcare, public transport and regulatory or voluntary-based codes of practice need to be further developed.

In strengthening families to support their own well-being, it is important to respect families’ own systems of values and autonomy. It is possible to help families and vulnerable members therein through a variety of support measures ranging from income support to mediation services to legal protection and family-friendly practices such as working-time flexibility. In the provision of early childhood services or care of the elderly, it may be possible to facilitate greater family involvement in the planning and delivery of these services as well as in locating the point of service as close as possible to those receiving it.

Recognising the reality that families in the future will be smaller and more dispersed with increased pressure on people’s time, it is desirable to help graft new ties onto their existing social networks. Mentoring schemes, volunteer support and mutual help initiatives could help – especially where they are organised locally and involve active initiative by the people most concerned. There are many ways in which social isolation can be addressed through more imaginative and participatory public initiatives.

The issue of caring for children and young people deserves greater prominence in debates about education, early childhood care and working time. Four different agendas overlap:

- Gender equality and women’s access to the labour market;
- The role of men and fathers in caring for children;
- Quality of early childhood experience and development; and
- Quality of life for children and adults.

Each of the above is vital. A response by workers, employers and Government needs to identity issues of choice, opportunity and support with the welfare of children, women and men to the fore. It is surprising that issues around time-use including working time, caring time and other time are not more to the fore in national partnership discussions in Ireland. In the area of gender equality, a policy to promote female participation in the labour market without adequate childcare supports seems lopsided and short-sighted. Turning the clocks back on greater female participation in the labour market would be a retrograde step. Facilitating choice and providing supports so that families can make the best provision – they want – for themselves and their children offers the most promising approach, in my view.

Addressing the obstacles to lack of choice would require a number of initiatives:

- Negotiation of flexible working time at the local and national levels in the context of partnership negotiations;
- Facilitation of greater mobility in and out of the labour market as well as flexibility in terms of working time-time;
- Support, recognition and accreditation for alternating periods of caring, work, training; and
- Gradually changing the culture which assumes that men are 'naturally' the main bread-winners and women are the 'naturally' the main carers.

A culture-shift of the above magnitude would represent a long-term goal. Nancy Folbre (1994: 257-9) discusses two possible approaches to the issue of gender inequality in labour market access:

- overcome the present market and household division of labour by aiming for near equality in male and female labour force participation rates and, at the same time, outsource household labour and caring to paid workers (especially women) from disadvantaged groups; or
- aim for gender equality in labour force participation <u>and</u> family and household responsibilities.

The complex emotional and cognitive needs of children cannot be entirely met in what James Coleman refers to as 'a corporate purposive environment'. Option 1, which is consistent with a culture focussed on high earning and labour market activity, is more easy to achieve than option 2. Writing in a US context, Folbre argues that it suits present class, ethnic and strong nation actors. The difficulty with option 2 is that even if it is rhetorically acceptable to argue for near-complete gender equality in the labour market and the informal household economy, it remains unrealistic in the current climate for reasons of labour market rigidities and entrenched cultural norms. Various longitudinal data analyses indicate that increased total working time in the labour market for women has not been accompanied by a corresponding fall in household working time (Gershuny and Robinson, 1988).

To realise option 2 would require a lowering of male participation rates (both through hours of work as well as actual total participation in the labour market over the lifecycle) and an increase in female participation. Purchased market (or public agency provision) substitution for family labour would play a less important role under this option. This scenario would be harder to achieve and would represent a short-term loss for some groups (particularly men). However, in the longer-term Folbre argues that it would benefit families, children and society through a more harmonious and balanced integration of market and unpaid caring activities.

What would be more realistic is to aim for equality of opportunity and choice rather than strict equality of outcomes in terms of labour market participation. This would go some of the way toward locating responsibility on an equitable basis for family caring with men as well as women. Given the prevailing norms and expectations of gender roles, it is likely that women will continue to spend less time in the labour force over a lifetime than men – especially when their children are young. Nevertheless, greater support for parental leave for father and mothers together with more flexible working arrangements would help. But, if mothers and fathers of young children chose (or have to) work full-time in the labour market, then society is confronted with the question of who pays for, and supports, high quality childcare and education. We cannot have it every way. Someone has to pay – individual purchasers of childcare or taxpayers – and investing in children costs time, money and effort.

11.5 Concluding remarks

One of the biggest challenges to a 'well-being' agenda is that society may under-invest in its own social capital. This may hold at all levels including families where, due to pressures of time, marketisation of care and greater mobility and reliance on outside sources of employment and income support, there is less incentive to invest in children. However, the case of family under-investment is unproven in the absence of comparable historical data analysis in specific cultural contexts. Children may spend more time watching TV in their bedrooms and have less sustained relationship with their elders or extended family. However, the quality of care, attention and responsibility has changed and may very well be higher than it was in the past when parenting styles were more authoritarian and family dysfunctionality and abuse were covered up.

Love and care, especially in the early years of life, supports personal growth. Although inter-personal love and care are observed at the individual level the role of public policy and community also deserve attention. We need to understand this interaction. In some cases, close social ties can substitute for weaker, or market-based ones as when, for example, a parent or offspring chooses to forgo paid employment to care for a child or elderly parent. But, disconnection with the paid labour market, in these circumstances may lower social contact with others outside one's immediate family, circle of friends or neighbourhood. There are real tradeoffs and choices confronting adults and children as well as societies.

Markets (purchasing in care), State (welfare) and civil society (care in the community) can provide partial responses to the decline in family cohesion. Some degree of substitution – but not replacement – of formal organisation for voluntary and spontaneous social organisation such as in the family needs to be found. However, the scope is limited. The question remains – how do we strengthen and re-norm families without returning to an unequal model in which choice and opportunity were denied or discouraged?

Civil society organisations including faith-based movements and Churches can provide important reference points for belonging and norm-formation. However, these are typically particular to certain groups and can divide as much as unite people of different ethnic and social class backgrounds. Moreover, some Churches are, themselves, among the principal bulwarks of patriarchy in society.

A key problem identified in this chapter has been the mismatch between rhetoric and practice; between gender equality in the labour market and gender equality in the home and family. More rights in the labour market have been accorded to women without a corresponding increase in obligations and responsibilities on the part of men – particularly in the areas of educating and caring of children. The work of nurturing, caring and educating children still falls disproportionately on women both in the family and in the market place.

Hence, we need to find ways of strengthening families in a way that spans generations and gives incentive for parents to sacrifice their own individual or short-term interests for the long-term well-being of their own children. The study by McKeown, Pratschke and Haase (2003) found that the extent of social support outside families and the capacity of parents to resolve conflict and relate well to others was found to be strongly related to family well-being (both of parents and children). Policies which enhance networks of support – whether through informal channels or through more formal public agency provision and mediation could be very effective. Finally, programmes and policies to help improve parenting skills and inter-personal relationships are needed.

Chapter 12

Fostering Learning Organisations

'*Working for an organization that is intent on creating knowledge is a wonderful motivator, not because the organization will be more profitable, but because our lives will feel more worthwhile'* (Margaret Wheatley,1997 and cited in Capra, 2002: 101)

12.1 Introduction

Organisations can contribute, intentionally or otherwise, to well-being. For the purposes of discussion in this chapter, organisations refer to all purposive market or non-market institutions other than families. They comprise such entities as commercial enterprises, Government ministries, various public agencies and service institutions such as hospitals and schools, churches, voluntary and community organisations and professional, business or trade union organisations. Since very few people escape membership of, or active engagement in, one or more such organisations it is useful to inquire how these institutions contribute to human well-being – of those who are members of these organisations and those who are not. There are very significant differences in the mission, purpose and mode of operation across all of these types of institutions. At the same time, there are important commonalities in organisational culture that will be explored in this chapter.

Although I have drawn mainly on a few authors in this chapter – Capra, Cohen, Prusak and Polanyi – the key points of the chapter, especially those in section 12.4, also reflect my own personal experience of working and contributing to a number of different types of organisations over a long period of time. All organisations – whether commercial, public or voluntary are, unavoidably, caught between two poles:

- To achieve some specific goal such as make profit, manage some area of public administration, propagate religious faith, provide charitable assistance, etc.; and

- To provide a context in which individuals and networks interact, support each other and seek meaning in personal and team level effort.

To get going and to survive, organisations have to meet the first goal. However, to flourish they need to foster the second goal as well. Kogut and Zander (1996: 503) understand the commercial firm as:

> a social community specializing in the speed and efficiency in the creation and transfer of knowledge.

This understanding may be generalised to all organisations including non-market based ones engaged in providing a service of some sort. Hence, the production, dissemination and application of knowledge is the core business of all organisations where knowledge is understood, broadly, to refer to cultural values and belonging. A hospital, for example, is a place where crucial knowledge is embodied in the practices of medical professionals, other staff and those whom they serve. Releasing knowledge is key to the well-being of an organisation's stakeholders. However, communicating such knowledge involves different methods of knowledge flow.

A distinction according to explicit and implicit knowing is useful in this context (Polanyi, 1974) and will be further explored in the next section. From there I characterise organisations according to whether their sharing of knowledge is undertaken as in a 'learning organisation' or a 'bureaucratic organisation' (section 12.3). Understanding this distinction and polarity, which characterises most organisations I have been familiar with over 30 years, provides an important introduction to how organisations can be turned around, changed and modified – the subject of section 12.4. The relevance to well-being is captured in what Fritjof Capra (2002: 101) wrote:

> In an organisation that is alive, knowledge creation is natural and sharing what we have learned with friends and colleagues is humanly satisfying.

12.2 Tacit and explicit knowledge

As discussed in chapter 6, knowing is interpreted to include not only 'know-what' (prepositional or factual knowledge) but also 'know-how' (procedure and skills) and 'know-why'. Much knowing is tacit in nature. It is typically embodied in individual or collective behaviour and knowing. Explicit knowledge can be more easily extracted, described, measured and transferred. Although explicit knowledge can be complicated, it can be broken down and dissected. Tacit knowledge, by contrast, is complex. Bearers of specific tacit knowledge know more than they can tell (regardless of whether they wish to tell) and they can tell more than they can write. Tacit knowledge is not contained in CD-ROMS, libraries or Management Information Systems (MIS), nor is it easily described except, perhaps, through the telling of stories.

Tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge only with great difficulty. By definition, it cannot be taught: it is learned 'on-the-job' through conversation and practice. Hence, attempts at codifying, measuring or 'transferring' tacit knowledge are doomed to failure. When an individual changes company, community or society some tacit knowledge is lost, not only to the organisation losing that individual, but to the new organisation where she or he works because it was specific to another organisational experience.

Nahapiet and Ghosal (1998) classify knowledge (or what they refer to as intellectual capital) according to tacit-explicit and individual-shared polarities (Table 12.1). Their distinction by individual and shared (organisational) mirrors the distinction between human and social capital discussed in Part A. Individual explicit knowledge is exemplified by conscious knowledge relating to facts, concepts and frameworks – the material for success in school or college examinations, whether written or oral. Individual knowledge embodied in practice and experience is more tacit than explicit. Organisational knowing and practice is more than the sum of individual knowing within an organisation. A pattern of organisational culture and knowing emerges from its structure of relationships.

Table 12.1

Differentiation and Classification of Knowledge Resources in Organisations

	Individual (≈ human capital)	Shared (≈ social capital)
Implicit/tacit (not easily transferable)	Automatic/complex/abstract	Organisational culture and communities of practice
Explicit (codifiable and transferable)	Conscious knowledge	Objectified knowledge (e.g. textbooks, manuals, published articles)

12.3 Learning organisations and bureaucratic organisations

The role of tacit knowledge and organisational culture seems critical to 'the new economy' characterised by new patterns of organisation, technology and productivity performance (Lesser, 2000). In the pressure to compete and search out new ideas and new talent, networks based on trust and sharing of information assume a new competitive advantage. However, they can also provide another outcome – members of organisations can experience higher levels of subjective well-being as they feel more responsible and trusted in learning organisations.

Learning organisations are characterised by a joint and continuous effort by people in an organisation to learn; to share what is learned; and to apply it in pursuit of goals that matter to them. Authority and management structures in these organisations are more participatory and norms of co-operation are more internalised than imposed. By contrast, bureaucratic organisations rely on formal control mechanisms to achieve their aims. Tacit knowledge plays a stronger role in learning organisations and receives greater credit through its style of knowledge management.

Learning organisations learn through a dynamic and interactive feedback within social networks (Senge, 1992). Etienne Wenger has used the term 'communities of practice' to characterise organisations based on a mutual interaction among its members and a set of shared norms, rules and 'knowledge'.

The learning organisation relies on knowledge-rich 'communities of practice' in which vital conversations and flows of knowledge take place. 'The shared practice creates flexible boundaries of meaning that are often unspoken' (Capra 2002: 96). Such an organisation knows how to recognise, validate and integrate informal social networks into its overall structures.

In this type of organisation, individuals are more likely to give of their best: they feel empowered and supported in striving to achieve meaningful goals since there is correspondence between personal goals and organisational goals. Values of innovation, inquiry and creativity prevail over conservatism, unquestioning obedience and submission. The learning organisation learns because it knows how to pool and join up all that it knows which is more than the sum of individuals' knowledge. At the same time, it is open to ideas from the outside world. The individual does not feel himself or herself to be sacrificed on the altar of organisational efficiency, expediency or internal politics.

The concept of the learning organisation has a close ally in McGregor's management Theory Y (McGregor, 1967). Theory X and Theory Y are presented as contrasting polar assumptions used by managers in how they run organisations. Under Theory Y it is assumed that workers will give of their best when they are responsible, active and committed. Personal values and organisational goals are in correspondence. He believed that managerial assumptions cause employee behaviour and managers will receive from their employees no more than what they expect. Under *Theory X*, the assumption is that individuals cannot be trusted. Hence, many controls, checks and sanctions are needed.

The motivational base of organisational performance is vital. It takes a long time to build and can be quickly destroyed through lack of attention to what motivates people. Deming (2000) suggests that arrangements in the workplace which emphasise intrinsic values of trust, self-esteem and autonomy contribute to more effective organisational performance than arrangements based primarily on control, monitoring and financial incentives. The 'motivational base' of an organisation risks corruption by excessive reliance on extrinsic rewards coupled with excessive regulation and control. Self-interested, self-calculating and reactive behaviour is rewarded and fed by such approaches. Some strategic action by another agent undermines well-being and choice or freedom can lead rapidly to a downward spiral of distrust, a sense of disempowerment and a loss of respect.

Learning organisations, like the long-lived organisations examined by De Geus, ‘tolerated activities in the margin: experiments and eccentricities that stretch their understanding’ (De Geus, 1997). Effective leadership knows how to manage uncertainty, doubt and confusion within themselves as well as others in the organisation through open dialogue and participation. The notion of wholeness through ‘tensions of difference’ is central to a reflexive and learning organisation. Applied to religious organisations and Churches, for example, the concept and practice of ‘learning organisations’ challenges notions that such organisations possess the full and absolute certain Truth. Hence, the notion of the exclusively ‘teaching Church’ encapsulated in the expression – ‘magisterium’ – does not fit comfortably with the notion of ‘learning Church’ encapsulated in the expression ‘sensus fideli’. The learning (and teaching) Church knows how to listen, not only to its own adherents, but to the wisdom and insights of other religions and none while remaining true to its own shared faith.

Bureaucratic organisations tend to leave little space for experimentation, questioning or reflection. Yet these are essential hallmarks of being human and being creative. Also, in the realm of commercial enterprises, freedom and innovation and inquiry are key competitive factors in ‘new economy’ firms based on market niches and the efficient transfer and application of new knowledge. The assumed model underlying bureaucratic organisations is one of hierarchical and linear dependence – a machine model based on an assembly of discrete parts. Authority, and with it information, flows primarily in one direction – downwards through a chain of control and command in which each member has an assigned and separate function. Understandably, uncertainty about the outcomes of any process of change constitutes a point of discomfort and stress for many with a strong intellectual and emotional stake in the status quo.

However, many organisations try to provide a service or deliver some product in environments characterised by complex and self-organised social organisms. There can be a fundamental mismatch between the stated aim of the organisation and its *modus operandi*. The import of the machine and living organism metaphors is that machines need to be controlled, owned and directed, whereas, a living system can only be disturbed. Capra (2002: 98) states that 'meaningful disturbances will get the organisation's attention and will trigger structural changes'. However, people are more likely to choose to be disturbed if these disturbances are meaningful to them. A point of instability is reached when a new paradigm, idea or information challenges the structures, behaviours and beliefs of the system as a whole. At this point the system can, in the words of Capra, either 'break down' or 'break through'.

The difference between learning and bureaucratic organisations is summarised in Table 12.1. The details have been adapted from an article by Paul Maarsdorp in which he applies the notion of learning organisation very broadly to refer to faith-based organisations or Churches and not just commercial or public administrative organisations.

