

MASTER'S PROJECT
An Exploration of Millennial Public Sector Employees'
Approaches to Resilience and Wellbeing Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This study explored strategies that can be undertaken by individuals, communities, and organizations to improve the wellbeing and resilience of public sector employees aged 24-39 (millennials) in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Developing strong wellbeing and resilience skills is key to positive daily functioning and to getting through challenging situations. 2020 presented a unique opportunity to explore wellbeing and resilience during a time of unprecedented change and challenge. Enhanced understanding of how population groups were impacted and coped at this time could offer insight into ways they can thrive moving forward. The experiences of this population group both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic were examined, and similarities and differences in the ways they coped were considered.

While identifying ways people can thrive in their lives is valuable in its own right, it can also provide benefits to broader society. Thriving individuals are better positioned to do their best work, come up with creative solutions to complex problems, and contribute to building thriving communities (Fredrickson, 2004, p.1367; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5-13). Given the nature of public sector responsibilities including the development of public policy, stewardship of public funds, and delivery of essential services, public sector employee effectiveness is of importance to the public good. This report has not been prepared for a specific client and instead aims to provide recommendations to a diverse audience of individuals, community organizations, and public sector employers suggesting ways they can contribute to enhanced wellbeing and resilience of this population group.

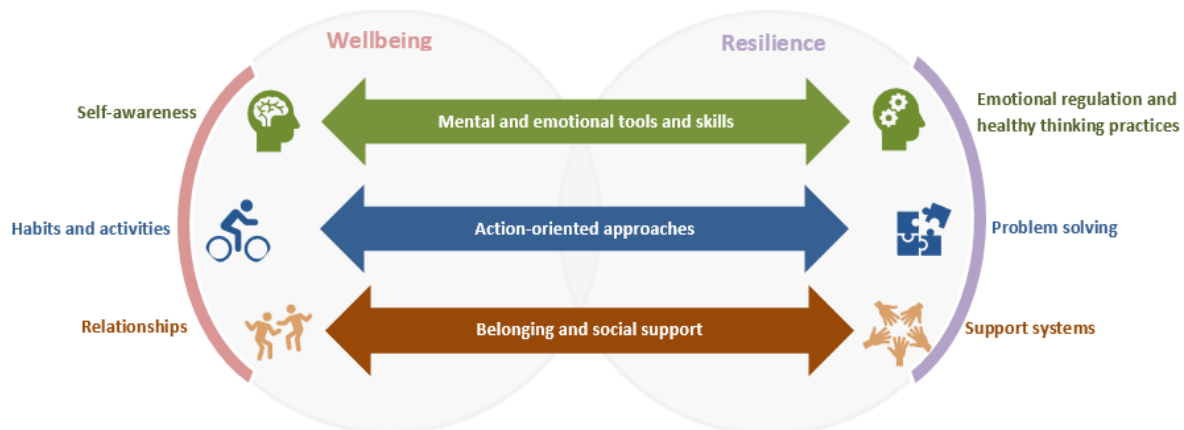
Methodology and Methods

The study was constructed and performed using asset-based approaches and the principles of appreciative inquiry, strengths-based positive psychology, and grounded theory. Data was collected through 14 semi-structured interviews with public sector employees aged 24-39 living in Edmonton, and a two-phase literature review. The first phase of the literature review examined existing frameworks related to wellbeing and resilience and resulted in this research being designed around a modified version of Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing. It asserts the elements that contribute to wellbeing are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health (Butler & Kern, 2016, p.2; Seligman, 2011, p.24). The interview questions were framed around these six elements and expected to identify specific personal approaches that individuals take within each element, as well as interventions in community and the workplace related to these elements that have a positive impact on their wellbeing. The semi-structured interviews resulted in the discovery of information that was not

anticipated and provided significant depth and clarity of information (Newcomer et al., 2015, p.385, 471). Thematic analysis and grounded theory methods were used to analyze the data and resulted in the development of a new framework to conceptualize the way study participants experienced wellbeing and resilience.

Key Findings

A new framework was developed; its foundation is the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and resilience. Improvement or losses in one area of wellbeing or resilience was described as having impacts on other areas. Three broad themes (mental and emotional tools and skills, action-oriented approaches, and belonging and social support) were found to be the key contributors to both wellbeing and resilience but contributed to each in different ways. For example, a participant who described group dance classes as a regular movement practice that contributes to her daily wellbeing indicated when facing a challenge, she takes walks alone in nature to determine how to tackle the problem. While both these approaches include action and movement, the way they are used and the way they impact daily life and challenging situations is notably different. As such, action-oriented approaches were broken down into two categories: regular habits and activities (e.g., the dance classes) which contribute more to daily wellbeing, and problem solving (e.g., the walk in nature) which contributes more to resilience. All three of the major themes were broken down similarly with some of the approaches contributing more to wellbeing and some more to resilience, and all showing reciprocal dynamics and interrelatedness.



None of the concepts shown in the framework are novel; all have been researched thoroughly and in diverse ways. However, the relationships between these concepts does not appear to be articulated in this way elsewhere in the literature. These unique findings are thought to be because of the design of this research. Most studies on wellbeing and resilience appear to focus on the components that contribute to only one of wellbeing or resilience, or on the relationship

between the two concepts (Tonkin et al., 2018, p.110). When they are studied together, it tends to be with the aim of defining and measuring them separately as opposed to looking at similarities and differences between the contributing factors of each (Mguni et al., 2012, p.12). Additionally, the semi-structured interviews were quite long (up to two hours in length) so participants were able to tell in depth stories about times when they experienced a high sense of wellbeing, what contributed to it, times they experienced challenges, and how they got through them, which revealed nuances about the similarities and differences between the tools they used in each type of situation.

Participants described using similar approaches to get through the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic as past challenges, so this framework is expected to continue to be applicable to this population group moving forward.

Recommendations

Overall, participants described incredibly powerful assets and comparatively minor gaps and challenges, especially as it related to their personal assets. A shift towards a strengths-based mindset at the individual, community, and organizational levels would make implementing these recommendations significantly more effective and could have an incredible impact on helping this group to thrive. For example, an individual who has strong self-awareness but limited habit-forming skills can use their self-awareness skills to form a new movement habit by identifying activities they enjoy, identifying current barriers to exercise, and putting structures in place to help them succeed. Another example is a work environment that has good team dynamics and psychological safety but unmanageable workloads. They can leverage the psychological safety asset to have honest and creative discussions about how to tackle workload issues.

Recommendation 1: Individuals may wish to make a personal commitment to improving their wellbeing and resilience and pursue approaches that work for them within the following five areas.

1a. Develop a movement practice. This was by far the most salient theme identified in this research. According to participants and the literature, developing a regular movement practice that a person truly enjoys is possibly the most influential thing they can do for their wellbeing.

1b. Work to build self-awareness. Identifying one's values, strengths, and personal preferences puts them in a position to build their life around things that make them feel happy and engaged.

1c. Learn emotional-regulation and healthy thinking practices. Developing a set of tools and skills in the areas of mindfulness, focusing on what is in control, gaining perspective and reframing, and self-compassion puts a person in a position to become more resilient as they can draw on varied practices in varying situations.