Table 12.2[67]

The Difference between Learning Organisations and Bureaucratic Organisations

Learning Organisations	**Bureaucratic Organisations**
Encourage personal mastery - continuous, self-driven personal development	Encourages personal adaptation to a given state of affairs, an inherited way of doing things
Ongoing, continuous development of a shared vision of the group's purpose	The Organisation's mission/goals/activities/job specifications are a given, the norm against which everything else is to be evaluated
Self-discipline oriented to standards mutually agreed with the boss	Direction and discipline is provided top-down by the boss
Decisions reached by win-win consensus in work groups	Decisions imposed from above or, at best, derived from pseudo-consultative process
Dedication to constantly challenge prevailing personal and corporate constructs	A norm by which constructs from the past are given reverence regardless of their appropriateness
Adherence to a "fifth discipline" - systems thinking which affirms the inter-relatedness of everything	Fragmented thinking which partitions the administrative from the professional, technical from policy, economic from the social, empirical from the qualitative, and 'doing' from 'thinking'.

[67] refer to http://homepages.which.net/~radical.faith/notes/stebbing.htm [consulted July 2004].

High-trust organisations based on shared norms of co-operation and empowerment tend to breed confidence and initiative so that individuals and small teams take responsibility to pursue their projects within agreed frameworks. People are likely to be happier and more prepared to contribute if they feel part of a community, seriously listened to and empowered to make decisions within agreed frameworks (Senge 1992). In summary, appreciation, respect and higher subjective well-being are more likely to be found in learning organisations than in bureaucratic ones.

12.4 Practical issues for moving towards learning organisations

Fritjof Capra (2002: 86) has observed:

> In recent surveys, CEOs reported again and again that their efforts at organisational change did not yield the promised results. Instead of managing new organisations, they ended up managing the unwanted side effects of their efforts.

Leaders of organisations are challenged to bridge a gap between the stated goal or mission of the organisation and the pervasive and complex reality of power and inter-personal relationships at its heart. Given the dual purpose of organisations, as stated above, to aim at a specific goal and, at the same time, to provide a context of meaning, belonging and, ultimately, well-being, there is an inevitable and creative tension between its designed structure and its emergent properties. Managing this tension is the 'stuff' of leadership. Nurturing creativity, innovation and flexibility in emergent structures calls for qualities of considerable communication, courage and vision. The designed structures continue to be necessary to provide a supportive environment for appropriate order and facilitation of valuable emergent properties.

Are organisations and the people in them open to change in a way that facilitates well-being? The answer is probably yes provided that change is owned by the entire organisation and it arises from meaningful and respectful conversations based on some shared norms. A genuine focus on personal well-being as opposed to an instrumental approach could reap huge benefits in organisations. For commercial or public enterprises, issues around team-working, empowerment, job design and management style have a profound impact on well-being.

The following ten points provide a way forward. They are re-cast from many sources and most of which are discussed in greater length by Cohen and Prusak (2001):

- *Do no harm* and delegate authority down as much as possible and thus build loyalty, commitment and mutual respect through compassionate leadership, integrity, fairness, honesty and good example. Workers look out for organisational signals which suggest that trustworthy behaviour is rewarded or not. Essentially, the good manager is there to facilitate social capital so that everyone can do the job as part of a team. Workers can become more engaged and responsible members of a community or organisation rather than just employees 'going through the motions'. Decisions must be fair and seen to be fair.

- *It's great to feel trusted* - 'If you suspect a man, don't employ him, and if you employ him, don't suspect him' (Chinese proverb)[68] – you get what you expect from employees. Distrust them by following McGregor's theory X and they will act distrustfully. Trust them and you may very well bring out the best. Reward trust and trustworthy behaviour by appropriate credits and incentives.

- *Stop trying to control knowledge* - within the appropriate parameters of market or public confidentiality de-regulate knowledge management by operating open and pro-active communication and dialogue. Since knowledge is not the monopoly of anyone and does not necessarily follow the grain of hierarchical power, de-regulating knowledge means including people in decision-making in a genuinely

[68] http://chineseculture.about.com/library/literature/blsproverb-hi.htm)

co-operative and shared endeavour. This is not to be confused with mere reliance on formalised corporate partnership structures where various lobby representatives exert influence.

- *Provide space and time for social capital* – isolated individuals in virtual company and programmed to work alone need space and time to engage in 'face-to-face' conversation – coffee breaks and inter-divisional 7-aside soccer teams pay high organisational rates of return!

- *Encourage narratives* – most organisations probably fail to tap the most vital tacit knowledge resource it has by failing to convert individual and collective experiences into stories that can be told to communicate deep rooted values and experiential learning of the community.[69] Many private sector organisations and knowledge management 'think-tanks' in the World Bank and other organisations are realising the potential of stories and conversations as practical tools for sharing knowledge and building trust. Cohen and Prusak (2001: 114) comment: 'stories, we believe, are an essential social capital tool, preserving and transmitting the basic belief and nuances of culture'

- *Small is beautiful* – smaller groups and localised activities which reduce perceived distance between decision-making and impact can sustain bounded trust within teams which know each other.

- *Not on work alone* - recognise that the community of a firm or public organisation overlaps with other communities including families and local-based communities. Community members who feel the incentive and have the opportunity to balance their time investment in all of the communities that matter to them and to wider society add more to societal well-being including that of their colleagues and themselves. Unbalanced lives cost socially, organisationally and personally. Corporate responsibility for the health of communities means that firms and workplaces cannot 'own' their employees and do not need additional personal dysfunctionality.

- *Harness longevity, stability and loyalty* - new trends in the labour market have tended to shorten tenure, increase volatility and uncertainty and have frequently lowered trust and in-company loyalty. The key argument is that trust and commitment take time to build. However, mergers, downsizing and globalisation are a fact of life. New contracts and understandings may be possible to foster better relationships and more meaningful belonging. These can be used to define expectations, values and personal obligations.

- *Virtuality is not real community* - Use new information and communication technologies wisely to network individuals and groups but don't assume that virtuality is the answer to community building. Frequently, new means of communication can strengthen non-communication. Face-to-face meetings and conversations involving non-verbal cues and interaction in real space are still needed to generate mutual trust. Individuals can be neither 'here nor there' due to the distraction of email. As Cohen and Prusak remark: 'The telecommuter knows less about what goes on, who is doing the work, and how it is being done' (Cohen and Prusak, 2001: 170)

- *Re-set the mindset* - enlarge from a pre-occupation on *individuals, process and technology*[70] in conventional management and organisational thinking to a wider focus which includes *teams, values*

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[69] The words communicate and community share the same root word in Latin.

[70] Otherwise referred to by Cohen and Prusak as 'fools, rules and tools.'

and culture. Real competitive advantage and better quality public service depend much more on inter-dependence, knowledge and values than new technology or organisational re-structuring. Formal mission statements and SMARTT objectives are important symbols.[71] However, culture is revealed in how we put these into practice. People in organisations need to 'walk the talk' to create more social capital and enhance well-being - where they work and live.

12.5 Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have contrasted two types of organisations – learning and bureaucratic – that have relevance to well-being. Relationships within learning organisations tend to be non-hierarchical and focused on intrinsic motivation rather than instruction or control. The propagation of tacit knowledge embodied in cultural practice is vital for the success of learning in organisations. Discovering and releasing intrinsic motivation is, therefore, a key challenge for organisational leadership. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y provide a useful typology of organisational culture and management style.

To move towards a learning organisation model, an organisation needs to be

- willing to be disturbed;
- open to new ideas and innovations; and
- accommodating of conversations in multiple feedback loops.

I would add a fourth requirement – the organisation needs wise and sound leadership at different levels. Effective leadership is based on qualities of vision, integrity, human compassion and a set of broad capabilities to facilitate change. However, leadership can of two kinds: leading from ahead towards a vision or goal of the leader; and leadership which facilitates the emergence of novelty not

[71] **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**greed, **R**ealistic, **T**ough and **T**ime-bound objectives.

through directing change but through empowering others to bring it about. Fritjof Capra argues that both kinds of leadership are necessary but leadership complemented with outside facilitation is a powerful combination.

A few year's ago, I found the following anonymous poem on the internet within a composite of responses to the question 'Why a learning organization?[72]

As I see it,
through the glass dimly (if not darkly),
we learn with the aim to live
more fully,
to become,
simply to contribute--
whether personally, communally, or
"organizationally"--
more for the world.

We learn
to live more fully
simply to contribute
more for the world.

We learn better
in communion
I think generally
than we do alone--
communion with the
whole world
and beyond the world
that we can see and touch and know
personally.

In learning in communion
WE have the simple hope
perhaps the real promise
of doing more

[72] The poem can be found at http://www.learning-org.com/WhyLO.html. See also http://www.learning-org.com Reproduced with permission of Richard Karash.

for the world
by being
more in communion
with the world,
and more.

And speaking personally,
as I see it,
that's why.

Chapter 13

Influencing Government Actions

'For in everything, it is no easy task to find the middle'
(Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, 9)

13.1 Introduction

What can Governments do to enhance human well-being? Should Government's role be primarily to allow individuals the maximum freedom and autonomy to pursue their own well-being? Or, should Governments intervene to provide support for direct investments in well-being – especially where private endeavour or market signals are sub-optimal? My claim is that an important way to increase well-being is through direct, or indirect, supports for social capital <u>and</u> social equality of opportunity. Measures to support and draw on an inclusive and active citizenship can enhance the quality of subjective well-being. Hence, contrary to a view frequently expressed, in Ireland and elsewhere[73], the promotion, use and prioritisation of the concept of 'social capital' does not necessarily deflect from a focus on equality and social justice.

The review of literature in Part A and the findings of one empirical study in Part B points to the role of effective social relations at a personal level. However, there is a place for public policy and community action to provide social support that might be lacking in the absence of such initiative. Hence, what Governments do and the way public authorities behave has profound implications for public well-being (Donovan and Halpern 2002: 34).

[73] A view that social capital deflects from a focus on social inclusion was articulated at various meetings and fora on the topic of social capital, including the March 2001 conference convened by the then Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs as well as the NESF Plenary meeting in September 2002.

A rationale for stronger intervention by Government to address social problems is frequently made on the assumption of there being widespread 'market failure' in the supply of social goods and services. However, 'failure' in any type of human institution is a problematic term. It may be used to infer that markets (for example) fail to provide enough of some socially desired good or may lead to the wrong results in the absence of some other institution. Alternatively, markets may be said to fail because some other actor or agency prevents them from providing a socially desirable outcome.

All types of institutions, including families, markets and Governments, can fail to varying degrees and in different ways. It seems more appropriate to ask how synergies among these institutions can be used to succeed in raising the well-being of the greatest number of people. Like markets, the State can fail – to produce and sustain the norms and social ties that give rise to well-being. And, communities may not always represent the solution to the supposed failures of markets and States. They may even be part of the problem by reason of parochialism or exclusionary traditionalism.

Three themes dominate this chapter: liberty, equality and social solidarity. In the next section, I explore the nature of public policy as applied to what Government does. I will argue that the traditional 'civic republican' ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity sit well within a policy to promote well-being. In recognising the dignity and uniqueness of each person and community, Governments help others to achieve their own well-being. Following a consideration of autonomy-compatible public policy in section 13.3, I consider, in section 13.4, the contribution of Government to the achievement of justice, equality and fairness as key building blocks in realising well-being. Finally, Governments' contribution to social solidarity through development of social capital – already identified as an important determinant of well-being – is discussed in section 13.5. Examples of specific areas of policy and programme-application are provided.

13.2 The nature of a new public policy

Some clarification of the term 'public policy' is appropriate – since it may be equated with *government* policy. I understand public policy as:

> a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by key social stakeholders including public, private and civil society interests.

It is useful to separate out what Governments do, how they do it and how various 'layers' of civil society and government interact in practice. By seeking to implement policies and programmes to address particular social and economic problems we may be at risk of missing on the crucial linkage between what Michael Woolcock (2002) refers to as:

- *Practices* (deeply cultural, embedded, local, idiosyncratic, customary, defying easy measurement, control or standardisation);
- *Programmes* (formal, standardised, uniform, risk-averse, universal and 'delivered'); and
- *Policies* (broad principles covering such areas as legislation, interest rates, school size, class size, welfare-to-work etc. etc.).

In the area of Government action, policies are typically devised by relatively few people - Ministers, their advisors, senior civil servants and others – possibly in consultation with a much wider audience such as under the formal arrangements for social partnership in Ireland. Parliament and the legislature also shape the evolution of policy to the extent that they set the legal and normative framework in which policy actions are decided. An example of a policy decision in the domain of the labour market is the decision to set a minimum national wage.

By contrast, programmes of service delivery are provided on a relatively standardised basis throughout a jurisdiction by a relatively large number of public officials. They answer to a general need such as curriculum delivery or social welfare support for the elderly. Policies and programmes form the basis of what Governments 'do'. 'Policy-relevant' research is deemed useful to the extent that it can help Governments to devise policies and programmes that are more effective in meeting societal needs. However, there is a further area in which Governments act – the particular and local culture in which a large number of 'practitioners' relate to each other.

The habits and practices of Government, markets, civil society and families mediate what Governments and others 'do'. Hence, a policy or programme to address loneliness among the elderly in rural areas, for example, may not take into account the pervasive reality of cultural practice in the particular rural communities served by such programmes. Blockages to effective policy impact may occur at the local or intermediate levels where relationships, attitudes and behaviour are critical to success. Just as the importance of global networks and markets grow, the role of local interdependence becomes even more critical.

Policy paradigms confined, exclusively or mainly, to States and Markets may omit the critical role of other agencies such as families and various informal social networks. A 'new public policy' agenda is one that seeks to shift the focus away from:

- Just one actor (Government as benefactor and sole decision-maker) to many actors in which no one actor has the upper hand; and

- Formal provisions and standardised programmes to place- and people-specific solutions.

In policy-bureaucratic models, the key criterion is the use of scarce public resources in meeting the multiple needs of individuals and groups. Power rests exclusively with the public agency giving help, whether those in need are defined as 'clients', 'customers' or simply members of the public. It is vested in organisations and hierarchies with a remit to administer services and goods to the public where the market fails or under-provides relative to some social optimum. Control over scarce resources and the administration of these resources is an over-riding concern for those in positions of authority. Along with control, legitimacy of functions is jealously guarded by administrators. A policy-bureaucratic style of Government 'knows what is best' and works analogously to McGregor's Theory X management of organisations described in the previous chapter.

The emphasis in government action has, traditionally, been on uniformity or services, universality of access and centralised control over allocation of resources allied to enforced accountability of those in receipt of State support. However, given the complex nature of the environment in which Government policies and actions are developed, a 'one-size-fits-all' model of service delivery is increasingly questioned. At the same time, the role of the State (whether at local, national or supra-national level) as sole arbitrator of decisions involving diverse communities and individuals is open to question.

Such a model for government action may undermine the motivational base for actors other than Government as well as fail to make effective use of the resources of other actors in decision-making and provision. Policy-bureaucratic models are associated, not infrequently with the One-Best-Way approach to the promotion of community development, public health or lifelong learning. In such a model, there is a search for empirical evidence to justify 'best practice' based on a discovery of a statistical relationship assumed to be causative and assumed to be generalisable to all situations and contexts.

A policy-bureaucratic model of government action was well described by Wilhelm von Humboldt, (1969: 25), founder of the University of Berlin, when he wrote in 1791:

> The cultivation of the understanding, as of any man's other faculties, is generally achieved by his own activity, his own ingenuity, or his own methods of using the discoveries of others. Now, State measures always imply more or less compulsion; and even where this is not directly the case, they accustom men to look for instruction, guidance, and assistance from without, rather than to reply upon their own expedients.

In today's world, hierarchical, rigid and compartmental structures of public governance are ill-suited to the necessary task of reforming the public service system and helping it to relate more effectively to a renewed civil society. An emerging policy design which reflects the realities of complexity, inter-relatedness and localism is one which gives primacy to 'self-organising networks of relatively autonomous players' (Stewart-Weeks, 2000).

A number of important design principles would be useful to consider in developing a new policy agenda – one which I refer to as *policy-plurocratic.* These could be summarised as:

- Cultivating mutual help and self help;
- A movement away from identifying 'needs' only to identifying unique community 'capabilities';
- Promoting trust through equality and respect for rights;
- Letting go of excessive and over-detailed control (empowering and trusting communities to be responsible);
- Valuing, rewarding and recognising voluntary effort and achievement.

In a policy-plurocratic world, the State moves to being supportive and enabling more than controlling. In any society, distance from power, lack of meaningful consultation, absence of deliberative mechanisms and a general sense of not being included in key decisions tend to generate a lack of trust and engagement. Hence, 'letting go' and empowering emerge as crucial areas for policy examination.

At the same time, recipients of support-funding need to be accountable. One way of enhancing accountability is to build in more effective delegation and reporting relationships based on open dialogue and trust. Accountability based on sustained dialogue, trust and subsidiarity is more effective than accountability based exclusively on a command and control model of governance. It is still possible to incorporate issues around accountability, transparency and equality by ensuring that any 'letting go' or delegation downwards is based on partnership and trust. This may not always work in the sense that some local public agencies, communities or groups may abuse their position or misuse their authority and resources against the wider public interest. However, it is worth taking the risk of letting go so that, in the long-run, a relationship based on trust and co-operation is established. A system of accountability within a devolved decision-making process requires time and openness to risk.