1d. Strengthen connections and relationships. Meaningful connections that foster a true sense of belonging is among the greatest contributors to wellbeing, resilience, longevity, and a meaningful life.

1e. Get involved in community. Getting involved in communities and connecting with people over shared hobbies, interests, activities, or causes provides a sense of purpose and enjoyment, and significantly contributes to wellbeing.

Recommendation 2: Community groups may consider increasing the availability of diverse supports, diverse ways to get involved, and inclusive and welcoming environments.

2a. Seek input from community members to create diverse offerings and opportunities to contribute that suit their needs. It is easier for community members to fully participate when there are diverse offerings and ways to contribute. This can allow them to both give and receive supports.

2b. Create inclusive and welcoming environments that foster social connection. Identify ways to increase interaction, socialization, and to make the environment more inclusive and comfortable for members.

Recommendation 3: Public sector employers may consider using targeted approaches to supporting the wellbeing and resilience of employees in several key areas.

3a. Build collaborative environments where psychological safety and healthy relationships are fostered. Passion and productivity for work is most strongly correlated with relational factors. Creating a safe and healthy work environment has incredible benefits to the employees and the employer.

3b. Provide diverse wellbeing supports that are aligned with employee needs and preferences. The Government of Alberta and the City of Edmonton already have diverse supports in place, which almost no participants seemed to be aware of or find useful. Further investigation of the needs of employees and feedback on existing (and possibly underutilized) supports may be needed.

3c. Support management of time and workload. Employers may consider ways to help employees find time to take care of their wellness by ensuring workload is reasonable and employees have access to the type of flexible work arrangements that will help them to manage their work and personal responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study intended to use a modified version of Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing to identify high impact actions individuals, communities, and employers can take in order to improve wellbeing and resilience of millennial public sector employees. The findings did not align with the Theory of Wellbeing as participants did not describe approaches to wellbeing and resilience that fit well within the six different elements. The new framework for wellbeing and resilience developed in this study can contribute to ongoing discussions in the academic community about the relationship between wellbeing and resilience, the factors that contribute to each, and specific mechanisms that can help individuals to increase their wellbeing and resilience.

This study also supports the notion that there is a need for studies about the nuanced needs of specific population groups. There is an incredible depth of research on the topics of wellbeing and resilience, and it can be challenging for an individual to identify what is relevant to them. Increased research that identifies approaches that work well for specific population groups could help individuals identify and focus their energy on high impact activities that are likely to help them thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

Issue Identification

In 2000, Martin Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, two prominent academics, appealed to the research community to shift focus from primarily studying mental illness in favour of wellbeing, to determine “what makes life worth living” and to help the general population live more fulfilling lives (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5). They suggested that in addition to the inherent benefit of helping individuals thrive, this could lead to broader benefits as thriving individuals could help create thriving communities and societies (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.5-13). Wellbeing is not about feeling good all the time. Challenges are part of life and it is important and normal to experience disappointment, failure, and grief; however, wellbeing can be compromised if people are not able to manage these experiences (Huppert, 2009, p.137). Resilience is a person’s ability to manage and recover from difficult situations (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.1-2). While there has been a notable increase in research exploring these topics, it has been suggested there is a need for nuanced studies about ways to enhance wellbeing and resilience of particular population groups in specific contexts (Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Lambert et al., 2009; p.461).

Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in interest in employee wellbeing and how private companies can create environments where employees thrive and do their best work; however, there has been limited research on the wellbeing of public sector employees (Lahat & Ofek, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a slight increase in attention to public sector employee wellbeing as they developed and delivered new financial support programs and delivered essential services to the public in new and creative ways as part of government crisis responses (Schuster et al., 2020, p.792). Public sector workers in diverse roles faced changes to where they worked, how they worked, and their responsibilities at a time when their capacity and effectiveness became more essential; it was argued that promptly addressing the challenges they faced, so they could do their best work, would be essential to an effective pandemic response (Schuster et al., 2020, p.792-795). This logic can be applied more broadly. Given the nature of public sector responsibilities including the development of public policy, stewardship of public funds, and delivery of essential services, public sector employee effectiveness is always of importance to the public good. Identifying and addressing the unique needs of public sector employees and working to improve their wellbeing and resilience will continue to be critical after the pandemic.

The purpose of this research is therefore to add to the body of knowledge about wellbeing and resilience of public sector employees. It will be examined among individuals aged 24-39 and employed directly with a government ministry or municipality in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

2020 presented a unique opportunity to explore wellbeing and resilience during a time of unprecedented change and challenge. Enhanced understanding of how this population group (and others) were impacted and coped at this time could offer insight into ways they can thrive moving forward.

Project Objectives and Research Questions

With the aim of adding to the body of knowledge about wellbeing and resilience and supporting the need for nuanced research about specific population groups, this study has identified roles individuals, communities, and employers can play in supporting the wellbeing and resilience of public sector employees aged 24-39 (millennials). The research identifies personal approaches that are working for this population, supports being accessed through communities and employers, and assets and gaps in supports. Similarities and differences between how individuals have managed the challenges experienced in 2020 relative to other times in their lives are also examined and recommendations made for interventions to improve the wellbeing and resilience of this group moving forward.

Primary Research Question

What strategies can be undertaken by individuals, communities, and organizations to improve the wellbeing and resilience of millennial public sector employees in Edmonton?

Research Sub-questions

Which personal approaches to wellbeing and resilience have worked well for this population? Which external supports and resources have worked well for this population? How can these assets be leveraged? What kind of interventions would fill gaps and help improve the wellbeing and resilience of this population?

Key Definitions

Some of the terminology used throughout this report appears in the literature with multiple meanings and are used interchangeably with other terms. To increase clarity, key terms are defined below.

Wellbeing

For the purpose of this research, wellbeing is defined as the experience of life going well, which includes positive functioning and feelings of fulfillment and satisfaction (Diener & Chan, 2011, p.34-35; Huppert & So, 2013, p.838, 849). Wellbeing is a multidimensional construct meaning that many different elements contribute to a person's experience of wellbeing (e.g. positive emotions and relationships, among others) (Seligman, 2011, p.15).

Resilience

For the purpose of this research, resilience is defined as the ability to persevere and adapt when things go awry; this refers to managing small daily struggles or large life changing traumas; it is also a multi-dimensional construct with many contributing factors (Reivich and Shatte, 2003, p.1-5).

Mental Health

Mental health is a widely used term with many different definitions. The Government of Canada defines mental health as a person's state of psychological and emotional wellbeing, a necessary resource for living a healthy life, and a main factor in overall health (Health Canada, 2020). The World Health Organization emphasizes that mental health is more than the absence of mental disorders (WHO, 2018). The literature commonly uses the terms wellbeing and mental health interchangeably, which will be the case in this report when relevant mental health research is referenced. It is important to note that mental health is a complex concept that is not fully explored in this research. The relationship between wellbeing/mental health and mental illness is explored in the literature review.

Public Sector

Most broadly, the public sector can be defined as all aspects of the economy that are tied to programs or services that are controlled by any level of government; meaning it does not include private companies or voluntary organizations (Kent State University, 2020; Wegrich, 2014). This can include those who provide a broad range of public services such as police, military, public transit operators, teachers, health care providers, staff at public colleges, staff with municipalities and government ministries who develop and deliver government programs, among others (Kent State University, 2020; Wegrich, 2014). For the purpose of this research, the public sector will be defined in a more limited way to include only "core government agencies and departments", which means participants work directly for a municipality or government ministry (Kent State University, 2020), as individuals in more diverse public sector roles will likely have differing needs that should be considered in separate studies.

Background

This section provides some context that helps frame the scope and rationale for this research. Local and situational context as it relates to events of 2020, the impacts on Alberta, employer commitments to employee wellbeing, recent experiences of public sector employees in Edmonton, and public perception of the public sector are described. The need for tailored programming in order to meet the needs of specific population groups is considered along with an overview of the differing needs of generational cohorts, some of what is known about the

specific needs of millennials and public sector employees, and ways the needs of this population can be identified.

Local and Situational Context

A Challenging Year. The events of 2020 including the COVID-19 pandemic, its associated isolation requirements, the global economic recession, broader shifts in economic conditions, social movements, and the United States presidential election have created challenges and the need for resilience for people around the world (Blake & Wadhwa, 2020; Mounk, 2021). A tool that measures collective wellbeing around the world using social media data found that May 31, 2020 was the saddest day on record since the tool was developed in 2007 (Schwartz, 2020). It showed that feelings of sadness, anxiety, depression, stress, and suicidal thoughts were higher in 2020 than in the same months in 2019; and it also noted extended periods of negative feelings including collective depressed moods every day for up to full months at a time (Schwartz, 2020).

Alberta Context. In Alberta, the impacts of the events of 2020 have been significant. In terms of political discourse and social cohesion, Alberta has seen an increasing divide; the political and economic landscape has been described as similar to the United States in terms of large segments of the population being dislocated from their main employment industry and a related increase in populism and divisive politics (Bench, 2021; Mertz, 2021b). In addition to an increasingly tense political context in Alberta, the direct impacts of the pandemic and associated economic recession have been severe as unemployment rates were among the highest in the country at over 11% (Statistica, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2020). Additionally, the province faced a significant budget deficit due to the costs of COVID-19 relief measures, lost tax revenue, and lost oil revenue, which the Premier indicated would result in a “fiscal reckoning” (DeCilla, 2020; Thomson, 2020). This resulted in further uncertainty about how the fiscal reckoning would impact Albertans through tax increases, programming cuts, or public sector layoffs or salary reductions (DeCilla, 2020).

For public sector employees in Alberta, uncertainty around job security started in 2019 and continued throughout the pandemic. In 2019, the Government of Alberta committed to significantly reduce government spending in a number of ways including by reducing the size of the Alberta Public Service and reducing funding to municipalities (Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta, 2019, p.50). Some Government of Alberta management layoffs began in late 2019 and provincial unions were informed of up to 2,500 layoffs in the Alberta Public Service (Dormer, 2020; Russell, 2019). Throughout mid-late 2020, the City of Edmonton committed to no tax increases while needing to account for reduced revenue; this resulted in the need to employ workforce strategies throughout 2020 and layoffs in early 2021 (Mertz, 2021a).

Commitment to Wellbeing of Employees. Public sector employers in Edmonton have indicated their commitment to improving wellbeing, resilience, mental health, and/or psychological safety for employees. The City of Edmonton has made the most robust and public commitment to change after employee surveys in 2016 and 2018 showed signs of a toxic work culture with up to 24% of employees indicating they have experienced harassment while at work (Heidenreich, 2019; Stolte, 2017). An employee services department and a safe disclosure office were created to improve workplace mental health and deal with allegations of harassment and discrimination (Heidenreich, 2019). New initiatives including leadership training, mental health training, an employee advisory committee, and hiring a consulting firm to independently process employee complaints have been initiated; the 2020 survey shows signs these initiatives are having an impact with the number of individuals stating they experience harassment down from 24% to 9% (although city officials indicate a change to methodology should be noted and the improvement may not be as dramatic as it appears) (Snowdon, 2020).

The most recent Government of Alberta staff survey results are from 2018. The most positive results show 90% of employees have good relationships with co-workers, 81% felt their job was a good fit with their skills, and 75% felt they were treated with respect at work. Some of the lowest scores were 56% of employees felt innovation is valued, 56% have confidence in senior leadership, 53% felt they received meaningful recognition, 48% felt there was opportunity for career growth, and 46% felt essential information flows from senior leadership to staff (Government of Alberta, 2018, p.4). It is notable that most of the positive comments relate to immediate work environment while the negative results tend to relate to senior leadership and the culture of the organization. The Government of Alberta has a public website that details some of the benefits of working there including information about the employee and family assistance program, respectful workplace policy, diversity and inclusion policy, and health benefits (Government of Alberta, 2021); however, there is limited detail available about the specific mechanisms used to implement these policies, and approaches to improve employee confidence in leadership.

Identifying Needs and Offering Tailored Supports

Community Engagement. Community engagement can be defined as “the process of working collaboratively with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations with respect to issues affecting their wellbeing” (United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011, p.3). Over several decades of research, community engagement has been shown to be an effective strategy for accurately identifying needs, building trust, improving communication, harnessing potential, and creating improved health and wellbeing outcomes (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2002, p.157; Cyril et al., 2015, p.1-2). Community engagement initiatives that aim to improve health related outcomes have often

been shown to also improve empowerment and motivation, self-efficacy, and social connections (Cyril et al., 2015, p.8). An effective way to begin understanding a population group is to ask them (through casual or formal mechanisms) about things that are working well, their challenges and needs, ways they would like to be supported, and ways the things that are working well can be leveraged to further improve their experience (Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Haines, 2014; Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.1-11; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p.26-27; van de Venter & Redwood, 2016, p.108).

The Case for Tailored Supports. Individuals often unwittingly assume others have needs similar to their own or to majority groups; as this has been shown to be an inaccurate assumption and a barrier to providing effective supports, there has been a push across sectors to better identify and address the diverse needs of population groups (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2011; U.S. Administration on Aging, n.d., p.2). Some of the barriers to accessing mental health supports include discrimination, financial barriers, and a lack of access to suitable tailored programming (Goldsmith et al., 2002, p.331-336). For these reasons, programs that are successful with one population group are often not successful with another population group. A commonly documented example is the delivery of general supports to veterans, often with very low success rates (Goldsmith et al., 2002, p.336). Identifying the needs of sub-populations can be challenging because of the significant diversity within groups; in spite of this challenge, there are a number of actions that can be taken including using varied communication and engagement approaches, acknowledging and committing to continued work to understand diverse needs, and creating new supports as needs are identified (Cyril et al., 2015, p.8-9; United States Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011, p.185-188).

Generations. Generation is a socially constructed concept describing age cohorts where individuals were influenced in their formative years by a common set of environmental factors, which may have contributed to the development of a common set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms (McLeod, 2014; Nakai, 2015, p.331-332). There has been extensive research on generational cohorts with mixed results. Some studies have shown significant commonalities within generational cohorts while others have shown contradictory results (Campbell et al., 2017, p.130-132; Havens, 2015, p.2-4; Hitchcock, 2021). There is widespread recognition of the limitations of generational theories due to significant intra-generational differences such as socioeconomic status, parenting styles, experience with technology, and culture (Okros, 2020, p.33). While it is unknown the extent to which historical experiences impact people and whether it is as significant as other identify factors, it is clear that current age is important and that a person who is currently 20 years old has different needs and experiences than someone who is 60 years old; as such, there continues to be value in looking at the current and specific needs of age group cohorts (Nakai, 2015, p.331-334).