As suggested in the last chapter, an important area of policy leverage lies in the way public organisations organise themselves. Government agencies can improve their own use of social capital internally and externally. For example, internally, they can focus on factors such as: the distribution and use of internal human capital/knowledge within the organisation, the lay-out and design of space in offices and building, and organisational culture. Externally, agencies can develop social capital through links to: other public agencies, social partners, various communities of knowledge, and other specific communities. Hence, 'social capital' is also about how public organisations operate within and among themselves. Giving space and time for dialogue and communication of norms and information is important.

13.3 Liberty: helping people to help themselves

Empowerment and facilitation constitute the first general principle of an effective policy design that favours well-being. Policy interventions need to go with the grain of human nature and community in all their complexity, richness and ambiguity. As suggested in the previous section, the policy-bureaucratic style of public governance entails knowing best what people need to do and telling them to do it with built-in control sticks and carrots. A top-down and standardised approach to public service planning and delivery is the hallmark of this model.

The policy-plurocratic model, by contrast, starts from the notion that social systems are interactive and inter-dependent. To work more effectively, such systems need to build on motivations that go well beyond the linear 'command and control' models underlying much of public service management up to now. They are autonomy-compatible in so far as they place the 'helped' (client or citizen) in the role of joint decision-maker with the 'helper' (public agency or regulator). However, the 'helped' is allowed to become increasingly self-reliant – and responsible. She needs 'to do it for herself'. The principle of *Subsidiarity* implies a delegation downward of authority and responsibility to the lowest level of decision-making possible, and to the highest level necessary - local, regional, national and international.

In the context of official aid to developing countries, Ellerman (2001) proposes an 'indirect assistance' approach based on the cultivation of self-reliance on the part of the 'helped'. Using such an approach, the aim is to change the relationship between resources (income, time, social ties) and the decision or choice of those who are helped. However, the underlying preference function and sets of predispositions, values and cultural norms remain intact. In other words, 'indirect assistance' approaches are compatible with the unique culture and values of those who are assisted. Moreover, they respect the freedom, intrinsic motivation and unique capability of each community to decide on its own goals and strategies to attain its own cherished ends. More generally, an effective policy in support of countering exclusion and poverty might place more emphasis on individual and community freedom, choice and capability in aiming for those goals compatible with individual and community own values and preferences.

However, any policy design that is autonomy-compatible needs to differentiate among communities with different levels of access to social knowledge and power over relevant resources. Even where communities are successful in developing their own resources, there may be a lack of contact with wider networks. Some form of partnership and external intervention is, therefore, necessary to meet these needs. However, it needs to 'go with the grain' of the communities which remain essentially free to determine their own ends and identify their own solutions.

Policy models that reward, perhaps unintentionally, particular behaviours and responses based on continuing reliance on external help are less effective than models which give incentive to individuals and communities to 'help themselves'. For this reason, funding and support aimed at facilitating change and enhancing choice work best. Essentially, the principal agent or 'helper' cannot supply the motivation and rationale of the agent or 'doer'. A plurocratic public-policy is directed more towards well-being *freedom* than well-being *achievement*.

A question worth raising here concerns the extent to which policy development in Ireland – especially that focussed on community development and social exclusion – relies on a top-down approach to setting limits to what communities can do. The relationship between central government and local government has never been an easy one in Ireland – dating back to the early decades of the twentieth century. The relationship between various public agencies (local and national) and local communities, partnerships and voluntary groups is also fraught.

A greater reliance on external funding with all of its concomitant requirements for grant-applying, reporting and monitoring can reinforce reliance on the centre or external more than communities' own unique resources. Also, a focus on what communities (and individuals) 'need' (usually defined by external experts) is implied in many of the public supports for community development and social inclusion. With the best will, supporting public agencies may miss the essential gold of unique local community energies and synergies – partly because these are more difficult to measure and partly because a culture of control and accountability has stifled local initiative and 'letting go'.

A principle of subsidiarity and cultivation of mutual self-help is succinctly captured in the report of Clifford Shaw regarding the *Chicago Area Project* to counter youth delinquency in 1944 (quoted by Carl Rogers, 1976: 59):

> Attempts to produce these changes for the community by means of ready made institutions and programs planned, developed, financed, and managed by persons outside the community are not likely to meet with any more success in the future than they have in the past. This procedure is psychologically unsound because it places the residents of the community in an inferior position and implies serious reservations with regard to their capacities and interest in their own welfare. What is equally important is that it neglects the greatest of all assets in any community, namely the talents, energies and other human resources of the people themselves … What is necessary, we believe, is the organization and encouragement of social self-help on a cooperative basis.

To sum up this section, any public support for social capital needs, therefore, to respect the principle of empowerment and facilitation. Too much control, social engineering or provision of external incentives could negate the very principle of an active civil society which is based on voluntary effort and support motivated by a collective desire and endeavour for the common good. We need to relax into some level of uncertainty without seeking to over-control the direction of change or foresee the outcome. Letting go is one of the hardest, and yet urgent, challenges facing public policy in Ireland. The other is building trust through fairness – which brings me to the next theme of this chapter.

13.4 Equality: taking fairness seriously

Perhaps the greatest contribution that Government and the social partners can make to investment in social capital is through actions that encourage social inclusion, fairness, transparency and equality of opportunity. Social equality, in general, is an ambiguous term. It can be used to argue for 'equality of outcomes' (e.g. an equal rate of participation in the labour force by men and women) or it can be used to argue for 'equality of opportunity' where people have the same chance to success. But, how is equality of opportunity understood or achieved if it is a worthwhile goal? Random differences in ability and life opportunity are inevitable. Moreover, the 'tension of difference' and the freedom to compete and innovate are surely valuable assets in any society.

Much has been written about the impact of social policy on social equality. Some doubt, justifiably, the hypothesis that a rising (economic) tide will raise all boats. Others see absolute poverty and deprivation as much more significant than statistical measures of relative income inequality. It is more helpful to focus on the extent to which individuals and groups sense their own exclusion and disempowerment in terms of decision-making, access to goods and treatment with respect by others – more powerful than them. This goes to the heart of equity and justice in a way that any limited approach based on measures of income and wealth, alone, cannot. Yet, access to economic income and wealth are important – especially if people lack the basics to 'live a good life' as they would wish. Our notion of 'wealth' needs to be expanded to include concepts of empowerment, respect and social obligation. These are partly subjective in nature. However, they challenge us to re-think our notions of poverty without neglecting the enduring importance of basic (and measurable) economic-good needs.

In addition to income access, access to information and effective partnership in decision-making are important policy strategies for overcoming lack of equality. Listening to, and engaging with communities, lowers the perceived distance with decision-making as well as the costs associated with transaction and conflict (NESF, 1995). In the context of recent public scandals, transparency and accountability are important for rebuilding civic trust and reengaging citizens. Closing the gap between the language of public policy and the needs and everyday language of people in communities is one way of building trust and voluntary engagement.

Treating people with respect – especially those with different values and identities – is a key element of a just public policy. The NESF *Strategic Policy Framework for Equality Issues* referred to the role of respect and recognition as dimensions of socio-cultural inequality. It stated (NESF, 2002: 23) that:

> relations of solidarity, care and love give people a basic sense of importance, value and belonging, a sense of being appreciated, cared for and wanted.

The NESF (2002: 24) has also discussed the negotiation of diversity –

> where the practical implications of identity and diversity are named and negotiated into policy, practice and provision.

What it describes as ‘the unequal distribution in relationships of love, care and solidarity with others’ can have a powerful impact on participation by individuals and groups in society. The transparency, accountability and respect that authorities – political, civil, religious – demonstrate in their internal and external relationships has an important impact on trust as well as the capacity of individuals and groups to play a more active and effective role in society.

13.5 Solidarity: developing social capital[74]

The evidence reviewed in Part B has indicated a potentially strong positive role for social capital in the attainment of well-being. The contribution of public policy and action to social capital is supportive and facilitating as well as direct. Rather than seeing public policy contributing to social capital in isolation, it is more useful to see social capital as a factor intersecting with policy to promote

[74] This section draws heavily on my earlier writing for the NESF Report on Social Capital (NESF, 2003) and the report of my visit to New Zealand in 2004 (Healy, 2004).

education, health, economic growth, sustainable development etc. Some actions of Government contribute to social capital in a very direct and immediate way. For example, community development programmes that build capacity, encourage participation and foster trust contribute to social capital directly. Other actions such as provision of public education or regulation of trading activity provide a facilitating environment for the use of social capital. Still further, the very existence of public authorities and their operation in providing various 'public goods', maintaining order, protecting the weak, re-distributing wealth, regulating corporate behaviour, etc., can help protect trust, civic participation and social co-operation.

Just as important as identifying specific policies to promote social capital – built on an inventory of existing public policies and identification of missing gaps – is to examine the ways in which the design of public policies contributes to social capital, or not. 'To do no harm' is frequently given as a first counsel to Governments. Certainly, Governments and other parts of society can assess the potential negative impact of their actions on social capital. Some type of 'social capital impact statement' would be worth considering even if it were very loose and non-quantitative in nature.

By following certain 'design principles', public authorities can avoid damaging social capital – or trade some forms of social capital for others in a more explicit way. So, for example, closing a school or post-office, relocating Government staff from one location to another or terminating some publicly funded community scheme may have discernible impacts on some aspects of social capital. However, the benefits – not just in terms of cost-efficiency – but in terms of other aspects of social capital may outweigh the costs. For example, students uprooted from their neighbourhood school to travel a distance to a school in which there is greater social and cultural diversity may benefit in terms of exposure to a more diverse social and cultural environment. In this example, 'bridging social capital' is substituted for 'bonding social capital' (even if the two types of social connection are not necessarily mutually exclusive as suggested in chapter 5).

Making these costs and benefits more explicit – not necessarily through precise indicators – would help to inform decision-makers prior to any major shift in policy. At a minimum, public agencies need to be more aware of the presence of social capital as an important factor in mediating what they do, even if its presence is difficult to describe or measure precisely. Social capital may counter-act shortfalls in other areas of community resource such as human, cultural or physical capital as well as formal institutional supports. It may even serve as a lever for developing other forms of capital acknowledging its fungible concept. However, social capital alone cannot provide a complete answer. In the following sub-sections, I address a number of broad, thematic areas covering the use of time and space, lifelong learning, and the promotion of active citizenship as well as other Government policies to illustrate potential areas of fruitful policy and civic dialogue in the future.

13.5.1 Time use

Various proposals to encourage greater levels of volunteering and the giving of time in community are discussed in NESF (2003: 79-99). One approach to fostering social capital at a local and self-organised level is exemplified by the development of Community Time Banks. The rate of exchange between time and money is determined by preferences and expectations. Exchanges of time outside the monetary market are based – figuratively – on 'fiat' money in the form of mutual obligations and expectations. They involve an implicit promise to pay someone back in the long-run (or else possibly suffer the consequence of social sanctions or internalised guilt).

'Credit slips' in the form of 'IOUs' accumulated on the basis of services performed for the benefit of others helps establish mutuality. A time bank provides a formalised mechanism to build up mutual expectations and obligations based on mutual help. Individuals can access the means as well as the incentive to contribute time in caring for others. Experience gained in contributing caring time could be the subject of a programme of reflexive learning and shared knowledge. For example, the accreditation of knowledge and experience gained through time given might open up new learning opportunities in a specific geographical community.

To work effectively, a reciprocal, exchange system requires some minimum level of co-operation and trust; ‘credit slips’ must possess some level of ‘fungibility’ and be underwritten by a shared trust. A key challenge is to build trust in small steps by listening, engaging and respecting. A low-key, quiet and personal approach builds relationships and trust, gradually. Eventually, stronger networks based on reciprocity and mutual trust could be created. An example of a Community Time Bank, in an Irish context, is provided by the Cork-based time-bank in Glounthane (http://www.communitytimebank.org/). It is based on a computerised databank of offers of hours detailing many of the interests, knowledge, skills and needs of people involved in the community.

13.5.2 Social space

The size of one’s social network radius is likely to be correlated with the extent of social engagement. Evolutionary studies suggest that the size of the brain, in many species, tends to be positively correlated with the size of optimal social group. The phenomenal growth in human brain size over hundreds of thousands of years together with the development of language and symbolic tools were correlated with extended sociability of the early human species.

Parents of pupils in Irish schools chose various types of schools from mainstream denominational to Gaelscoileanna or Multi-denominational schools for many reasons. These may include convenience, academic reputation, ethos or linguistic-cultural factors. However, size of the school as a whole (and not just average class size) may also have a bearing.

In pre-modern societies, kinship and tribal affiliation typically defined the accepted boundaries of small, self-organised communities. Even as late as the seventeenth century, most European societies were generally based on an conglomeration of small communities where a person was likely, on average, to have been connected to, and familiar with, only 100 persons over a lifetime. Gladwell (2001: 169-92) claims that the optimum size of a social group is around 150. He cites evolutionary biologists who draw attention to the way in which humans evolved in the context of feeling strongly about few people, short distances and relatively short periods of time.

The spatial size and radius of familiarity in social networks is important to the sense of influence a person feels over their external environment. Completion of social ties within a relatively small network helps create familiarity and provides a fertile ground for informal social capital. Hence, policy designs that pay attention to size as well as downward subsidiarity could reap benefits in terms of empowerment and connectedness. A grouping of service delivery in small and clustered networks or teams nested within larger ones could facilitate familiarity and trust.

Modern social patterns of living and working tend towards a greater differentiation and separation of residence, leisure and work. Greater fluidity in living and working arrangements together with more age-specific forms of entertainment and leisure reinforce this separation. In addition to the size of social space, the particular distribution of connecting points in networks of living, working and travelling has an important impact on people's sense of identity with each other. Careful attention needs to be paid to spatial planning and its long-term impact on patterns of social engagement. For example, patterns of long commuting distances to work, undue reliance on car transport and a proliferation of far-flung and poorly connected housing estates can undermine engagement and reciprocity at the local level. Likewise, the development of highly segmented residential patterns – whether by ethnic background or social class) can reinforce various social divides.

By contrast, multi-purpose residential, living and working arrangements can foster greater inter-connection and overlap. Even simple design innovations such as the creation of enclosed 'semi-public spaces' in a cluster of houses or the creation of more pedestrian and cycle-paths can have significant impacts on social capital (refer to Aldridge and Halpern, 2002).

13.5.3 Learning space

Learning to co-operate, communicate and engage for a more open, tolerant and active civil society is important for the development of social capital and well-being. In the economically developed world, schooling is an important experience for a large part of almost every person's life. Even if, at most, 20% of total 'waking time' is spent by young people (aged 6-15) in school, the impact of school on behaviour, attitudes and preparedness for work and life is profound. Schooling is a natural area in which public authorities can exert long-term influence on social capital – in partnership with learners, families and communities. The involvement of communities and learning partnerships of students, teachers and parents in governance, curriculum design and implementation at local level is an example of a public policy response to the development of social capital. However, the content and process of learning in schools is also important as these help foster civic attitudes and behaviour.

Mutual obligations and expectations are formed in the course of a learning life including experience of formal education. Families, communities, friends and work associates can provide important supports for learning at all stages of life. Learning can reinforce co-operative norms of behaviour and values of respect, care and tolerance of others as well as reinforce an awareness of the needs of others. In addition to the social-cognitive benefits of learning and formal education, there are significant benefits in terms of the engagement and sense of belonging with others in a community of purposive and shared learning. Being educated along with others as well as being involved in social activities is one of the most effective ways of getting to know (and respect) others of different social, ethnic, religious, political or cultural backgrounds.

Experiential and life-connected learning matter as much as classroom-based learning. Carl Rogers (1995: 276) observed that: 'the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning'. What matters is the climate in which values and knowledge are shared and developed and not just the accumulation of knowledge based on separate modules or subject areas. Formal education provides an important setting in which social capital is formed. However, learning is much more than schooling.

In a world of already overloaded curriculum, there is a limit to what schools can be expected to add by way of promoting civic knowledge, ethics, team-working. A co-operative ethos embedded in a school climate and entire praxis offers the best way of fostering social competence. Social and individual competencies relevant to social interaction concern everything that takes place in human learning from acting and thinking autonomously to capacity for using ‘tools’ such as language, mathematics, art, etc. What sorts of policy and practice issues arise in the case of formal education? Some examples are given in Table 13.1 below.

Table 13.1 Social Capital Policy Issues at Each Level of 'Formal Education'

	Resources	Networks	Skills	Potential policy leverage points
Pre-primary	Very 'teaching' intensive – resource light (spending per child)	Child, other children, parents/guardians, caring staff, educators	Pre-foundation and foundation skills, including socialisation (typically in a learner and child-centred environment)	Strong parent-early childhood networks. Early formation of social norms and sanctions of behaviour.
Primary	'Teaching' intensive – relatively resource light (spending per pupil)	Pupil, other pupils, parents/guardians, teachers, friends, communities.	Foundation skills (frequently in a learner and child-centred environment). Learning-to-learn skills.	Extra-curricular activities, project & group focussed learning. Enhancing the role of sports. More public/local use of school premises at evenings, weekends and out-of-term times. Greater involvement of parents in running, volunteering for, supporting school activities, management, learning process. Seeking balance between diversity/choice/curricular freedom on the one hand and bridging and linking social capital on the other.