Millennials. This research is focused on the age group that is defined as the millennial cohort, those born between 1981 and 1996 (Dimock, 2019), which means in 2020 they were aged 24-39. Based on human development theory, millennials are currently approaching the end of young adulthood, a period that was focused on establishing oneself in the adult world; they are entering middle adulthood, a period where individuals traditionally have started to feel as though they have things 'figured out' to some extent (Baxter-Magolda, 2004, p.4-7). Recent studies of individuals in this age group have shown significant mental health challenges and evidence that many are not settling into adulthood well; it has been postulated that large societal issues such as climate change, inequality, and decreased financial security are contributing to this poor mental health and low wellbeing (Deloitte, 2020b, p.2-10; Hoffower & Akhtar, 2019; Lucero et al., 2021, p.269).

Millennials are sometimes described as being defined by technology and uncertainty; this is in reference to being the first generation to have access to technology in their formative years which has influenced how they communicate, their experience with significant uncertainty as there have been multiple recessions in their relatively short careers, along with concerns about climate change for a large part of their lives (Grayway, 2016, p.6-8). A worldwide survey of millennials has shown that their priorities and concerns tend to be in the areas of having purpose in their work, addressing climate change, being engaged in their communities, diversity and inclusion, and mental health (Deloitte, 2020b, p.24). These priorities and characteristics may be considered when determining how to engage with millennials and on which topics. For example, given information about their communication preferences, there may be better response rates and participation when digital options for community engagement are provided.

Public Sector Employees. Existing research suggests the challenges public sector employees face are associated with the need to balance competing expectations. This includes balancing traditional public values such as integrity and neutrality with business-like values such as efficiency and responsiveness, managing work overload in the face of reduced budgets and staffing, and limited autonomy/ability to solve problems due to red tape, onerous decision making processes, and extremely hierarchical organizational structures (Steen & Schott, 2019, p.3-7; Steijn & van der Voet, 2019, p.64).

Addressing public sector employee wellbeing comes with added complex challenges of public perception and extremely limited funding. When private companies allocate resources to employee wellbeing, it has been shown to increase effectiveness and profitability so they often allocate large budgets to it (Berry et al., 2010). As the public sector does not have profits, it is harder to measure such improvements. In North America, there is a perception among some of the public of inefficiency and fiscal irresponsibility in the public sector; in a U.S. study where the

same services were provided by private and public organizations and met the same performance indicators, citizens rated the public service notably lower than the private service (Corbella, 2020; Marvel, 2015, p.209). Allocating funds to public sector wellbeing would likely be perceived negatively and as fiscally irresponsible by the public, especially in the Alberta context where there is public support for reducing public sector spending including staff salaries and benefits (Corbella, 2020). When examining the role of public sector employers in supporting employee wellbeing, this context has been considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of wellbeing and resilience research to situate this study within the context of existing literature. Initial literature review themes were focused on six elements that contribute to wellbeing and several elements that contribute to resilience. Based on themes found in the interview data and further review of the literature, three larger themes were identified which contribute to both wellbeing and resilience. The literature review has been re-framed to align with these three broad themes.

An overview of wellbeing research, resilience research, and some key concepts that explain the context and scope of this study are described followed by a review of each theme. There are vast amounts of research regarding interventions that improve various aspects of people's lives; it is likely many of these interventions have some impact on wellbeing or resilience, however, it is not possible to consider them all in depth. There is also incredible depth and breadth of resources regarding supports for mental health typically with a focus on the treatment of mental illness. Mental health supports and interventions are not reviewed comprehensively; however, the most relevant ones are. The topics reviewed are those that were most salient in the literature and the interviews.

Key Concepts

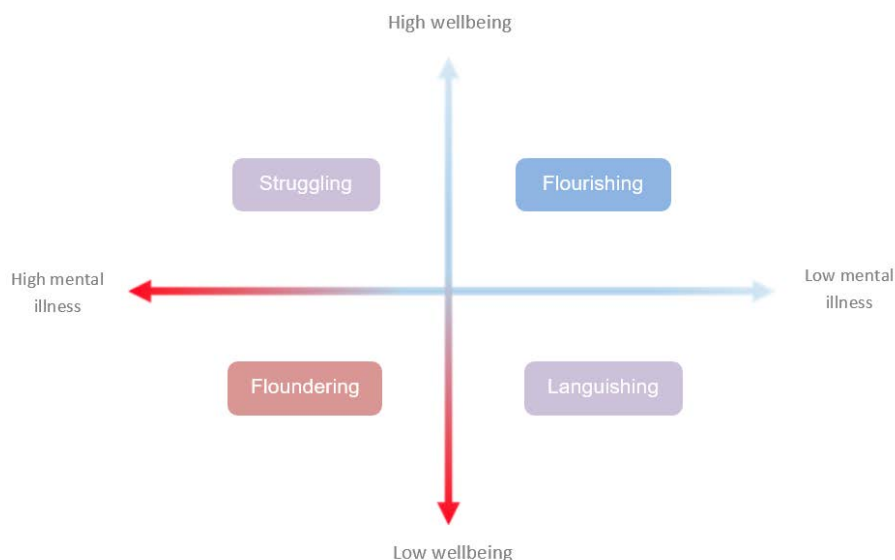
The key concepts explored in this section provide an overview of the theory and application of wellbeing, resilience, mental health, and mental illness research and how they relate to each other. This foundational information will help situate the literature review themes and findings in relation to these nuanced and interrelated concepts.

Relationship Between Wellbeing and Mental Illness

Psychology research has traditionally focused on the treatment of mental illness, often considering wellbeing and mental health to be the absence of mental illness (Seligman, 2011, p.1-2). Through many different studies and theories on wellbeing, a consistent finding has been

that wellbeing is more than the absence of negative functions such as negative affect, depression, loneliness, insecurity, and illness; rather it is the presence of positive functions such as positive affect, happiness, social connection, trust, and wellness (Butler & Kern, 2016, p.2) Mental illness and wellbeing are not opposite ends of one linear continuum, rather they are two distinct but related concepts (Keyes, 2005, p.546) as shown in figure 1. The treatment of mental illness without wellbeing interventions can cause individuals to feel empty and that in the absence of negative emotions they feel no emotions at all (Huppert & So, 2013, p.838; Seligman, 2011, p.54). It is possible for individuals to work on improving their wellbeing in both the presence and absence of mental illness (Iasiello, 2018). Some interventions are effective for addressing mental illness, some are effective for improving wellbeing, and many others show benefits for both the treatment of mental illness and the improvement of wellbeing simultaneously (Bolier et al., 2013). While acknowledging that appropriate treatment and support for mental illness is critical for a person to flourish in life, this research is focused on the wellbeing dimension.

Figure 1: Model of Wellbeing and Mental Illness (adapted from Iasiello, 2018; Slade, 2010; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008)



Wellbeing Theories

Wellbeing was previously treated as unidimensional and measured by asking a single question such as “all things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole, these days?” (Huppert & So, 2013, p. 839). In recent decades, multi-dimensional theories have emerged and while there is no consensus about which theory is most accurate, there is agreement that unidimensional theories are too simplistic and miss important information about the multiple intrinsic, extrinsic, and subjective dimensions that influence a person’s level of wellbeing

(Huppert & So, 2013, p.839). Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing is a well known and widely researched theory that describes five elements of wellbeing; positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011, p.16-18). Other researchers have expanded on this theory adding health as an additional element, and developed an approach to measuring these six elements (Butler & Kern, 2016, p.1). The Theory of Wellbeing has been used to inform research on a wide variety of populations. When tested on veterans with mental illness, the elements of wellbeing were found to offer a suitable model for assessing and improving veteran wellbeing; researchers also tested a single factor model and found it to be less reliable (Umucu, 2020, p.1-4). Two studies conducted on undergraduate college students using cross-sectional and longitudinal data showed strong empirical support that measures for the elements of wellbeing were strongly correlated with other markers of flourishing such as GPA, frequency of doctor's visits, perceived life satisfaction, and post graduate opportunities (Coffey et al., 2016, p.205-206). Seligman's theory and other wellbeing theories continue to be studied extensively; there has been a ten fold increase in positive psychology related publications since 1992 (Seligman, 2019, p.20-21). Seligman himself has acknowledged potential gaps in his framework; however, a better supported alternative has not been identified and his elements of wellbeing continue to frame a large amount of research and clinical practice in this area (Goodman et al., 2018; Seligman, 2018, p.333-335; Seligman, 2019, p.20-21).

Resilience Theories

Research has long shown that resiliency skills can be critically important and life changing for individuals. Early studies of resilience often focused on the unexpected success of individuals who had experienced significant challenges in life. In 1988, a study was conducted on youth aged 13-19 whose parents suffered from serious psychiatric disorders. Many of them faced significant challenges for their age including taking care of their ill parents; the youth who functioned well under these circumstances showed high levels of self-awareness, deep commitment to relationships, and the ability to think and act separately from their parents (Beardslee & Podorefsky, 1988, p.63). These findings supported considerable future research into factors that contribute to resiliency. Resilience research has been described as occurring in three waves where research was initially focused on resilient qualities including individual and environmental traits that help people overcome adversity, as in the 1988 study; the second wave focused on resiliency processes, which are common approaches people use to bounce back/return to equilibrium after adversity; the third wave is referred to as innate resilience and focuses on concepts such as post-traumatic growth and how individuals can transform and grow through adversity (Greene et al., 2012 p. 482; Richardson, 2002, p.308). All three of these areas of focus continue to be studied, with more recent studies often considering all three.

Most suggest a combination of internal, personal qualities combined with external social, ecological, and spiritual factors provide the strength and energy required for individuals to be resilient (Richardson, 2002, p.319). There has been a shift in the perception of resiliency as a personality trait that an individual either has or does not have naturally, toward seeing resilience as a collection of skills that anyone can develop (American Psychological Association, 2012). Personal approaches and ways of thinking that increase resiliency have been documented; this includes calming practices, putting things into perspective, avoiding jumping to conclusions, and many others (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.13-14). A study of the resilience of Indigenous youth in Canada shows that intersecting personal and social factors complimenting each other result in resilience; for example one youth described an interplay between family support and connection to cultural practices that allowed him to heal and improve his life. He indicated the presence of both the family support and cultural connection simultaneously were necessary for his resilience (Njeze et al., 2020, p.2008-2018). Awareness of personal strengths and social support systems, and the ability to draw upon those strengths and supports are key to resilience for most people in most situations (Dresen et al., 2019, p.297; Njeze et al., 2020, p.2018; Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.321).

Relationship Between Wellbeing and Resilience

Studies of resilience and wellbeing show significant overlap. Some literature describes overall wellbeing as a factor that contributes to resilience while other literature describes resilience as a precursor for happiness and wellbeing (Reivich and Shatte, 2003, p.1). Quantitative research has shown the elements of wellbeing (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) correlate with resilience (Umucu, 2020, p.1) and that resilience may be a product of a person's pursuit of wellbeing (Coffey et al., 2016, p.188). An individual's wellbeing is often powerfully influenced by their early environment; however, it is possible to compensate for this later in life as personal actions and attitudes have a greater influence on wellbeing than external circumstances (Huppert, 2009, p.154). This means an individual's ability to be resilient during and after a challenging time helps determine their future wellbeing. Self-awareness, effective problem-solving skills, strong communication skills, empathy toward others, and hope for the future are some of the concepts that have been described as precursors to resilience (Hippe, 2004, p.240). Related concepts such as planning for the future, taking action to achieve goals, avoiding comparison, and having strong relationships and love in one's life have been described as key to wellbeing (Rath et al., 2014 p.5-8, 57).

Research has shown that individuals have four primary uses for resilience: 1. overcome past obstacles, 2. steer through everyday obstacles, 3. bounce back from major life altering setbacks, and 4. reach out, which means persevering through challenges to achieve goals, try new things, and find meaning in life (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.15). All four of these categories can be seen

in wellbeing literature as well, as a person's ability to manage challenges as they arise has significant influence on their daily experience of wellbeing (Rath et al., 2014, p.6-9; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.7-13). High wellbeing has been shown to act as a buffer when individuals are experiencing challenges, meaning they are more resilient and able to cope with challenges when their wellbeing is high; likewise individuals who are experiencing low wellbeing at a time when something challenging happens, are more prone to negative outcomes such as depression (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p.11-13).

Theme 1 – Mental and Emotional Tools and Skills

Wellbeing and resilience theories consistently highlight mental and emotional approaches and coping mechanisms as key to positive wellbeing and resilience. There are a wide variety of tools and skills that are of value and an incredible depth of literature on approaches to developing these tools and skills. Some of the approaches most salient in the literature are explored.

Self-awareness

Having awareness about one's values, strengths, and personal preferences as well as the types of adversities that push one's buttons, inaccurate beliefs that arise, and the feelings and behaviours that result from those beliefs are key to wellbeing and resilience (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.67-74; Selig, 2016). Awareness of values, strengths, and personal preferences all positively influence motivation; this improves wellbeing as it tends to result in making healthier choices, increased sense of meaning, and experiencing more vitality and pleasure (Selig, 2016). Individuals who possess accurate self-awareness are able to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, accept their reality, and embrace their strengths as tools to help themselves and others, which makes them more resilient (Hippe, 2004, p.240). There are many different ways to improve self-awareness including seeking feedback from others, working with a therapist, completing research-based assessments, trying new things, and dedicating time to introspection (Eurich, 2018, p.2-8; Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.67-74; Selig, 2016).

Emotional Regulation and Healthy Thinking Practices

The foundation of many resilience building tools is the understanding that emotions and behaviours are not triggered by events but by the way individuals interpret those events (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.66). Below are some of the tools, approaches, and thinking practices known to be most effective for emotional regulation.

Psychological flexibility. Psychological flexibility is a broad concept that includes the abilities to adapt to changing situations, recognize and shift mindsets and approaches when they compromise personal or social functioning, balance competing priorities, and be aware of and take action that aligns with deeply held values even when it is challenging (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010, p.865). Increased psychological flexibility can help people experience

reduced stress, better management of uncertain and unpredictable environments, better tolerance of negative emotions, and increased effectiveness and fulfillment in daily life (Wersebe et al., 2018, p.64; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010, p.875-876).