Table 13.1 continued.

Secondary	Less ‘teaching’ intensive (compared with primary) – more resource intensive (than primary)	Networks of students, other students, parents/guardians, teachers, friends, communities.	Wider range of subjects and subject-specific focus along with ‘cross-curricular’ competencies. Vocational education (especially at upper secondary level)	Community-based learning; accreditation; civics and social skills programmes. Links to youth organisations (Youth Parliament initiatives in some countries); student school councils (giving students a voice and helping them to apply civic skills in the school). Team-working among teachers. Role of mentoring linking students with older members of the community. Inter-school co-operation and ‘nested clusters’ within schools to take advantage of the benefit of relatively small learning groups.

Tertiary	Less ‘teaching’ intensive (compared with secondary) – Resource intensive (than other levels)	Networks of students, other students, families, teachers/researchers professionals, peers, communities.	Discipline or occupation-specific skills as well as inter-disciplinary Specialist or technical knowledge in non-university sector.	Community, Volunteering and ‘Service’-based learning; accreditation; knowledge networks; Business links; distance learning networks; encouraging informal research networks; learning to ‘think outside the box’. Fostering ‘communities of practice’ among academic staff, researchers, communities, business. Role of mentoring.
Adult	Less ‘teaching’ intensive (compared with schooling) – although not for basic literacy programmes. Tends to be resource light in most OECD countries	Networks of learners, other learners, spouses, partners, teachers/researchers/ professional, workplace, peers, communities.	Discipline or occupation-specific skills. Upskilling, re-skilling. Workplace, leisure, personal development skills. Second-chance education.	Learning from experience. Recognition of prior learning or community-based learning. Networks of mutual support and learning. Value of conversational learning, action research, practical applications of learning.

A key policy challenge is to embed learning in a social and community practice. Too often in the past, formal education has tended to isolate the learner from ‘practice’ and from ‘other learners’. There is a need to reconnect schools, homes and communities in the widest sense. Peter Senge speaks not just of schools but schools that learn because they are comprised of learning communities themselves (Senge et al., 2000). Table 13.2, below, provides a schematic, and perhaps exaggerated, account of how the worlds of formal education and the workplace/community can diverge.

Table 13.2 Matching Education, Learning and Life

What formal education values…	***What the workplace/community typically needs…***
Prior academic attainment or recognition	Evidence of competence
Largely solitary study	Working with others
Generally uninterrupted work	Constant distractions
Concentration on a single subject	Working at different levels across different disciplines
Much written material	Mainly verbal skills
High analytical ability	Problem-solving, wisdom, decision-making.
Passive acceptance of information and knowledge	Creation of new knowledge, leadership, innovation and creativity

Source: reproduced with the permission of John Abbott:
http://www.21learn.org/arch/slides/john/scene_setting/additional41_48.htm

13.5.4 Active citizenship

The term active citizenship has been used to describe the active responsibility and rights of engagement of all citizens not just those who have formal citizenship. Frequently, the term ‘active citizenship’ is confused with a narrow legal concept of nationality rights, or with some form of engagement that is at odds with a community development perspective based on challenging power hierarchies through an emphasis on human and social rights for those who are disadvantaged. In practice, ‘active citizenship’ can sit within any normative framework and does not necessitate a legalistic view of 'citizenship'. Active citizenship is probably best understood from its rich connotations in political philosophy especially that of 'civic republicanism' which is a natural conceptual complement of 'social capital'.

There are many types of community involvement and governance from very informal social relationships at one end of the spectrum to highly public and regulated forms of engagement at the other. In between, various types of civic associations and forms of participation mediate the relationship between Government and other formal institutions and civil society. New forms of social engagement such as the new social movements centered on gender, environment or other issues continue to spring up. These may challenge some existing movements and structures based on more paternalistic or clientalist approaches to community need.

Public agencies may not be able to directly invest in informal social networks – but can offer appropriate support and advice – and thereby harness some of the energy and dynamism of local engagement. The provision of suitable 'spring boards', incentives and signals is important. The local level is a natural one in which to consider initiatives, measures and responses which strengthen network ties and tap into shared norms of co-operative behaviour. Bowles and Gintis (2002) rightly observe:

> Far from being an anachronism, community governance appears likely to assume more rather than less importance in the future. The reason is that the types of problems that communities solve, and which resist governmental and market solutions, arise when individuals interact in ways that cannot be regulated by complete contracts or by external fiat due to the complexity of the interactions or the private or unverifiable nature of the information concerning the relevant transactions.

However, it is not always possible to scale up lessons, practical insights and applications from a local experiment or project to national level. Hence, care is needed in disseminating what may be styled 'best practice' or, worse still, the One-Best-Way. Elsewhere, it has been argued that an incremental and experimental approach, jointly-owned and tailor-made to local circumstances, offers the best approach to developing active citizenship at local level (NESF, 2003). Some practical examples of community-building for active citizenship at the local level were discussed in the NESF Forum Report on Social Capital. These included:

- Support for volunteering through community facilitators, mentors and various institutional and indirect financial supports;
- Emphasis on the role of sports, the Arts, cultural events, festivals;
- Civic or Community Fora for deliberation and sustained dialogue;
- Youth initiatives (e.g. Youth Parliaments, Civic Awareness initiatives);
- 'Public-private-voluntary' partnerships; and
- ICT-based initiatives (e.g. community noticeboards).

13.5.5 Other policy initiatives

Marital stability and avoidance of unemployment has been identified as two important environmental factors influencing measurable subjective well-being. Unemployment impacts negatively on SWB not only because of the indirect income effects, but also because of the direct effects mediated through loss of self-esteem and social contact. Unemployment is amenable to macro-level economic policies and, therefore, constitutes an area in which Governments can make an important contribution to supporting well-being. Increasing personal security and trust through more stable family, work and community arrangements – while respecting individual autonomy and freedoms –provides a potentially important policy response to raising public welfare in the long-run.

Even if employment – especially relatively secure employment in which workers feel at liberty to develop their skills and talents as much as possible – is an important factor in predicting SWB, hours of work may be negatively related to it. Moreover, excessive working hours may impact negatively on other relevant factors such as health, family life and community engagement. Hence, there seems to be some case for encouraging a moderation of working time in the labour market.

Supporting job security as a way of enhancing SWB and commitment could provide one policy response – however this would need to be weighed up against the competitive nature of all organisations. Another policy option might be to raise income taxes on additional hours of work as a way of penalising excessively competitive behaviour. Apart from considerations relating to support of a Welfare State and other public investments, taxes on incomes and work over a certain threshold might be justified as a suitable penalty for behaviour which adds little to individual or community welfare. Raising taxes – whether on income or capital – is hardly a popular cause in contemporary Ireland particularly as we appear, on most European comparisons, to enjoy a relatively low rate of income, corporate and capital taxation. However, public support for higher taxes earmarked for specific local projects under local control and accountability would be more likely if the public policy were to shift from that aimed at the:

- maximisation of total GDP growth per capita, and the
- centralisation of authority, accountability and public service delivery at the centre,

to:

- the maximisation of human well-being – especially for those most vulnerable socially, economically and culturally; and the
- delegation of authority and tax-raising downwards to local level.

Support for the use of fiscal measures to achieve greater work-life balance has come from economist, Richard Layard (2003a: 11), who argues for higher rates of marginal tax to dis-incentivise work effort and raise personal well-being (by making leisure more attractive). It may lower GDP growth but is likely to increase subjective well-being. The instinct to achieve a favourable social status in comparison with others may be self-defeating for society. Too high a weight on social status as an instrumental means of achieving SWB may lead to a cancelling out of any net social gain. So, for example, competitive benchmarking at inter-institutional level may accentuate self-seeking behaviour in a way that leads to a spiral of competing behaviour. More formally, Layard (2003a: 13) states that:

> We should support benchmarking designed to show us what we could achieve. But we should question benchmarking where league table scores are highly public and deliberately made public in order to motivate people through the quest for rank. For this condemns as many to fail as to succeed – not a good formula for raising human happiness. The utility function we should be promoting through our system of childrearing:
>
> $$\text{Happiness}_i = f(\text{Leisure}_i, \text{Valued Consumption}_i) + \alpha\text{Rank}_i + \beta\text{Output}_i$$

Layard refers to Output as social product. He argues that public policy should aim to minimise the value of α and maximise the value of β. The virtue of social Output is that it can be summed across all individuals without lowering happiness for any individual, or without inducing a zero-sum result. This is congruent with the findings of Putnam (2000) in relation to the impact of community-level income in the United States: higher income at the State level, other things constant, lowers SWB; higher human and social capital at the State level, other things constant, raises SWB. Social ranking dependent on income may lower happiness of individuals (provided that they are above a certain threshold), through the value of αRank_i, while social connectedness and learning may increase it, through the value of βOutput_i.

13.6 Concluding remarks

A key challenge in post-modern Ireland is to reconcile patterns of authority and community responsibility with a growing sense of individual liberty and autonomy. Where do we strike the balance between self-restraint and social obligation on the one hand, and rights to autonomy and self-expression, on the other? The huge shift in value and patterns of behaviour in Irish society raises important questions about how far we should go, or allow each other to go, in any direction. Freedom has its limits and its price.

A new communitarian agenda founded on communal rights as well as individual rights and freedoms offers an attractive ideological framework in a post-socialist and post-thatcherite world. However, mutualism balanced by liberalism is hardly a new political philosophy. We still need to make hard choices about resources, about power and about individual and social rights. Periodic lip service to family, community and individual rights is easier than making, and acting on, difficult choices where some pain is necessary to realise a common good.

It would be helpful to think in terms of the central civic republican values of freedom, equality and social solidarity as components of an integral values system. Removing any of these three, potentially, undermines the remaining one(s) as well as the long-term sustainability of human well-being. A number of practical examples for Government response have been considered under each of these three headings.

An over-emphasis on extrinsic rewards and external control may undermine the motivation and freedom of agents to realise their 'freedom' well-being as distinct from their 'achievement' well-being as decided by someone else. Community governance, active citizenship, and other concepts associated with 'social capital' do not provide a panacea. Neither do they necessarily threaten existing market or State agent space. Properly devised, State actions at local and other levels can complement and even draw out more effectively the potential of social capital in civil society. This constitutes the main argument for Government support for positive uses of social capital – discussed in this chapter as well as elsewhere (OECD, 2001, NESF 2003 and Healy, 2004)

Historically, in Ireland, inter-generational exchange of care and nurturing has mainly taken place in families and other communities against a background of supporting State or Market-based institutions. Social obligations and expectations in the family continue to be based on natural and instinctive affiliation. Relationships are typically personal, care-based, non-contractual and informal. By contrast, public institutions control, provide and protect through access to resources, authority, legitimacy and agreed rules and procedures. There is no substitute – family, community or market – for the development of adequate and responsive State infrastructure in areas such as education, health, welfare and employment and training support. The State has a continuing and important role to play in complementing other actors. Part of its role is one of proactive and enabling partnership alongside a stronger and more connected civil society in which various levels of authority have responsibility and freedom to initiate. As suggested here, communities can become more, rather than less, important in the nexus of public governance –providing solutions to the co-ordination of actors and management of knowledge. Consequently, any presumption that 'social capital' provides a way of avoiding hard discussions about power and resource allocation does not hold up.

In this chapter, I have also stressed the importance of the local in a more global. Parallel to globalisation is a weakening in nation state identity. Just as globalisation takes a stronger hold in product markets and popular media, there is a counter-balancing trend to the local and the particular. Modernity assumed and imposed uniformity in place of tradition. Some versions of post-modernism went further and argued that there were no connecting stories or shared universal meanings: there were just individuals and chosen identities and interpretations. But, we need to re-discover the connecting thread of communities, families, spiritualities, local governance and active civic associations. The social fabric can be renewed through new types of association that transcend traditional loyalties but that sustain loyalty, commitment and belonging in a more globalised world.

Public policy can enhance well-being in many ways. It can:

- Uphold and promote fairness, equality and mutual respect in civil society and markets through appropriate active measures (section 13.4);
- Promote shared communicative competence through education and open learning systems (section 13.5.3)
- Foster connectivity at various levels – in public institutions, in compacts of public, private and voluntary initiative and at the 'grass-roots' of civil society (sections 13.5.2 and 13.5.4);

- Empower civil society and other agents to take responsibility – shared or otherwise for various areas of social and economic provision (sections 13.2 and 13.3); and

- Seek to support healthier and more balanced lifestyles through an appropriate use of fiscal and other measures (13.5.1 and 13.5.5).

In short, a new communitarianism or social mutualism is needed for sustainable well-being. A liberal and communitarian approach– in a contemporary context – implies moral renewal based on self-reliance and autonomy along with a renewal of the connecting threads of families, communities and civil society.

Chapter 14

Conclusions

There is indeed a strong rationale for recognising the positive role of free and sustainable agency – and even of constructive impatience. Amartya Sen (1999: 11)

14.1 Introduction

Well-being is rooted in shared meanings and social conversation. As Irish society matures many of the old certainties have vanished. Public discourse has switched, increasingly, to a focus on individual rights (social, economic as well as legal and civic) and individual desire-fulfilment. What seems to be missing from this discourse – relative to the enormous focus on individual autonomy – is a consideration of social norms, values and collective responsibility. Public policy can facilitate the attainment of well-being by allowing space for individuals and communities to clarify and communicate their values and needs.

In a society of legitimate diversity in values and identity, the important question confronting us is how to identify some common and minimum set of shared values and identities that can sustain diversity and innovation. The sharing of some values is a prerequisite of giving space and respect for diverse value-systems. Creating some minimum set of shared values can be approached in two ways: (i) authoritarian impositions of norms through legislation or control of social behaviour, and (ii) bottom-up consensus-building through sustained dialogue and acceptance of some personal or community-level autonomy. Modern, pluralist and democratic societies tend to rely more on (ii) than on (i).

In this concluding chapter, I argue for dialogue among different:

- disciplinary perspectives (e.g. economics, sociology, political science);
- actors – Civil Society (including new social movements, Government, Corporate; and

- methodological approaches (e.g. qualitative, empirical, action research)

Durkheim's proposed response to observed social anomie was via social integration of norms and behaviour. I believe that this response is still highly relevant. According to Durkheim, institutions - public and legal – should play a vital role in promoting and sustaining civic culture in support of the norms of equality, liberty and social solidarity. He believed that, as societies emerged from 'mechanical solidarity' to attain 'organic solidarity' based on elective rather than imposed belonging, a new type of civic morality could emerge.

The new type is not based on homogeneity in views and sentiments as was the case in more traditional and mechanistic solidarity. It seeks social cohesion through a more voluntaristic acceptance of a common ethic supported by stronger institutions that provide an accepted normative regulatory role. This requires an extended, on-going and inclusive dialogue. To be sustained, such a dialogue requires a widespread civic maturity and capacity to listen and, at the same time, to articulate values in a clear and non-coercive way. Jonathan Sacks (2002: 2) offers a timely case for social dialogue when he wrote:

> The greatest single antidote to violence is conversation, speaking our fears, listening to the fears of others, and in that sharing of vulnerabilities discovering a genesis of hope.

14.2 Social Dialogue

Talking spaces enable people to meet on an equal playing field; to talk; to listen and to get to know each others' concerns, interests, motivation, assumptions and demands. Too often, we wish to seek a rapid closure on some intractable problem or contestation by defining a precise, legal and fixed solution. But, through sustained dialogue, positions are clarified, modified and negotiated. Respect is a key dimension of effective conversation. Beginning from the standpoint that I, or we, do not have a monopoly of truth, wisdom or interest, it is necessary for each to listen to the other. Too often these elementary principles are almost completely ignored in public discourse.

We need to facilitate communities that seek to identify and understand their common, and different, values. Debate about issues of public morality in the market place of ideas, politics and negotiated settlement among competing interests is a risky undertaking. It is easier to pretend that differences do not exist and that we are all agreed. Or, it is tempting to close debate and force closure on some intractable problem or dispute. The bland nature of many communiqués and official documents speaks of a lack of openness to acknowledging and debating differences.

Under the pretext of social dialogue, representatives of various tribes, factions and interest-group 'shout across' to the other side of the debate – not to arrive at a shared view of a problem based on openness to the other but on the basis of dominating the other with one's own ideas which are deemed to be correct. The aim of the exercise is to demonstrate that the others are wrong and therefore we are right or, worse still, 'we are right: therefore they are wrong'. It is a zero-sum game whether in politics, community development, organisational management or theology.

Even when social dialogue conforms to the requirements of respect, many debates are based on a search for a 'one-best' solution to an identified problem. However, the nature of a set of possible solutions is complex. Rather than seeking a discussion of solution-design, there is a rush to close down discussion, lead others and oneself into identifying a solution based on a fixed set of 'designed' questions and permissible answers. There is little space, time or willingness to explore the dimensions of a problem, its impact in different areas, how the problem is viewed and understood by different people and in what sense people use different words to describe an identical phenomenon.

The difficulty with a narrow approach to social dialogue is that the 'designed' pre-given question may never be questioned. Effective social dialogue is a matter of re-designing questions to consider situations from different standpoints. It may also entail a surrender of positions, assumptions and axioms in order to re-gain some or all of these in a new light or context. This is individually and collectively painful – but constitutes the price of co-designed evolution towards collective well-being. We bring forth a new world (to use Capra's phrase) by dying to ours in isolation. Grains of wheat must be buried to die[75].

If the first premise of effective social dialogue is respect, the second is hope – hope that together those who take part in respectful conversations can change the world around them for better, now and in the future. It means recognising others as being, at one and the same time, the same offspring of a universal and diverse family. *The Dignity of Difference* is the title of a book recently published by Jonathan Sacks (2002). He argues that the future of civilisation rests on the promotion of a debate about values in the context of respectful difference. Sacks regards this difference as a mark of dignity since, for him, God does not just love the human race in general, but in all its particularity and in the ultimate uniqueness and non-negotiable dignity of each individual human being. A key message in Sack's argument is that, whereas *power* resides in politics, compassion and *influence* reside in religions. This is over-stated, though, in as much as organised religion becomes a power-game.

In my view, ambiguity – shared, negotiated, agreed and moderated – could provide a partial way of managing (but not necessarily resolving) civic conflict. Examples of negotiated ambiguity on issues such as shared space, shared identity and openness to continuing dialogue and re-definition of 'the problem' exist in many international settlements and 'peace agreements' – the 1998 'Belfast Agreement' in Northern Ireland being one example. A conditional, transitional agreement offers various parties to a conflict an opportunity to continue talking while agreeing on some common ground or working arrangement in the interim. However, such conflict-management strategies require two elements for success:

- Relative equality of treatment for, and participation by, the negotiating parties; and

[75] Holy Bible - John 12:24.

- Enforcement or guardianship of an agreement by one or more ‘external’ authorities.

There are limits to ‘ambiguity’ in any context. Elinor Ostrom (2000) has used the example of self-organised local resource management regimes to make a case for successful design principles. These entail the development of clear boundary rules defining who has rights to draw on the resources. A key point in Ostrom’s example is that users of the resources participated in the design of the rules – giving legitimacy and buy-in to all concerned.

The antithesis to an effective social dialogue is an arrogant view point that says in so many words: *Since I/we know the whole truth and am/are certain of my/our own position – then I/we don’t need to enter into dialogue with you. I/we just need to convince you of ‘my truth’ and ‘our truth’ which is also The Truth.*

‘Truth’, according to this view, is not embodied in conversations and practice; it is entirely ‘out there’ waiting to be assimilated and appropriated by all. However, truth that is entirely ‘out there’ remains out there. To be embodied, it needs to be embodied in practice, conversations and shared meanings.

14.3 Synthesis of Ideas, Concepts and Praxis

Baert (1998: 203) has noted the existence of:

> a trend amongst social theorists in the late twentieth century towards avoiding the employment of knowledge from other fields. Instead, quite a number of scholars seem to assume that theoretical progress depends solely on close scrutiny and re-cycling of preceding social theories.

Ideas, concepts and practice are frequently the prisoners of various academic or ideological systems. In seeking to connect ideas and concepts, it is hoped to advance the work of *synthesis* which is not to be confused with summarising these. Synthesis is about laying different hypotheses and conceptual understandings of the world alongside each other to identify their common pattern and unity alongside their essential difference. There are many ways of telling stories about societies or picturing the complex realities of social relationships. A synthesis helps to connect these different interpretations and thereby inform praxis.

However, arriving at a synthesis is likely to be a lonely and risky undertaking – especially in academic discourse where a narcissism of difference and tribal-disciplinary affiliation is prized. The prophetic dilemma of Erwin Schrödinger, speaking in Dublin in 1943 (Schrödinger, 1967: 1), is worth recalling as it is no less relevant today. He acknowledged that:

> A scientist is supposed to have a complete and thorough knowledge, at first-hand, of some subject, and, therefore, is usually expected not to write on any topic on which he is not a master.

However, he begs to renounce this 'noblesse oblige' in declaring:

> We have inherited from our forefathers the keen longing for unified, all-embracing knowledge. The very name given to the highest institutions of learning reminds us, from antiquity and throughout many centuries the universal aspect has been the only one to be given full credit. But the spread, both in width and depth, of the multifarious branches of knowledge during the last hundred odd years confronts us with a queer dilemma...It has become next to impossible for a single mind fully to command more than a small specialized portion of it.

A way forward is suggested by Schrödinger in the following terms:

> I can see no other escape from this dilemma (lest our true aim be lost for ever) than that some of us should venture to embark on a synthesis of facts and theories, albeit with a second-hand and incomplete knowledge of some of them – and *at the risk of making fools of ourselves.*

There is a need, in my view, to contest the existence of separate and disjointed discourses which take place within largely self-contained groups. A language based on shared meanings and understandings common to a particular group can provide an effective means to keep others out and maintain a special position of separation and, possibly, privilege. Language can divide as much as unite.

I share the view of systems thinker, Fritjof Capra (1997: 6), that a paradigm shift analogous to what occurred in quantum physics in the early decades of the twentieth century is warranted, today, in the social sciences:

> I have generalized Kuhn's definition of a scientific paradigm to that of a social paradigm, which I define as 'a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself.'

The case for a synthesis is illustrated by a word-play on analysis and synthesis. The 'symbolic analyst' of Robert Reich is one who identifies, brokers and solves problems. He breaks down a problem into its components and identifies relationships and points of leverage in which to find a solution. The root meaning of 'analysis' – *analyein* - is to unloose or to bring apart. The analyst typically proceeds along the following lines:

- Break the problem up into a set of discrete questions or hypotheses;
- Elaborate an *a priori* model in which various aspects of behaviour and the conditioning environment are thought to be inter-related;
- Differentiate underlying concepts, facts or observations;
- Relate these facts or observations through a causal, deterministic or relational model (typically by assembling data from observations of behaviour or other phenomena in the past);
- Draw conclusions about inter-relationships – their nature, strength of association, direction of causality and context in terms of time, space or sub-groups within a population; and
- Possibly modify the original hypothesis and *a priori* model.

By contrast, we may consider a 'symbolic synthesist' as one who joins or integrates knowledge from very different contexts and meanings. Both the symbolic analyst and the symbolic synthesist, potentially, create new knowledge and new meaning from what already exists. However, the starting point of the synthesist is, in accordance with the root meaning of synthesis – *syn thēsein*, to place things aside each other and, in so doing, to fuse elements that seem to be in opposition or contradiction. Former President of the Czech Republic,Václav Havel, has said that: '*Education is the ability to perceive the hidden connections between phenomena*'.

The synthesist starts from real complexity and ends up with a different interpretation of real complexity. She needs many tools including imagination, story-telling and a capacity to listen and see. Her underlying intuition is that there is unity and meaning underneath complexity. Implicit in the seeking of synthesis is a tension, incompleteness – even frustration – to re-interpret and re-join and possibly even change reality. Imagination is the key to connecting ideas, concepts and facts. Imagining draws on symbols in which to interpret relationships and people.

By contrast, the analyst starts from a simplifying mental picture of reality in which that picture is made gradually more *complicated* and *abstract* by a series of differentiations and reductions. The tools of the analyst include logic, deductive reasoning and, frequently, mathematics. His underlying hypothesis – *hypo thesis* - or under-thesis – is that reality is reducible to a set of universal axioms and laws as a way of understanding the world (but not necessarily changing it). Thinking tends to be linear and compartmentalised.

There is a third category – the anomist – who embodies *anomie* or the *anōnymos.* As *anōnymos*, it has a private name but no shared name. It stands apart from any shared understanding or meaning and doubts the existence of any underlying *hypo thesis* or *syn thēsein.* It does not engage with change around itself because there is nothing to change. The world outside *anomie* has no name. However, in anomie there is no soul or *nous*.

The relevance of this word-play for me is the light it can shed on different ways of doing research and making sense of real-world phenomena. Any research in the area of well-being needs to combine different approaches including a perspective that avoids treating subjective well-being as a readily separable and quantifiable reality – to be observed and explained by observation external to the subject. The point of a synthesis of ideas, practice and concepts is that all three are inter-linked and we can best understand each by considering them in relation to the others. Hence, rather than viewing research as something that academics or other professionals alone do, it would be more helpful to treat research as the exploration of thoughtful practitioners who share and synthesise knowledge embedded in practice. Action research or policy research starts from praxis and draw on theory and ideas from discipline research.

What implications would this hold for the way in which research, including research on well-being, is conducted in Ireland? The next section considers the advantages of a mixed-design policy-research model that combines different approaches to combining knowledge.

14.4 Research Issues

Interest on the part of public policy makers in research is mainly from the point of view legitimising existing public policy. However, Coleman claimed that interest in the results of many particular types of research is likely to be higher among those with relatively little power by way of funding leverage or political influence (for example the status and well-being of children or the elderly). Coleman (1990: 636-637) argues, convincingly in my view, for a more pluralistic policy research relationship based on research design input from many actors including non-government actors.

Habermas feared that the development of policy research in a way that bypasses the political process is dangerous. In a traditional policy research model familiar to the Irish public, Government or other public sources determine the basic design of policy-funded research. However, a pluralist approach to research design and funding is the existence of multiple feedbacks loops and research design inputs from (i) government/corporate actors, (ii) political representatives, (iii) intermediaries and (iv) policy recipients.

There seems to be an imbalance in research to the extent Government and corporate actors determine the shape of applied social or natural scientific research. The researcher is not a neutral actor and the specification of which questions are to be asked and what range of possible answers or interpretations is possible is too heavily influenced by one set of actors in the set of research interests.

Added to the issue of research design control is the issue of research methodology. Model of causal determination among discrete, observable, measurable objects holds sway in a world of empirics and the world of empirics dominates the thought patterns and sets of assumptions of public policy-makers. A policy-bureaucratic model of policy-research rests on a view of the world as essentially a problem in social engineering in which experts are invited to discover the causal pathways and determining features of social behaviour through empirical research based on use of reductionist statistical techniques and a devising of 'policy interventions' to impact on behaviour.

Using observational data, it is possible to describe behaviour or attitudes of the 'objects' being studied. However, there may be little or no interaction between the 'object' and the researcher. The 'researched object' is observed by the researcher – in a sense controlled by the researcher to the extent that the interpretations, meanings and active participation of the 'object' are ignored or left aside. The meaning of individual responses is not probed further. Conversations, interactions and feedback, typically, do not occur. Moreover, the lived experience is not captured – but rather a very limited view based on a standardised and limited questionnaire.

The results of empirical social research remain as working hypotheses – highly suggestive but concealing of the dynamic and locally rich context in which outcomes can be understood. This raises what I term the 'policy-bureaucratic' dilemma. 'Policy makers' seek to know 'what works' and 'why it works'. It relies on empirical investigations that are, by their very nature, reductionist. These need to be so in order to provide some basis for generalising across contexts and providing 'policy makers' with 'powerful' (read generalisable) evidence on pathways of causation, potential points of policy leverage and determination of best expected return for investment in strategy A and not strategy B. The problem is that when it comes to implementing change, all of the particular and contextual factors apply to undermine the stated goal of policy-makers. The ‘non-measurable’ still matters and what is evident from analysis of correlations based on summary historical aggregates do not necessarily give a reliable guide to how living organisms and social networks will respond to a particular policy initiative or programme.

The advantage of quantitative methods, compared to qualitative ones, is that they abstract from local peculiarity and provide generalisable and, possibly, transferable lessons for application over a wide range of circumstances. The drawback of sole reliance on quantitative approaches is that they fail to address the specific, contextual and local nature of phenomena – impoverishing the understanding of how things work in a particular environment. Such approaches may also lead to erroneous conclusions based on incomplete knowledge of all the relevant factors at work in a situation.

We need a mix of ethnographic-qualitative and quantitative approaches to examine how individuals and societies regulate themselves and achieve goals. Starting from a qualitative hypothesis or series of conceptual assumptions based on lived experience, it is possible to assess the validity of these assumptions through quantitative methods. From there it may be possible to combine the results of quantitative research with insights from other approaches including action-research to arrive at an enriched and coherent view and understanding which serves as the basis for decision-making.

Action-based approaches focus on the meanings and interpretations of ‘social facts’ by actors. ‘Social facts’ are not just givens and the social system is not just analogous to some physical or natural organic system. Action research offers a much richer context in which to link practice with reflection, experience and theory-building even if the results of action research and similar qualitative methods do not always lend themselves to generalisation and widespread application. Hence, we need more examples of mixed research design as well as more democratic participation in the design and execution of research. To be effective, a mixed, ‘pluralist’ policy research design needs to be:

- Co-designed;
- Co-produced (e.g. as in action research);

- Co-owned; and
- Co-disseminated.

Otherwise, 'research' and 'evidence-based' public policy becomes yet another form of symbolic domination by elites supposedly on behalf of those who are deemed to know less and are largely incapable of helping themselves. The dominance of empiricist thinking and assumptions along with an excessive desire to control and dominate public discourse represent real threats to pluralist research in Ireland. Inglis (2002: 167) gives a timely wake-up call when he wrote:

> At another level, there is a need to analyse how the language of the state, the way its reading and understanding of social life, has colonised the lifeworld and the different interest groups within civil society.

Inglis believes that action-oriented research should be directed at 'the emancipation of the dominated'. Any discourse – including that on social capital or well-being – cannot be external to those who are dominated. To evaluate and act on the capabilities of dominated groups, language must be appropriated by them. Inglis says (2002: 158):

> unless it [sociological knowledge] can be understood by those about whom it is produced, it may have the unintended consequence of adding to, rather than subtracting from, their domination.

14.5 Data Issues

Research on the causes of well-being requires a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. Quantitative research needs to draw on a range of appropriate instruments to measure some aspects of well-being. In this section, I discuss a number of challenges regarding the measurement of subjective well-being and social capital in an Irish context.

Diener et al. (1999: 277) have commented that:

> SWB research is limited by the almost exclusive reliance on cross-sectional designs with inadequate tests of causal hypotheses.

They conclude that future research needs to identify:

- the direction of causality through a more appropriate research methodology;
- the extent of adaptation, over time, to external events; and
- different types of outcomes by dimension of SWB.

Measuring happiness or subjective well-being calls for a much more systematic and cross-disciplinary approach than has been evident up to now. Indeed, given the paucity of published works on this subject in Ireland, empirical well-being research is still in its infancy here. There is a need to enhance both the range of usable data sources as well as relevant survey questions to examine and test the relationship of key variables such as age, health, marriage, social support, employment and income level to different dimensions of well-being. Layard (2003a: 11) writes:

> We cannot have good policy unless we have a major programme of quantitative research on the size of all the non-income channels affecting human welfare.

Ultimately, it would be desirable that well-being be measured over time for the same individuals in panel data to allow researchers to test directions of causality and interaction. Future studies of well-being should provide for a distinction among different components of subjective well-being such as: pleasant affect, unpleasant affect and evaluation by the subject according to specific domains (e.g. health, work, relationships).

Experience sampling methods (ESM) could provide a valuable means for measuring happiness concurrently with particular events. The responses, evaluations and feelings of individuals are recorded as they experience various events over a given period of hours. Experience sampling could complement survey research such as Time-Use Surveys to capture experiences of pleasant and unpleasant events in the course of a short period of time. Further developments in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) could expand the frontiers of understanding with respect to the link between brain, mind and happiness (Davidson, 2000).

If subjective well-being research and data gathering is under-developed in Ireland, the same could be said of social capital as a research field. Compared with human, and especially physical capital, it is likely that the benefit of social capital in organisations, neighbourhoods and other communities is under-valued and under-recognised because of the difficulty in measuring and explicitly building it into existing public programmes and policies. The importance of establishing a more extensive data source on social capital has been acknowledged in the recent *Agreed Programme for Government* (Government of Ireland, 2002). However, it remains to be seen how quickly and seriously this commitment will be implemented through the development of new surveys or modification of existing ones. One particular area that would be worth developing is the establishment of local community surveys to assess the presence of social capital at a local, neighbourhood level.

As suggested in Part B, measurement of social capital remains a particularly challenging activity. The temptation may be to try to reduce social capital to a limited set of proxy measures of trust, socialising, volunteering, voting or membership of associations – all based on reported behaviour or attitudes of individuals participating in standardised surveys. However, social interaction occurs in a very specific context where the meaning of actions is defined by its participants. A social capital measurement tool, to be useful, needs to start from the basic question – 'why do we seek to measure social connection in this community?' and 'what is the meaning of participation, interaction and mutual obligation for participants' in this particular community taking account of its history, culture and relationship to other communities (e.g. hierarchical, contractual, ethnic, etc.)?