Being able to identify what is in control, accepting what is not in control, and taking values based action within those constraints is one way to exercise psychological flexibility (Hayes et al., 2006, p.6-9). Stephen Covey's circles of influence illustrate this concept well. Figure 2 shows the circles of influence with a COVID-19 related example. When navigating stressors regarding the pandemic an individual may identify the spread of the virus, actions of others, and impact on the economy as outside their control and let go of these concerns as much as possible; they may identify their home environment, finances, and family and friends as areas where they have some influence; and they may identify things in their control as their own behaviours, attitudes, outlook, and decisions (The Career Psychologist, 2020). This can be an empowering approach as it reduces feelings of hopelessness and allows the person to accept the circumstances in order to focus on and take action in their areas of control and influence (Hayes et al., 2006, p.6-9).

Figure 2. Circles of Influence (The Career Psychologist, 2020)



Mindfulness. Mindfulness is a state of being aware of the present moment without judgement (C. Moore, 2020). Increased mindfulness has been linked to improved overall wellbeing, mood, and cognition, as well as positive clinical outcomes for those with depression, anxiety, heart disease, and chronic pain (Behan, 2020, p.256; Crescentini et al., 2017, p.81; Goldberg et al., 2018, p.52-53). When faced with stressors, many individuals find value in using mindfulness and mindful breathing techniques to help calm themselves down before reacting (Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.192). There are many ways to become more mindful, different tools work for different

people, so trying out a variety of practices is necessary; some options include deep breathing and other breath tools, muscle relaxation practices, positive imagery visualizations, mindful movement, meditation practices, and simply making an intentional effort to focus on the present moment (Moore, 2020; Reivich & Shatte, 2002, p.192-197). Mindfulness practices have been shown to be particularly impactful in times of prolonged struggle including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Behan, 2020, p.256).

Perspective and Reframing. Possessing the ability to challenge one's thinking patterns and gain new perspectives can have a profound impact on wellbeing and resilience. Cognitive reframing, a technique that was identified for the treatment of clinical depression in the 1960s and 70s, is now a popular technique used by much of the general population (Beck et al., 1979, p.35; McNamara, 2012; Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014, p.55). Reframing is defined by its usefulness in creating a sense of personal control; adjusting perceptions of negative or distorted beliefs; converting self-destructive ideas into supportive ideas; and its ability to change behavior and improve wellbeing (Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014, p.55). Reframing helps people to shift their perspectives in a number of ways so they can see challenging situations differently; it can help with problem solving, decision making, and learning (McNamara, 2012).

Another approach to shifting perspective is through gratitude and optimism. Gratitude is thought to be particularly helpful when individuals feel their lives are not manageable, meaningful, or comprehensible (Lambert et al., 2009, p.468). One common gratitude intervention is the 'three good things exercise' where an individual writes down three positive things that happened in their day and for each item writes either why it happened, what it means to them, or how they can have more of this good thing in the future (Pawelski, 2020, p.675-676; Seligman, 2011, p.84). Another is the 'one good thought' habit where an individual aligns a healthy habit they are trying to form with their values. The one good thought is a word, phrase, or mantra they repeat when the habit change is challenging; for example, someone who values family and is trying to quit smoking may repeat a mantra about living a long and healthy life with their family when they experience a craving (Selig, 2015). This allows the individual to shift their perspective from thinking about the craving to feeling optimistic about the future and the reason they are working on this new habit (Selig, 2015).

Self-compassion. Self-compassion is an emotionally positive attitude made up of three components: self-kindness, which means being kind and understanding toward oneself; common humanity, which allows one to perceive experiences as part of being human rather than isolating and unique to them; and mindfulness that allows them to hold painful feelings in balanced awareness rather than over-identifying with them (Neff, 2003, p.85). Just as

individuals can feel compassion for others when they suffer, this type of care can be directed towards oneself whether their personal struggles are due to external conditions or their own personal mistakes or inadequacies (Neff & Germer, 2017, p.371). Self-compassion is challenging for a lot of people because western culture tends to foster self-criticism and the belief that individuals should be strong and push through their suffering; this is unfortunate as self-compassion is a powerful coping mechanism that can help individuals heal and move through challenges more easily (Neff & Germer, 2017, p.372). There are a wide variety of mechanisms that can be used to develop self-compassion skills including a writing exercise where an individual explores how they would treat a close friend when they are suffering and consider how things may be different if they treated themselves this way during a challenging time; another option is to monitor critical self-talk and make an active effort to change and soften the messages each time they occur (Neff, 2021).

Theme 2 – Action-oriented Approaches

There are many types of action individuals can take to improve their wellbeing and resilience. Individuality is referenced often in the literature, in recognition that different things work for different people. However, the three items below are particularly salient in the literature and it appears some form of movement, problem solving, and managing energy approaches are valuable for most people.

Movement

People who have some form of movement practice experience more gratitude, love, and hope, are more satisfied with their lives, have a stronger sense of purpose, tend to be more connected to community, and are less likely to suffer from loneliness; various studies have shown that these benefits appear to apply across cultures, socioeconomic status, physical ability, and throughout the lifespan; even patients in hospice care have been shown to experience benefits of movement (McGonigal, 2019, p.3; Sharma et al., 2006, p.106). There is no specific type of movement or way of training needed to experience these benefits; any type of movement, any amount, using whichever parts of the body still move, alone, with others, at home, outside, any movement that a person enjoys is likely to provide positive benefits (McGonigal, 2019, p.214).

There is also abundant evidence supporting the importance of movement to resilience, both as a preventative measure to help one be in a state where they can handle new challenges, and as a mechanism to process and move through ongoing challenges (Deuster & Silverman, 2013, p.28; McGonigal, 2019, p.185-189; Wu et al., 2013, p.7). Athletes have also described endurance races as teaching them how to suffer well; getting through the physical hardship, pain, self-doubt, and exhaustion that creep up during long races allows them to cultivate

mental strength that helps them through other life challenges (McGonigal, 2019, p.185-189). When they felt overwhelmed some described committing to just one more lap, mile, or step; some described thinking about treasured memories; some remember the current struggle will not last forever; and others gave themselves permission to cry, feel angry, or rest when they needed to (McGonigal, 2019, p.186). Pushing through challenging forms of exercise mimics the human experience in some ways; it reminds individuals that it is possible to experience happiness in a moment of deep exhaustion and that suffering and joy can co-exist, which are thoughts that help people get through other difficult times (McGonigal, 2019, p.189; Weekes, 2004, p.xvi).

Doing exercise outside instead of inside can provide additional benefits; it helps some people with motivation as individuals who exercise outside report more positive emotions and psychological wellbeing than those who do comparable indoor exercise (Loureiro & Veloso, 2014, p.303). Nature therapy is a health promotion approach that encourages exposure to natural stimuli from forests, urban green spaces, plants and natural wooden materials to improve wellbeing and to treat some forms of mental illness; it has been shown to reduce stress and increase relaxation (Song et al., 2016, p.782). Research suggests that spending between two and five hours in nature per week is associated with significant improvements to health and wellbeing (White et al., 2019).