A crucial dimension of social interaction is the transfer of information and energy in self-regulating feedback loops. More than the transfer of information items, these networks combine knowledge in useful ways to regulate behaviour and produce new configurations of connection. It is possible to measure structure in terms of the quantity of connections and the place of members/nodes/points in a network. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure the pattern of interactions and inter-dependencies. We need *maps* to understand the workings of complex systems in which the whole is greater than the sum of its individual parts. To that end, the value of 'story-telling' needs to be acknowledged. The nature of social interaction is so particular and so local that only 'story-telling' can adequately capture the full richness of a given community. 'We can tell more than we can write.' Hence, social dialogue or conversation, action research and confirmatory quantitative research come together in a potentially powerful mix to reveal what empirical research, alone, can never reveal or test.

The NESF Survey data explored in Part B of this Study do not enable me to draw firm conclusions about the causes of subjective well-being or the pathways of influence. Longitudinal research as well as experimental survey design would approach the issue of causality more directly and definitively. Perhaps, in the past, there was a tendency to treat the measurement of subjective well-being as a secondary issue – hardly directly relevant to public policy. Economic development to provide for long-term sustainable growth in well-being was seen as the primary policy goal (if not still). Moreover, in so far as subjective impression or recent objective data such as those in the World Values Survey could tell, we were a happy-go-lucky people. Why bother with measuring well-being when the answer was to lift as many boats as possible through high-wage employment and productivity growth from a low base?

14.6 Key Theses

This Study proposes the following 12 theses based on a number of tentative definitions and insights from personal reflection and empirical evidence provided in one survey. These are described as follows:

1. Individuals desire their own well-being or good and that of others. The manifold well-springs of human motivation are too often ignored or over-simplified in models of empirical research and public (governmental) policy.

2. For individuals – and still less for societies in which they live – it is not obvious how their own well-being can be realised. Choice, risk, opportunity and uncertainty provide the setting in which they pursue their own well-being.

3. Well-Being is both subjective and objective in nature as well as specific in time, place and social significance. Individuals experience and define their own well-being in the first instance. Social groups may also share an assessment of well-being for the group as a whole.

4. Since individuals develop in society, well-being is intimately related to the social environment in which norms of interdependence and behaviour among individuals evolve. 'I think; therefore I am' gives way to 'We are, therefore I think'. Individuals construct their own meaning *in a social context* and through *interaction with others*.

5. A key element of social environment is the formation of *expectations* and social *functionings* and their inter-relationship.

6. Norms, culture and institutions have an important impact on well-being. These notions are subsumed under the concept of *human capability*, which describes the freedom and ability of individuals and groups to achieve the 'good life' as they see it, based on their chosen or received needs, values, expectations.

7. The ideas of 'human capital' and 'social capital' can provide useful points of reference for understanding the way in which subjective well-being is realised. They broaden the scope of traditional welfare economics and facilitate cross-disciplinary dialogue.

8. However, a metaphor of capital, taken from economics and applied to the study of subjective well-being, would be over-

limiting especially if it were used to represent complex and dynamic processes with a set of universally equivalent empirical measures. Consequently, an integrated and pluralist approach to research based on cross-disciplinary co-operation and respect for various complementary research approaches is required.

9. Learning from practice and reflecting on experience is an important individual and social strategy to enhance well-being. It requires the practice of social *values* of respect, fairness and tolerance, or, the 'good old' civic republican values of equality, liberty and fraternity.

10. A frequently acknowledged, but forgotten in practice, conclusion is that learning in social networks requires *space* and *time* for social dialogue because we live in a social context of shared meaning, language and codes of behaving.

11. A new communitarianism or social mutualism is needed for sustainable well-being. A liberal and communitarian approach– in a contemporary context – implies moral renewal based on self-reliance and autonomy along with a renewal of the connecting threads of families, communities and civil society.

12. There is an urgent and continuing need for a much closer synthesis of:

    - practice, reflection and experiential knowledge;
    - philosophy and the 'social' sciences (including sociology, economics, political theory and psychology); and
    - 'social sciences' and the biological sciences

> This Study does not provide such a synthesis. However, it suggests a number of converging ideas and currents of thought that could be taken up by various communities of practice.

In chapter 1, I began with an extract from the *Democratic Programme* of the First Dáíl. I now conclude with an extract from a speech to Dáil Eireann in January 1922 by Mr Kevin O'Higgins prior to his becoming Ireland's first post-independence Justice Minister:

> The welfare and happiness of the men and women and little children of this nation must, after all, take precedence of political creeds and theories.

Appendix I

Why I did it (on a lighter note)

‘It is good to see that our books in archives are still of use to someone’ dryly commented a librarian staff member in UCD as he stamped a date on a dusty 1901 copy of ‘The Principles of Political Economy’ by nineteenth century political economist, Henry Sidgwick. The book had been lasted borrowed by some UCD student in the late 1970s (it wasn’t myself, or at least, I can’t remember). The librarian may not have noticed my excitement when I proceeded to explain to him that Sidgwick was one of the first political economists to ever use the term ‘social capital’ (actually Marx was the first – but neither Sidgwick nor Marx used the term in quite the sense that it is used nowadays).

Odd people these PhD ‘mid-lifers’….

The story of how and why I embarked on a PhD in mid-life and mid-career is a personal one and it borders on the political and religious. At this point, I tread on personal eggshells. *Positively*, I wanted to write something about my own beliefs and understandings. On the *negative* side, I am frustrated. But, frustration can be a positive and creative tension.

My undergraduate training was in economics and, to a lesser extent, in quantitative methods and politics. I ended up studying economics as an undergraduate in UCD in as a result of spotting ‘Political Economy’ on the list of First Arts options. The year was 1974 and I was deeply involved, at the time, in political activity on the far left and would remain so for many years. ‘Political economy’, as ‘economics’ was then referred to at UCD, seemed an attractive option as a first year add-on to accompany my two main subjects – leaving me with just enough time to continue my political activities. As matters turned out, I graduated with a ‘pure’ degree in economics in 1977 (and a first class honours to my surprise considering the time I had put in!) and then, a Masters degree in 1981 following a spell of full-time political engagement. I worked for a few years as an applied economics researcher in the 1980s with another ‘interlude’ – this time in a Roman Catholic religious congregation.

With such an eclectic background, I was hardly a typical entrant to the Irish civil service in 1991 when, newly married, I moved from Belfast to Dublin to live with Laura. To be honest, I think that I learned more from being a spouse and partner as well as a father than anything else. Celibacy and academia take note!

A leave of absence to work at OECD, which ended up as a five-year assignment from 1995-2000, changed me. Working for an international and inter-governmental organisation shaped by an economist perspective (and an allegedly neo-liberal one – which is only 90% correct) was an exciting opportunity to spread my wings. I make new contacts and learned in a very changing, stimulating and diverse environment. It brought me back in contact with the world of academic and applied research but also opened up my thinking to areas of research and applied policy that went well beyond my university training and prior job experience in Belfast and Dublin.

I recall with a mixture of annoyance, embarrassment and amusement my induction into a rough peer-reviewed crash course in writing skills at OECD – preparing 'Issues Papers' and other documents and articles and, eventually, two publications – *Human Capital Investment: An international comparison* (OECD, 1998) and *The Well-Being of Nations: the role of human and social capital* (OECD, 2001). 'This is poorly drafted….why?…what are you trying to say?….how does that flow from this?….where is the evidence to support it?….etc.' Not good for self-confidence; but good for sharpening one's argument and presentation!

I appreciated the freedom and encouragement I received at OECD to explore many new ideas and types of research evidence. This also included the potentially powerful idea of social capital as a complementary to investment in learning. With its emphasis on social networks and associated norms of reciprocity, 'social capital' seemed to offer an antidote to the market-driven methodological individualism inherent in much of 'human capital' analysis. After about three years, I was bored with the human capital and rates of return literature – what did it tell us and what difference does it make to education policy and practice? Social capital seemed to be a much more challenging and promising way forward.

What has all this to do with well-being? – the subject of this thesis. Well, with a sense of indignation and frustration at the way in which 'growth' (short-hand for economic growth which is a short-hand for growth in measurable GDP which is a short-hand for growth in human welfare) remained the end-object of mainstream analysis at OECD, I was very much influenced by the writings and thinking of economists such as Amartya Sen. He treated economic income and wealth as primarily independent and not dependent variables.

Contrary to many popularised views, OECD – at least its Education Directorate – is a house of many rooms – a 'broad church'. And I prospered from the many discussions, arguments, agreements and exciting intellectual discoveries and revisions that I continued to make over the years I spent there.

Prior to my interview for the post at the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) at OECD in 1995, I was advised to play down the fact that I was a statistician in the Irish civil service. CERI was an unusual part of OECD as it did not conform to the empiricist and economist orthodoxy. By the time I left OECD, I was so thoroughly tainted with such 'errant' notions as social capital, sustainable development, learning organisations and tacit knowledge that I had forgotten that I was the 'numbers person' at the Department of Education back in Dublin. I was soon to remember what my role is.

On my return to Ireland in 2000, and not for the first time in my life, I was probably over-excited and over-confident. I didn't take seriously the prophetic warning of a respected international academic that 'he who embraces the spirit of the age will soon be widowed'. This was the period when British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, could say:

> the cutting edge work in social sciences is about the nature, limits and dynamics of co-operation, about trust and social capital, knowledge and human capital. The tide of debate has swung back to community, mutual responsibility and a cautious internationalism (Blair, 2001).

Apart from the irony of a ‘cautious internationalism’, one wonders what space has been created by Governments across the democratic and economically developed world for a growth in trust and social co-operation? A recent viewing of Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* – whatever its merits – leaves me very worried.

So, under the eclectic influence of catholic social teaching and my former socialist affiliations, I had found in the loose and growing body of literature on ‘social capital’ something that provided an antidote to the excessively positivist and individualist methodology of ‘economics’. It seemed to offer the ideal intellectual tool for a new mutualism – a type of ‘third way’ between a-moral capitalism and *dirigist* state socialism – both of which have ignominiously failed, in my view.

Of course, ‘social capital’ is not a novel concept – as I have stressed throughout this study. It is an organising term for well-established concepts of inter-personal duty, social solidarity and trust as old as humanity. Curiously, just as New Zealand Prime Minister Jim Bolger had launched the idea of social capital in the 1990s as a key idea for a new type of public policy and partnership there, no less than two current or former Irish Prime Ministers, in quick succession, seemed to adopt social capital as a unifying paradigm and call to community spirit and engagement at the turn of the millennium. Speaking in 1999, the former Taoiseach declared that ‘the enhancement of social capital in Ireland should be a key national objective and measure of success’. This sentiment was very much apparent in the short-lived Fine Gael ‘Plan for the Nation’ published at the turn of the millennium. Then, it was the turn of Fianna Fáil and the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern.

Speaking at a conference in March 2001, the Taoiseach declared:

> I believe that social capital is a concept which deserves to be discussed in much greater depth. It has the potential to be a very positive influence in public policy development in this country and throughout the European Union. It is a concept which puts communities at the centre of our debates and it helps us to find a framework to explain and address the linkages between areas which are seemingly very different. …I believe that the concept of social capital has the potential to play a very positive role in the development and evaluation of public policy. In order to fulfil this potential it has to be used carefully and it requires the attention of a much bigger body of researchers and commentators.

And so, the term 'social capital' found its way into the pre-election manifesto of Fianna Fáil in 2002 as well as in the *Agreed Programme of Government* following the general election that year. In a Section entitled, 'Building an inclusive society', the Government was said to be committed in the following way:

> We will fund an ambitious programme of data gathering on social indicators, including consistent poverty and social capital, to ensure that policies are developed on the basis of sound information. We will work to promote social capital in all parts of Irish life through a combination of research and ensuring that public activity supports the development of social capital, particularly on a local community level.

And the rest is history. Perhaps 'social capital' is not a winning election sound bite: *it's the economy, stupid*.

Economic slowdown, different fiscal circumstances, a changed international landscape and the practicalities of taking 'community' more seriously put the brakes on the advance of 'social capital' into popular political discourse. An added factor in the case of the place of 'social capital' in Irish public debate has been its very lukewarm reception – for good and understandable reasons in my view – on the part of some groups in the community and voluntary platform within the wider social partnership agreement. One has to acknowledge that, currently, all political and strategic roads lead to Social Partnership.

The reasons for this lukewarmness are to do with a complex range of factors including concerns that:

- ‘social capital’ could be used by Government and other actors to displace notions of ‘community development’ already in vogue – principally those that emphasise empowerment, social justice and self-reliance;

- the term is sometimes over-identified with an economistic framework that treats personal and social relationships as capital with a marketable value; and

- it is too general as a concept and does not relate sufficiently to specific issues of discrimination, poverty and power ‘on the ground’.

Anyway, ‘social capital’ seemed suspect – associated with American academics (but was popularised in sociology by Bourdieu - TH), a tad conservative and politically incorrect in a country recovering from religious dogmatism and authoritarianism (but used to argue for bottom-up solutions in governance- TH), woolly (but has spawned a large-scale empirical literature – TH), and must be wrong because promoted by the high temples of capitalism – World Bank and OECD (but there has been a lively debate and contestation of the concept from within the orthodoxy of those institutions - TH).

I will agree that ‘social capital’ is a double-edged sword in the hands of politicians, media and others. The clarification, take-up and impact of the concept still needs more work and time. It needs fresh evidence, clarity of meaning, connection to live issues, good communication media and courageous political leadership and vision – not undermined by ideological or transitory winds. Widowhood may be only temporary after all.

Evidence of a ‘reaction’ to the notion was well demonstrated over the period 2001 – 2003: the March 2001 conference on Social Capital organised by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Plenary meeting of National Economic and Social Forum on Social Capital held in September 2002. That said, a significant number of public authorities –

including local authorities concerned about issues of partnership, active citizenship and trust at a local level – have provided very strong support for the usefulness of social capital as a policy concept. Mention of the term has appeared in a number of County and City Development Plans as a key area of resource planning. Hence, the jury is still out on how the general concept of social capital will be developed in future policy-making and applied research.

A further ingredient to my own development and motivation to undertake this research was a growing sense of disillusionment with what is popularly and inaccurately referred to as 'evidence-based policy'. As a statistician in the Department of Education in the early 1990s and subsequently as a staff member at OECD involving close engagement with its education indicators programme, I had developed a keen sense of the severe limitations of empirical and empiricist research. Research about education is more than just measuring 'inputs' and 'outcomes' of schooling. Important as statistics and data-based analysis are, sheer weight of empirical evidence and filling of 'data gaps' will never suffice to explain why and how people – communities as well as individuals – learn. This seems to be all the more true at a local and culturally specific level where practice and relationships matter the most. Analysis can be impoverished by a reductionist paradigm in which it is asserted that complex social phenomena can be observed in a causal relationship based on isolation of component parts.

Something more was needed and that more must involve dialogue across the artificial boundaries of knowledge domains, methodologies and fixed job roles that industrial era formal education and public governance systems have erected. What continues to fascinate me is the idea of synthesis. Reaching for a synthesis of different perspectives and methodologies is about recognising the truth and relevance in 'both and' rather than 'either or'.

Appendix II

Issues in the Measurement of Objective Well-Being.

We can define a number of key indicators of OWB based on access to economic goods, income, education, health as well as public goods such as the right to vote and participate in community governance. This entails an explicit value judgement on the part of the researcher or user of data. Certain goods are deemed to be relevant to total well-being in a society and in deciding to include these, particular weights are attached to each component (reflecting ‘values’ attached to each). There are at least four crucial dimensions to OWB that are frequently ignored either conceptually or on grounds of practical measurement. These are the:

- Scope of activities contributing to OWB;
- The distribution of individual or group well-being in measures of OWB;
- The contribution of activities to OWB over time and across generations; and
- The relationship between Objective and Subjective aspects of well-being.

A key dimension of objective well-being measures is *social equity*. Distributional considerations arise in any measure of well-being. The marginal utility of an additional euro of income or consumption is not the same for different individuals at different levels of income. An extra euro is worth more, on average, in a deprived country or region than in a prosperous one. Diener and Fujita (1995) report a positive relationships between low levels of social inequality across countries and average levels of SWB, controlling for other factors. Extra income at the margin has a larger impact on SWB of the poor than the rich. However, as inequality in income diminishes, the marginal impact of extra income for the poor tends to fall (Layard, 2003b).

OWB measures such as those based on aggregate Gross Domestic Product (or Gross National Income) fail to reflect social preferences concerning equity goals. But, the same holds for measures of subjective well-being. Typically, both aggregate and individual measures of well-being are based on individual-level observation and avoid the question of whether the given distribution of life opportunities is socially desirable or just.

Current economic production is measured with reference to a limited period of time – a year or less. Changes are calculated from year to year. However, some economic activity contributes to changes in the stock of 'capital' – including environmental, social and human capital. Hence, these changes need to be estimated and netted out. The discounted value of economic activity is a crucial dimension of well-being. Furthermore, the impact of economic activity on subjective evaluations of well-being (e.g. through greater unemployment risk or pressure of working and commuting time) is not accounted for in measures based on money income.

The exclusive use of Gross Domestic or National Product as a yardstick of economic well-being flow in any period of time is not without merit. The advantage is that it is simple to use and objective to the extent that it based on a single *numéraire* – the monetary value of all goods and services produced and exchanged in markets or quasi-public markets. A euro of goods produced in the steel industry generates the same financial flow as a euro of services sold by a lawyer to a firm. The results of aggregation to calculate GDP per capita can be compared across countries and over time given broadly comparable understandings and classifications of economic activities in the *System of National Accounts* used by National Statistical Offices throughout the world.

In the case of service industries, measures are based on income derived from the sale of productive factor services (labour, physical capital). However, no adjustment is made for the quality of outputs of such activity. For example, expenditure on health or education services may be poorly related to the consumption or well-being value of such services. A euro spent on schools at primary level may be matched by a much different quality of learning experience and associated human well-being at different points of time. As *numéraire*, money is an imprecise guide to the potential of goods and services to create human well-being. Prices of goods and services bought adjust to market demand and supply as preferences of market agents are revealed. However, the less tangible and non-market economic activities that yield opportunities for human well-being are difficult to price and information may be poorly brokered – leading to a discrepancy between price and true human value to various economic agents.[76]

In the calculus of current-period GDP flows and in the absence of adjustment for changes in environmental or social capital, economic activities such as litigation or pollution-generating manufacture are counted as if they were additions to well-being. The flow of activity (whether as production, income or expenditure, consumption) and the stock of wealth accumulated (whether as tangible or intangible capital) do not, themselves, constitute well-being. Rather, it provides *opportunities* for well-being. The distribution of opportunities as well as the satisfaction that individuals and groups derive from these flows facilitates the attainment of well-being.

In *The Well-Being of Nations* report (OECD 2001) the term 'social regrettables' was used to refer to activities required to meet the needs of insurance, litigation or security but which did not add to total well-being. These activities may contribute to the well-being of some in compensation for losses incurred as a result of externalities imposed by other agents. However, such activities do not generally add to total human well-being and, consequently, need to be 'netted out' from GDP.[77] Hence, an alternative and wider framework for capturing OWB than that based on GDP or similar monetary measures is needed.

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[76] The saying: 'a people [who] know the price of everything and the value of nothing' has been attributed to Oscar Wilde.

[77] Although the vindication of one person's rights in a legal case may represent a significant addition to that person's well-being and, to the extent that society values such rights, the well-being of the whole society.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has reviewed a number of alternative existing measures. These are not elaborated on here but the reader is referred to (OECD, 2001: 73-9).

Amartya Sen proposes human development as a broader concept and measure of human well-being. Empirically, it has been adapted by the *United Nations Development Programme* as an index based on life expectancy, average years of schooling in the adult population together with literacy and GDP per capita adjusted for purchasing power parity (*Human Development Index* HDI). However, the calculation of the HDI and its associated measure of human poverty – HPI2 (human poverty index 2 used for 17 economically developed countries) has been justifiably criticised by many writers including, in the case of HP12, McCoy et al. (2002)[78]. Robert Erikson (1993) refers to many factors that individuals draw on to realise their goals against a background of social responsibility and solidarity. A wave of ‘Level of Living’ Surveys took place in the Scandinavian countries from the late 1960s onwards. Level of living has been defined by Erikson (1993: 72) as:

> The individual's command over resources in the form of money, possessions, knowledge, mental and physical energy, social relations, security and so on, through which the individual can control and consciously direct his living conditions.

Hence, Erikson looks at non-material resources as well as economic ones. However, the approach, in its application, is objective in so far as experts agree on what resources people need and measure these on a common playing field.

The term *economic* well being has been understood by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2001: 11) as referring to

[78] Principal among the defects of the HPI2 indicator is its reliance on arbitrary aggregation of different metric measures (e.g. percentage of long-term unemployed and percentage of adults with low literacy) as well as the dated nature of values for income inequality, adult literacy and unemployment.

well-being '*flowing from economic activity.*' It is related to the satisfaction of wants in the context of scarcity of resources. All human activity and endeavour including caring, nurturing and serving the needs of others potentially generates human well-being. Presumably all such activity is subject to constraints of ability, time, resources and opportunity as well as human agency, decision and response. In this sense all human activity has an economic dimension (as well as social, cognitive and ethical). Consequently, I do not view 'economic well-being' as a meaningful term.[79] There is just human well-being. Lionel Robbins (1952: 16) has defined economics as an analytical science which is concerned about *all* types of human behaviour and not just certain types of behaviour relating to the market or the production of tangible goods:

> Economics is the science which studies human behaviour as a relationship between given ends and scarce means which have alternative uses.

[79] The OECD use of the term 'economic well-being' arose from work that I undertook while at OECD. Together with other colleagues, I sought to enlarge the understanding of economic welfare away from a narrow focus on GDP measures without reference to inter-generational or inter-temporal externalities or the production of goods and services outside the market or measurable public services. However, in light of my comments in this Appendix, I now discard the term in favour of 'human well-being' – which has two dimensions, subjective and objective.

Appendix III

Recent Trends and International Comparisons in Relation to Social Capital in Ireland

From limited data sources, it is possible to conclude that Ireland appears to be above average compared to most European countries in measures of engagement, volunteering and trust. Data from the *European Values Survey* shown in Table III.1 suggest that levels of inter-personal trust, here are lower than many other countries. For example, reported trust was 35% in 1999 in Ireland compared to 40% in Northern Ireland, 30% in the Great Britain and over 60% in most Scandinavian countries. However, reported inter-personal trust was as low as 20% in Eastern and Central European countries. Local community involvement appears to be about average here. Hoewever, there are likely to be subtle differences with respect to which dimension of social engagement is measured. A headcount of memberships of voluntary associations may, for example, miss out on the quality of such engagement.

With regard to trends over time, the *European Values Survey* data in Table 111.1 show a fall in reported inter-personal trust during between 1981 (41%) and 1999 (36%)[80]. The NESF Survey of Social Capital is not directly comparable to the EVS results since the former included a response category of 'depends on the people in question', which was not contained in the EVS survey questionnaire. According to the EVS (cited in Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott, 2005: Figure 5.6), levels of trust in various types of institutions have been reasonably stable here between 1981 and 1999 (with the possible exception of trust in the Churches).

[80] However, the corresponding figure rose to 47% in 1990. Given the vague and non-specific nature of the underlying question on trust – 'In general, do you think that most people can be trusted?', fluctuations in the reported level of trust are likely from year to year as well as from survey to survey.

The proportion of adults spending some time in clubs and voluntary associations in the previous 12 months was 65% in Ireland in 1999 compared to an average of 48% across 32 European countries (Halman, 2001: 36). In a list of civic associations, Ireland had average to above-average rates of membership in the following: sporting, educational, artistic, cultural, religious, local community, youth and women's groups (Halman, 2001). According to the same data source (Halman, 2001: 28), rates of volunteering were above average for (a) sports and recreation organisations (14% here compared to 7% on average in Europe) and (b) religious-based organisations (8% here compared to 6% on average in Europe).

Trust in relation to specific institutions such as the civil service, courts, politicians or Churches was the highest of any country in 1999 (Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott, 2005). The average score for Ireland was 2.77 in 1999 on a scale of 1 to 4 (where 2 = not very much and 3 = quite a lot). Institutions which tended to attract the highest level of public confidence among the Irish public in 1999 were (as measured by the proportion of respondents saying that they had a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence): the education system (86%) and the Church (52%). The corresponding average European figures were 71% and 55%. An alternative data source to that of the *European Values Survey* is the Eurobarometer. It shows that, in 2001, average trust levels in four types of institutions (political parties, civil service, national government and national parliament) in Ireland was in sixth place out of the 15 EU Member States (Eurobarometer no. 55 cited in Lyberaki and Paraskevopoulos, 2002). Trust in the civil service in Ireland was third highest of the 15 EU States, according to the latter data source.

There are few available indicators of informal sociability cross-nationally. However, Stewart (2001) reports data from the *European Community Household Panel Survey* that place Ireland at the top of a number of European countries with respect to the proportion of respondents who reported seeing friends or speaking to neighbours at least once a week. The figure was 99% in Ireland marginally ahead of Greece, Spain and the United Kingdom. France recorded the lowest figure at 73%.

Voter turnout is about average in Ireland. At 63% in the 2002 general election, the turnout in parliamentary elections here in recent years has tended to be less than in Scandinavian countries as well as Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands (NESF, 2003: 123). However, it is higher here than in the United Kingdom, United States, Japan and France. In common with the USA and UK, levels of turnout have dropped sharply here over the last two decades and the level is less than in many other European countries. According to the European Values Survey, 32% of respondents in the European Values Survey stated that politics was important in their lives, compared to 34% on average across Europe (Halman, 2001: 11). However, 40% of respondents never "discuss political matters" when they get together with friends compared to an average of 28% across Europe.

Table III.1

Summary of European Comparisons of Engagement and Volunteering and Trust, 1999

	Membership of at least one voluntary organisations	Unpaid voluntary work for at least one voluntary association	Proportion of respondents saying 'most people can be trusted'
Sweden	96.2	56.4	66.3
Iceland	93.1	32.6	41.1
Netherlands	93.0	49.7	59.7
Denmark	84.9	38.3	66.5
Finland	80.0	38.4	58.0
Austria	67.0	30.8	33.9
Belgium	65.5	35.8	29.3
Slovakia	64.7	51.2	15.7
Czech Republic	59.5	32.5	23.9
Luxembourg	59.0	30.6	25.9
Ireland	**56.8**	**31.3**	**35.2**
Slovenia	51.7	28.5	21.7
Germany	50.8	21.3	34.8
Greece	48.1	33.7	19.1
Northern Ireland	47.1	22.3	39.5
Belarus	45.8	18.8	41.9
Croatia	43.1	23.6	20.5
Malta	42.2	28.6	20.7
Italy	42.1	26.1	32.6
France	38.5	26.1	22.2
Great Britain	34.2	-	29.8
Ukraine	34.1	13.1	27.2
Estonia	33.1	17.8	22.9
Russia	32.2	7.9	23.7
Latvia	31.4	22.4	17.1
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

Hungary	29.2	14.8	21.8
Poland	25.8	13.7	18.9
Portugal	23.6	13.8	-
Romania	21.1	15.7	10.1
Bulgaria	20.4	16.5	26.9
Lithuania	16.6	13.6	24.9

Source: *European Values Survey*, Halman (2001: 44) and Data from Central Archive for Empirical Social Research (ZA).

Comparisons over time are even more difficult to make. Although Putnam (2000) has provided convincing evidence that nearly most available indicators of social capital in the United States point downwards since the mid-1960s, the picture elsewhere is much less clear (Putnam, 2002). Some measures of social capital such as inter-personal trust and political engagement (e.g. voting) are in decline in a number of European countries (OECD 2001; NESF 2003). However, the evidence for a net decline in volunteering, membership of civic associations, informal sociability and social support does not hold up in countries such as United Kingdom, Netherlands and Germany. Caution is needed in interpreting all of the above findings as the data are not always comparable over time and the quality of social engagement is poorly measured (although this is less true in the case of US data).

Anecdotal evidence abounds in Ireland about how increasingly hard it is to involve people as volunteers whether in sports, parents' associations in schools or other activities. It is difficult to subject these claims to reliable empirical tests in the absence of comparable data over time in Ireland. No agency thought it sufficiently important or feasible to measure trends in 'social capital' over time using comparable survey questions and methodologies.

In relation to membership of voluntary association, the evidence is conflicting. Donoghue (2002) suggests some reduction in volunteering in the mid-1990s, (with a decline in rates of volunteering from 39 to 33% for the adult population over the six-year period to 1998). Fahey, Hayes and Sinnott (2005: Figure 5.5) used EVS data to suggest that volunteering and membership of voluntary associations has been on the increase between 1990 and 1999 (from 49 to 57%). There are few alternative sources of data to confirm these trends. Quite apart from 'traditional' forms of voluntary and community engagement, people may be opting for alternative forms (possibly less permanent and less visible) that are poorly measured in surveys.

An important consideration is the extent to which new social movements have emerged to replace older, more traditional forms. The new forms typically organised around local or particular identities and shared interests such as gender or 'single issue' politics. Identity is fluid and shifting. Hence, badges such as 'Irish,' 'Catholic,' 'Protestant', 'Socialist', 'Dubliner' etc are probably less relevant than in the past as symbols of identity. If this is true, forms of belonging and engagement are less place-specific or assumed as a result of inheritance or family background.

Appendix IV

National Economic and Social Forum Questionnaire for the Survey of Social Capital in Ireland (2002)

(undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute as a supplement to the EU Consumer Survey, August 2002)

Now, I would like to ask you a few questions on the amount of time you spend on various activities.

S1 *First, could you tell me how much time you spend travelling between home and work on an average day?*

(a) Home to work _____ hrs _____ mins
(b) Work to home ____ hrs ____ mins
(c) Not applicable / No paid work…❒

S2 *How much time would you spend watching TV on an average weekday?*

hours ______ minutes

S3a *Do you take part in any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside your own home or workplace on a REGULAR basis? Examples of such voluntary activity would include helping with fund-raising; visiting the elderly; St. Vincent de Paul or other charity work; coaching in a sports club etc.*

Yes.......... ❒1 ——▶ S3b How regularly? _________________
No........... ❒2

S4 *In the last 12 months have you been actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group such as a sports, residents or professional association, parish group, political party, trade union etc. By active involvement I mean attending meetings, being a committee member or taking responsibility for some activity?* [Int. Please note that attendance at mass or church service is not included].

Yes, actively involved .... ❒
No, not actively involved....... ❒

S5 *Please name up to three of the most important voluntary or community organisations in which you were actively involved.*

1. ________________________ *2.* _________________________ *3.* ________________________

[Int. If church is mentioned make sure this is not attendance at mass or service only. Amend S4 if necessary].

S6 *During the last 12 months have you:* [Int. Tick Yes or No for each]

	Yes	No
Attended a public meeting	❐	❐
Joined an action group of any kind	❐	
Contacted an appropriate organisation to deal with a particular problem (e.g. a local county council or residents association)	❐	
Contacted a T.D, public official or local representative	❐	
Undertaken unpaid voluntary work in a political party	❐	
Made a voluntary donation of money e.g. to charities, school, church	❐	
Written to a newspaper	❐	
Contacted or appeared on radio/TV	❐	

S7 *Did you vote in the general election in May 2002?*

Yes ❐ No❐

S8a *In the past 4 weeks have you visited anyone in their home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide them with some form of voluntary help or assistance in their home?*

Yes ❐ No ❐

S8b *In the past 4 weeks has anyone visited you in your home, apart from a family member or other relative, as part of a social visit or perhaps to provide you with some form of voluntary help or assistance in your home?*

Yes ❐ No ❐

S9 *When I talk about, "close friends" I mean people whom you feel at ease with, whom you can talk to about personal matters, share a confidence with, seek advice from or call upon for practical help. So how many close friends would you say you have among your:*

Neighbours __________ Work Associates ________
Relatives who don't live with you ________ Others ________

S10 *[Int. check answer to Q 18 (Consumer Survey) above. If there are no children under 18 years in the household go to S11. If there are children under 18 years of age in the household continue].*

In the past 12 months have you received any regular, practical help in bringing up children under 18 years from any of the following people. The help I'm referring to would include childcare, transport with children or help with domestic tasks. [Int. Tick Yes, No or NA for each]

	Yes	No	Not applicable
1 Friends	❒	❒	❒
2 Neighbours	❒	❒	❒
3 One of your own parents	❒	❒	❒
4 The parent(s) of your spouse/partner	❒	❒	❒
5 Ex-spouse/partner not in household	❒	❒	❒

S11a *Have there been times in the last year when you have felt cut off or isolated from people in general or felt that you couldn't socialise or meet people as much as you would like due to, lets say, work commitments, family responsibilities or caring for children or other persons, transport problems etc.*

Yes.. ❒

No.. ❒ Go to S12

S11b Would you say you felt isolated or unable to meet other people as much as you would like because of:

	Yes	No	NA
1. Work commitments	❒1	❒2	❒3
2. Childcare responsibilities	❒1	❒2	❒3
3. Other caring responsibilities	❒1	❒2	❒3

[Int. Tick Yes, No or NA for each]

	Yes	No
4. Lack of own transport		
5. Irregular/expensive public transport	❒1	❒2
6. Problems with physical access	❒1	❒2
7. Lack of places to meet others outside the home	❒1	❒2

[Int. Tick Yes or No for each]

S12 Do you meet up with your family or friends as much as you would like?

Yes ❒ if yes ⟶ Go to S14
No ❒

S13 Do the following factors prevent you from meeting up with family or friends more often?