Problem Solving

The motivations and thinking processes used to solve problems and achieve goals are context dependent and highly diverse (Akama, 2006; Zimmerman & Campillo, 2000, p.233-235). Some key concepts related to action-oriented problem solving are grit, growth mindset, and goal setting.

Grit is a concept that describes having passion, perseverance, and stamina for long-term goals; being gritty includes working really hard to achieve goals, sticking with them for long periods of time, and living life like it's a marathon not a sprint (Duckworth, 2013, p.2; Duckworth, 2016, p.269). Grit is correlated with growth mindset, which is the belief that talent can be developed through good strategies, hard work, input from others, and learning from failure; this is as opposed the belief that talents are innate and you either have them or you do not (Dweck, 2019, p.26; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015, p.47). Individuals with these grit and growth mindset perspectives and qualities tend to achieve more and are much more able to persevere through hardships and failures as they do not perceive them as permanent or as part of who they are (Duckworth, 2013, p.2; Dweck, 2019, p.26). Everyone has some fixed mindset triggers; when facing criticism or challenges it is common to feel insecure or defensive (Dweck, 2019, p.26-27). Learning to recognize fixed mindset triggers can help individuals to think through

situations and take productive, growth oriented action such as admitting errors, learning from them, taking action to correct them, collaborating and learning from others, and seeking feedback; this kind of approach helps individuals be better at problem solving and achieving their long-term goals (Duckworth, 2013, p.1-3; Dweck, 2019, p.26-27; Hochanadel & Finamore, 2015, p.47).

When a challenge arises, individuals generally go through three phases of solving the problem: forethought or pre-action phase, performance or action phase, and self-reflection or post-action phase; the forethought phase includes task analysis, goal setting, and planning, which allows individuals to identify the intended outcome and determine how to get there effectively (Perels et al., 2005, p.123-127; Shaffer, 2020, p.1; Zimmerman & Campillo, 2000, p.239). Individuals who are able to regulate their thoughts and actions so they can clarify the problem, identify the ideal outcome, and plan how to tackle it are generally more effective problem solvers than those who react immediately (Akama, 2006, p.895; Zimmerman & Campillo, 2000, p.239). Goal setting theory, first published in 1990, continues to inform approaches to problem solving and has shown that having clear goals and a commitment to achieving them makes people much more productive and effective (Locke et al., 1990; Locke & Latham, 2019, p.93). The use of problem solving and goal setting skills are both correlated with increased life satisfaction, wellbeing, and resilience (Headey, 2008, p.213; Nezu et al., 2019, p.361).

Managing Energy

Some research suggests there are four categories of personal energy; physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy, all of which are managed through periods of energy expenditure and renewal. Skillful management of all four types of energy can lead one to be physically energized, mentally focused, emotionally connected, and spiritually aligned with a greater purpose (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, p.4-11). Physical energy is understood to be the fundamental source of energy and critical to managing the other types of energy – it affects alertness, vitality, ability to manage emotions, concentration, creative thinking, and commitment and motivation. Managing physical energy through eating, sleeping, drinking water, exercising, and physical rest and recovery support increased mental, emotional, and spiritual energy and set a person up to improve all areas of their lives (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, p. 48-49, 71).

Mental energy includes one's cognitive capacity and ability to focus. Many people consider this to be the most important type of energy in their jobs as it is necessary for reading, writing, and thinking. Emotional energy is generally understood to be renewed through enjoyable and fulfilling experiences. Emotional energy allows one to exhibit qualities like patience, empathy, and confidence. In the context of this theory, spiritual energy is defined as one's experience of

being connected to a purpose beyond self-interest, which fuels passion, perseverance, and commitment. Spiritual energy can be managed by ensuring a balance between commitment to purpose and adequate self-care. People build mental, emotional and spiritual capacity in the same way they build physical capacity – by challenging themselves/exposing themselves to stress beyond normal limits followed by periods of rest and recovery (Loehr & Schwartz, 2003, p. 47, 92-93, 109, 127). Managing energy is relevant to wellbeing in that energy levels are a key influencer in one's day to day experience. Managing energy is related to resilience in that it supports the idea that one can build mental, emotional, and spiritual capacity through exposure to challenging situations.

Theme 3 – Belonging and Social Support

Belonging is a fundamental need for almost all human beings. It is the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us; it is not “trying to fit in”, instead it is characterized by presenting one's whole authentic and imperfect self and being fully accepted (Brown, 2017, p.31-34; Lavigne et al., 2011, p.1185). Feeling a strong sense of belonging has been shown to have significant positive outcomes for a variety of population groups including reduced recidivism of formerly-incarcerated women, increased resilience among breast cancer patients, and improved learning experiences and cultural agility among study abroad students. (Alizadeh et al., 2018, p.2469; Caligiuri et al., 2020, p.366-368; Schnappauf & DiDonato, 2017, p.1). Belonging can be experienced in a variety of ways including in close relationships and in support systems with friends, family, community, or at work.

Close Friends and Family

The Harvard Study of Adult Development is an ongoing longitudinal study that began in 1938 and follows participants throughout their adult lives with the goal of revealing what contributes to living a good life (Mineo, 2017; Vaillant, 2002, p.4; Waldinger, 2015). Data collected over 80 years has shown that the greatest determinant of happier, healthier, and longer lives is the quality of a person's relationships; not just being in a committed partnership or having a lot of friends, rather having deep and meaningful connections with people who can be relied upon (Mineo, 2017; Waldinger, 2015). The current director of the study, asserts that people overestimate the impact wealth, fame, and high achievement will have on their ability to flourish (Waldinger, 2015). Over decades, studies have continued to repeatedly show that quality relationships with family, friends, and community show the greatest correlation to happiness, health, and longevity for most people (Mineo, 2017; Waldinger, 2015).

It has long been understood that the greatest determinant of resilience in children is access to at least one stable and committed relationship with an adult (Resilience, Centre on the Developing Child, 2020; Werner, 2000, p.129). It has also become clear across studies that

access to supportive relationships is strongly linked to resilience for people of all ages (Afifi & MacMillan, 2011, p.266; Vaillant, 2002). One of the most meaningful steps a person can take toward increasing resilience is prioritizing relationships with trustworthy, compassionate, and like minded people, and building genuine connection with them (American Psychological Association, 2012, para 9-11). Expressing gratitude, praise and positive feedback to others is an easy way to improve relationships and increase feelings of belonging and support (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, p.105, 122). In addition to improving relationships, the person giving the praise can experience immense benefits; participants in one study described experiencing chills or warm feelings in their chest when they reflected on the positive skills and virtues of others people (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, p.122).

In addition to relying on supportive relationships when things go wrong, it is also important to have supportive and responsive people in one’s life when things go well (Gable & Reis, 2010, p. 247). People often turn to their closest friends and family when they have good news to share. The act of sharing the news and the way in which others respond can amplify the positive experience and can deepen the relationship in the areas of increased trust, commitment, closeness, stability, satisfaction, and intimacy (Gable & Reis, 2010, p.245). When others share good news, a person can use this as an opportunity to strengthen the relationship by responding in an active constructive way by being engaged, positive, and asking questions (Gable & Reis, 2010, p.245; Seligman, 2011, p.48). Table 1 provides examples of the four types of responses to positive news including active constructive, the one that strengthens relationships.