	Yes	No	NA
1. Lack of time due to paid work.......................	❒	❒	❒
2. Lack of time due to childcare responsibilities	❒	❒	❒
3. Lack of time due to other caring responsibilities	❒	❒	❒
4. Can't go out because of other caring responsibilities	❒	❒	❒
5. No vehicle	❒	❒	❒
6. Poor public transport	❒	❒	❒
7. Problems with physical access	❒	❒	❒
8. Too ill, sick or disabled	❒	❒	❒

S14 *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people or it depends on the people in question?*

Most people can be trusted	❐1
You can't be too careful	❐2
Depends on the people in question	❐3
Don't know	❐4

S15 *Thinking of your workplace. Would you agree that most people in your workplace can be trusted?*

Strongly Agree	❐1
Agree	❐2
Disagree	❐3
Strongly Disagree	❐4
Not Applic/Don't know	❐5

S16 *All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days. Where would you place yourself in terms of overall satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 where '0' means you are "very dissatisfied" to '10' which means you are "very satisfied" [Interviewer circle one number 0 to 10 to indicate level of satisfaction].*

Very Dissatisfied → Satisfied

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

S17 *Thinking about your current address, when did you start living there?*

___________ month _______ year

S18 *Is your accommodation:*

Owned outright (no mortgage) ❐1

Rented from a Private Landlord.. ❐3
Owned with an outstanding mortgage................................. ❐2
Rented from a Local Authority .... ❐4
Other (specify) ❐5

S19 *Which of the following would you say best describes how often would you generally attend religious services?*

More than once per week ....❐1
Once per week ....❐2
Once per month ....❐3
Several times per year......................❐4
Once a year.....................................❐5
Less often ....❐6
Never..❐7
Refused ....❐8

S20 *Which of the following would you say best describes the size of the location where you live?*

Open Country	❒1
Village of less than 1,500 people......	❒2
Town of 1,500 – less 5,000 people ...	❒3
Town of 5,000 – less than 10,000 people	❒4
Town or city, 10,000 or more...........	❒5
Dublin City – Urban area	❒6
Dublin City – Rural areas	❒7

Appendix V

Detailed cross-tabulation of results in the NESF Survey of Social Capital

Table V.1 Measures of Volunteering and Community Engagement by Demographic Characteristics of Individuals

Percentage of adults who: (A) undertook any type of *unpaid voluntary activity* or service outside the home or workplace; (B) were *actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group* in the last 12 months; (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group; (C3) contacted an organisation; (C4) contacted a public representative; (C5) undertook voluntary work for a political party; (C6) wrote to a newspaper, (C7) contacted/appeared on radio/TV; (D) donated money to charity & other causes.

	Volunteered	Comm. member	Civic engagement (reference: last 12 months) data in column C denote occurrence of at least one type of civic engagement among respondents (C1, C2 thru C7)								Charity
	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Male	19.4	25.8	34.5	22.1	6.6	11.1	15.7	3.5	4.5	5.7	60.1
Female	15.3	18.4	27.2	13.4	4.4	10.3	13.1	2.7	2.5	3.2	66.5
Age: 18-29yrs	17.6	25.5	29.4	16.1	7.8	9.3	12.1	0.9	3.4	4.0	50.6
30-39yrs	19.3	20.7	35.8	20.2	3.8	13.5	16.8	3.3	3.2	4.8	68.8
40-49yrs	22.7	25.5	33.2	23.0	6.9	10.2	17.1	4.6	4.6	6.5	67.7
50-64yrs	18.7	25.7	37.8	21.1	4.2	15.2	18.0	5.8	4.6	5.4	72.2
65+yrs	6.0	7.2	14.8	6.6	3.3	3.9	6.7	1.1	1.1	1.1	62.6
Married/cohabiting	20.3	26.4	36.0	22.5	6.9	14.0	16.3	4.4	3.8	4.2	70.6
Widowed	9.1	8.4	17.6	15.7	5.9	7.8	17.3	3.8	3.8	5.9	63.5
Never married	16.8	20.8	28.6	3.8	1.6	4.7	9.6	2.4	1.6	0	53.5
Separated/divorced	12.3	19.6	19.6	15.6	4.2	8.4	12.1	1.7	4.0	5.7	56.9

Table V.2 Measures of Volunteering and Community Engagement by Socio-economic Characteristics of Individuals

Percentage of adults who: (A) undertake any type of unpaid voluntary activity or service outside the home or workplace; (B) were actively involved in any type of voluntary or community group in the last 12 months; (C1) attended a public meeting; (C2) joined an action group; (C3) contacted an organisation; (C4) contacted a public representative; (C5) voluntary work for a political party; (C6) written to a newspaper, (C7) contacted/appeared on radio/TV; (D) donated money to charity & other causes.

	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Employment status: At work	20.0	27.3	35.8	22.6	7.5	13.4	15.5	3.8	4.0	5.8	66.2
Retired	10.6	10.1	18.6	8.6	2.1	7.1	10.7	0.7	2.2	1.4	65.7
Full-time in education	19.8	24.8	23.8	13.0	3.0	7.1	8.0	1.0	6.0	2.0	38.0
Unemployed/sick/disability	26.4	25.5	34.5	20.0	1.9	7.4	22.2	7.1	0	7.3	37.5
Domestic duties	10.3	11.2	24.1	10.2	2.8	6.6	14.4	2.9	2.8	2.4	71.2
Income: First income quartile	8.7	8.7	18.4	1.9	1.0	2.9	12.0	1.0	0	1.0	61.0
Second income quartile	13.7	15.3	22.5	13.9	1.2	7.1	11.8	3.0	1.8	2.9	58.8
Third income quartile	19.5	21.6	33.5	23.8	5.0	12.9	15.4	4.5	2.5	5.0	64.2
Fourth income quartile	24.6	31.7	35.8	18.7	8.2	13.5	15.1	2.4	5.4	4.7	69.6
Missing	7.5	13.8	30.1	20.2	5.8	9.3	14.2	4.0	3.1	6.2	54.2

Table V.2 continued

	A	B	C	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	D
All respondents	17.3	22.0	30.8	17.7	5.5	10.7	14.4	3.1	3.5	4.5	63.3
Occupation: Self-employed	31.4	25.5	39.2	17.6	7.8	27.5	21.6	3.9	7.8	5.9	66.7
Farmer	11.5	18.7	29.2	24.8	6.8	12.4	15.5	2.9	4.8	5.8	59.0
Professional	30.1	35.3	40.1	24.3	5.9	12.9	15.1	1.6	3.7	4.8	71.0
Other non-manual	19.6	22.8	35.7	19.2	5.6	11.6	17.3	3.5	4.3	7.1	68.8
Skilled manual	14.1	22.6	28.6	15.9	7.5	7.9	11.7	5.6	1.9	3.3	57.9
Unskilled manual	11.9	11.5	21.1	12.4	2.6	9.0	13.3	1.1	1.6	1.6	65.1
Never worked	4.1	11.3	21.2	8.2	4.2	6.3	8.5	1.1	3.1	1.0	52.6
Occupier status: Owns home	18.0	22.9	29.8	17.7	5.0	10.8	13.7	3.1	3.8	4.0	63.7
Privately rented	18.9	22.2	55.6	27.8	22.2	13.0	16.7	3.7	3.7	18.5	68.5
Local Authority rented	7.3	13.6	25.9	13.4	0	4.9	21.0	2.4	0	2.4	58.0
Education: Primary level	6.3	11.0	21.9	13.0	3.3	5.1	8.2	3.0	2.2	2.2	64.8
Junior Certificate	15.5	16.4	27.5	14.5	6.8	10.9	14.8	4.1	1.8	4.4	55.9
Leaving Certificate	21.3	25.8	31.0	17.0	4.0	11.5	14.3	2.5	4.4	5.3	62.6
Post Leaving Certificate	24.1	29.5	37.0	21.3	6.3	13.6	21.0	2.6	6.3	1.3	68.8
Third level	27.0	39.7	49.4	32.3	8.4	17.3	20.0	3.2	7.1	8.4	76.0

Table V.3 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Demographic Characteristics of Individuals

	Voting	Informal Social Support		Informal Sociability			Feelings of Social Isolation		Trust
	E	F		G	G1	G2	H1	H2	I
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Visited by someone at one’s own home – last 4 weeks	Did not feel cut off or isolated – last 12 months	Meet up with family/friends as much likes	Agrees that ‘most people can be trusted’
All respondents	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Male	75.9	45.5	57.8	58.6	48.3	50.0	85.7	83.6	25.9
Female	76.0	49.8	55.0	67.9	52.2	53.8	83.7	84.3	23.3
Age: 18-29yrs	48.8	43.6	55.7	53.9	49.4	47.6	83.0	81.5	23.9
30-39yrs	77.4	65.1	68.4	61.0	55.1	50.8	78.0	83.4	23.5
40-49yrs	86.2	47.1	55.1	59.6	50.2	48.6	86.6	80.6	20.3
50-64yrs	90.3	24.0	51.9	62.7	52.4	53.6	88.0	84.6	27.2
65+yrs	^	16.7	52.9	68.3	44.3	62.6	87.4	92.3	27.9
Married/cohabiting	86.3	54.7	55.7	62.1	52.1	53.8	83.6	79.5	21.7
Widowed	85.8	^	49.1	68.7	45.8	63.4	85.6	90.2	29.0
Never married	57.3	^	60.5	55.4	48.8	46.6	85.0	87.5	27.3
Separated/divorced	76.8	38.5	52.2	57.1	53.6	43.9	91.2	92.9	23.2

Note F1* denotes that data in this column refer only to households with children under the age of 18. The data are based on a sample of 500 respondents for most variables (e.g. 504 for gender and 501 for the age-breakdown). F2 denotes percentage of respondents in each category that reported eight ‘close friends’ or more from among neighbours, relatives (not living at home), work associates and others. ^ denotes a total sample size of less than 30 in the total number of respondents across all response categories. The data are, accordingly, suppressed.

Table V.4 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Socio-Economic Characteristics of Individuals

	Voting	Informal Social Support		Informal Sociability			Feelings of Social Isolation		Trust
	E	F		G	G1	G2	E	F	G
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ ‘close friends’	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)
All respondents	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Employment: Work	78.7	54.6	61.0	59.9	52.8	51.4	84.4	81.1	22.8
Retired	94.2	^	52.0	65.2	49.6	56.7	87.9	90.8	29.8
Full-time education	24.8	17.4	51.6	61.4	54.5	47.5	87.1	88.0	41.0
Unempl./sick/disabil.	61.8	^	50.0	30.9	25.5	18.2	80.0	85.5	14.5
Domestic duties	83.6	48.2	48.4	65.7	47.7	61.6	83.3	87.0	22.2
Income: First quartile	77.2	^	42.7	69.9	45.2	62.5	76.9	84.6	26.2
Second quartile	89.7	52.1	52.9	59.3	44.6	53.4	89.3	89.8	26.6
Third income quartile	82.0	54.1	63.2	61.7	51.9	49.5	81.1	84.0	18.9
Fourth quartile	74.1	45.8	56.7	57.1	51.1	48.9	83.5	80.1	25.9
Missing	62.6	44.1	58.8	62.0	53.9	54.4	90.4	86.8	24.9

Table V.5 Measures of Voting, Informal Social Networks and Trust by Other Characteristics of Individuals

	Voting	Informal Social Support		Informal Sociability			Feelings of Social Isolation		Trust
	E	F		G	G1	G2	E	F	G
	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ 'close friends'	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)	Visited someone in their home – last 4 weeks	Voted in 2002 General Election	F1* Help with bringing up children – last 12 months)	F2 8+ 'close friends'	Visited or was visited (G1 or G2)
All respondents	75.9	47.8	56.4	60.3	50.3	51.9	84.7	84.0	24.6
Church: Once a month +	85.1	46.9	55.7	64.8	53.4	56.1	85.5	83.8	24.1
Less than once a month	59.7	49.3	57.5	51.3	43.6	43.9	82.7	84.2	25.4
TV: 0-60 minutes	78.8	45.2	58.2	61.1	50.1	52.5	83.4	78.0	23.8
61-120 minutes	74.9	57.4	58.9	65.0	56.7	56.2	83.5	84.6	26.7
121 minutes +	73.9	40.6	52.0	54.4	43.3	46.7	86.4	88.4	22.4
Education: Primary level	85.7	21.6	58.0	65.2	47.0	59.5	86.0	90.7	24.7
Junior Certificate	74.8	51.4	52.7	56.0	47.6	47.3	86.1	87.0	20.9
Leaving Certificate	63.7	48.0	57.1	57.3	50.2	47.9	82.3	79.6	24.6
Post Leaving Certificate	86.3	48.6	61.3	58.0	51.9	48.1	86.4	77.5	26.3
Third level	80.9	56.3	57.2	68.2	61.4	59.0	82.9	78.5	31.3

Appendix VI

Glossary of terms

[with reference by relevant section indicated in square brackets]

Active Citizenship – the active exercise of rights and responsibilities as members of a civic community. [13.5.4]

Bonding Social Capital – social ties and shared norms among families and other homogeneous groups. [5.3]

Bridging Social Capital – social ties and shared norms among groups that are different by reason of gender, age, ethnicity, etc. [5.3]

Capital – heterogeneous stocks of goods or relationships associated with a flow of human effort over time, which are potentially 'productive' of some personal or social gain in the future. [4.1]

Citizenship – the state of belonging to a society or community with prescribed rights and responsibilities in legal, social, economic and cultural domains. [13.1]

Civil society - the domain of secondary associations that is distinct from primary domains such as Families, Market and State. [7.3]

Community – a group of persons who share a common residential area or a common identity or interest (cultural, social, professional etc.). [7.3]

Community Development – 'a network of purposeful conversations about issues that concern them' Lillis (2001). [13.3]

Community efficacy – a shared sense of empowerment and capacity to effect change at the community level. [9.5]

Culture – that which transmits, legitimises and integrates values, knowledge and practices over time. [2.2.2]

Government Policy – a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by public authorities – possibly in consultation with other actors. [13.2]

Happiness – a subjective feeling of contentment or fulfilment by individuals. [chapter 2]

Human agency – 'for an individual to possess agency is for her to possess internal powers and capacities, which, through their exercise, make her an active entity constantly intervening in the course of events ongoing around her.' (Barnes, 2000: 25) [1.1]

Human Capability ─ The freedoms, efficacies, relationships and norms that enable individuals and groups to act in pursuit of the quality of living best suited to their needs, values and expectations. [4.1]

Human Capital ─ as used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – 'The knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being' (OECD, 2001: 18)

Human Capital ─ as re-defined in this study – the attributes, potential and capability of *individuals* to live a good life as judged by them in accordance with their needs, values and expectations. [6.7]

Human functionings – what individuals and groups can do with their human capabilities. [2.2.3]

Human Rights – **'**Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' – United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. [1.2]

Institutions – are decision-making mechanisms or rules that codify and formalise informal social norms and conventions. [7.3]

Justice – 'the administration of law or some other authority according to the principles of just behaviour and treatment' (Oxford English dictionary). [2.2.3]

Learning Organisations - are characterised by a joint and continuous effort by people in an organisation to learn; to share what is learned; and to apply it in pursuit of goals that matter to them. [12.3]

Lifelong Learning – human learning in any setting which takes place throughout the life cycle – from birth to death. [11.4]

Lifewide Learning – human learning which takes place in a wide range of settings from formal schooling to informal or experiential learning. [11.4]

Linking Social Capital - describes social ties and shared norms among groups in a social hierarchy (based on power, status or social advantage). [5.3]

Love – the capacity to desire the well-being of others as much as one's own and to act on this. [10.3.1]

Norms (of reciprocal behaviour) – 'specify how things should be done; they define legitimate means to pursue valued ends' Scott (1995: 37) [7.6]

Objective Well-Being – the realisation of the common good in a community and evaluated by that community or others as good. [2.1]

Organisations – all purposive market or non-market institutions other than families. [12.1]

Physical Capital – produced goods and tools for use in creating economic services. [4.7]

Policy – 'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organisation or individual' (Oxford English dictionary). [13.2]

Praxis – practice orientated towards the realisation of well-being. [10.3.1}

Public Policy – a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by key social stakeholders including public, private and civil society interests. [13.2]

Social Capital – as used by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the National Economic and Social Forum – 'networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups' OECD, 2001: 41).

Social Capital – as re-defined in this study – resources inherent in self-organised human *networks* based on reciprocal expectations and *obligations* (of support, engagement, delivery); *communication* of information, knowledge, informal norms, sanctions and understandings; and *belonging;* that facilitate collective action. [4.4]

Social Cohesion –a state of co-operation and effective functioning in the primary, secondary and tertiary domains of social belong – family, civil society, market and state. [14.2]

Social Economy –enterprises or activities that engage in 'not-for-profit' activity in the market to meet various social and economic needs. [7.3]

Social Inclusion – a process of full and unhindered cultural, social and economic participation by all individuals and groups regardless of sex, race, class or creed. [13.3]

Social Networks – a grouping of people who interact with each other on the basis of some shared interest or identity. [7.3].

Subjective Well-Being –informed desire-fulfilment by individuals and evaluated as good by individuals themselves. [2.1]

Subsidiarity implies a delegation of authority and responsibility to the lowest level of decision-making possible and to the highest level necessary - local, regional, national and international. [13.3]

Sustainable Development – 'Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.' From *Our Common Future* (The Brundtland Report, WCED, 1987: 43) [4.2]

Trust - a belief or expectation about the *good* intentions of others (familiars, strangers, specified groups, institutions). [7.5.1]

Values – 'conceptions of the preferred or the desirable together with the construction of standards to which existing structures or behaviour can be compared and assessed.' Scott (1995: 37). [7.6]

Volunteering - 'as the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or other causes,' (Government of Ireland, 2000b: 4: 30). [5.2.2]

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