Table 1: Active, passive, constructive, and destructive responses to good news (adapted from Seligman, 2011, p.49)

News shared	I received a promotion at work today!
Active constructive response	That’s great! I’m so proud of you! Tell me all about the moment your boss gave you the news. Do you want to go out and celebrate?
Passive constructive response	That’s good news. You deserve it.
Active destructive	That sounds like a lot of responsibility. Are you going to spend even less time at home now?
Passive destructive	What’s for dinner?

In Community

Being involved in community fosters a sense of belonging and a feeling of contributing to something; whatever it is a person is interested in and cares about, community means finding a group of people who can learn to trust each other, work together, and build enjoyment and

purpose around that shared interest or goal (Block, 2018, p.xi-xii). Individuals engage with and seek support from communities in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes; providing opportunities for diverse interactions and ways to get involved is a key aspect of the role of community (Block, 2018, p.2-5; Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.1-6; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p.26-27). Communities can be location/place-based as in neighbourhoods or can be created based on shared interests, hobbies, values, causes, advocacy, lived experiences, or backgrounds (Haines, 2014; Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.2-5).

Community offers an opportunity to acknowledge everyone's interdependence, leading conversations away from individualistic concerns toward a more community minded focus on hospitality and generosity (Block, 2018, p.2-5). Communities that provide diverse opportunities for individuals to access supports, engage in enjoyable activities, and contribute their skills in ways that are meaningful to them avoid labeling people and provide them with greater opportunity to fulfill their potential and improve their wellbeing (Block, 2018, p.13; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p.26-27). Abundant Communities Edmonton is a grass-roots, community led initiative supported by the City of Edmonton that aims to enable neighbourhoods to stimulate and sustain neighbourliness as a wellbeing promoting behaviour (Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.6-11). It seeks to identify the assets of the neighbourhood and increase individual and collective resilience by providing opportunities for neighbours to support each other (Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.6-11; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996). Residents who have participated in asset based initiatives of this nature have been shown to gain new skills, feel valued, enhance confidence, experience greater sense of purpose through strengthened roles in community, and improve their resilience through the development of new and deeper social connections (Haines, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p.25; van de Venter & Redwood, 2016, p.108).

Communities can play a key role in improving the mental health and resilience of community members. As mental health is influenced significantly by environmental and cultural contexts, nuanced local approaches tend to be the most effective when it comes to treatment, prevention, promotion, and de-stigmatization (Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Horton, 2007, p.806). Communities around the world including in the Edmonton area have embraced calls to action to promote and support initiatives that improve community wellbeing by addressing diverse needs within the local context (Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Horton, 2007, p.806). Local municipalities and non-profit organizations in the Edmonton area offer a robust selection of supports including online resources, hotlines, and varied support services developed for specific populations including seniors, parents, caregivers, youth, and newcomers on a variety of topics including mental health, physical wellness, education and learning, family and parenting, and elder abuse (Edmonton Community Mental Health Steering Committee, 2016; Strathcona County, 2021). One small municipality in the Edmonton area

offers youth wellness kits at libraries on topics known to be of particular significance to local youth including tools for dealing with big emotions, stress, identity, social media, connection, healthy relationships, LGBTQ2S+ topics and how to be an ally, and activities that encompass Indigenous perspectives and culture (Strathcona County, 2021).

Communities can also contribute to the wellbeing of members by offering a variety of fun activities; participating in enjoyable activities in community can give individuals a break from the stresses of everyday life (Khasnabis et al., 2010; McGonigal, 2019, p.174-176). A combination of wellbeing promoting initiatives, an environment where social connections can form, opportunities to contribute in a meaningful way, and fun activities allow communities to have a significant impact on the wellbeing and resilience of their members (Block, 2018, p.2-5; Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.6-11; McGonigal, 2019, p.174-176).

At Work

Work is a significant part of life for most people; having positive feelings about work is associated with higher personal wellbeing, workplace effectiveness, and retention (Wesbecher, 2016, p.1-2). Thriving at work describes an individual's experience of vitality and learning; this means feeling enthusiastic and energized while also experiencing a sense of progress, growth, and development in the work place (Kleine et al., 2019, p.975; Spreitzer et al., 2005, p.537). There are a wide variety of approaches that employers have taken, with varying levels of success, to help employees thrive, feel supported, and improve their health. Interventions are generally in the areas of creating a positive and psychologically safe organizational culture, physical and mental wellness programs, and work-life balance supports such as flexible work arrangements. Finding the right balance of initiatives that meet the diverse needs of employees is key to creating an environment where they truly feel safe, supported, and able to do their best work (Lieberman, 2019, p.2-9).

Across many studies, thriving at work has been shown to be most strongly correlated with relational variables including perceived organizational support and positive relationships with coworkers, supervisors, and others in the organization (Kleine et al., 2019, p.992). Executive leadership and direct supervisors play different but critical roles in the development of a healthy organizational culture where workplace friendships, collaboration, and compassion can flourish. Executive leaders have the ability to influence the psychological wellbeing of those around them and individuals throughout the organization by setting a tone of inclusiveness that lends itself to a safe and supportive work environment (Arnold et al., 2007, p.193; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006, p.941). In addition to setting this tone themselves, some executive leaders hire managers and staff with a compassionate approach who can bolster a culture of teamwork,

empathy, and support (DeSteno, 2016, p.3). One of the best predictors of team effectiveness is whether their supervisor has a supportive demeanour and shows empathy and compassion by making time for one-on-one meetings, socializing, and helping people solve problems (DeSteno, 2016, p.3). Environments where employees are encouraged to get to know their colleagues tend to be more compassionate, employees feel more connected to each other, and feel their colleagues and managers care about their wellbeing; people with at least one close workplace friendship have higher productivity and passion for their work (DeSteno, 2016, p.2-4; Friedman, 2014, p.102).

Over 90% of organizations across the world offer some form of physical or mental wellness benefit, which are sometimes perceived by employees as attempts to placate them rather than building the type of support systems they actually need; for example, offering access to a gym while not permitting time off for employees suffering from mental health challenges (Lieberman, 2019). Low employee participation in physical and mental wellness programming has been a challenge for many organizations across sectors; reasons for this include employees are unaware of programming, they feel they do not have time to participate, and employers are not offering the supports they really want or need (Global Corporate Challenge, 2013, p.1; Robroek et al., 2009, p.26-36; Spence, 2015, p.109; Strauss, 2013; Wellness Workdays, 2020, p.1). Finding mechanisms for employees to participate in the development of wellness programming such as employee surveys, assessment tools for existing initiatives, and the creation of employee wellness committees that co-develop solutions can help address these challenges by helping identify employee needs and creating peer to peer promotion of the initiatives (Wellness Workdays, 2020). Offering multi-component interventions where employees have the option to participate in different types of activities or access different types of benefits also improves participation and satisfaction with wellness initiatives (Robroek et al., 2009, p.36). A survey of over 300 organizations around the world found that wellness programming has to become part of the organizational culture to be widely effective; if employees feel they have to find time in their schedules for wellness activities, they are much less likely to participate (Global Corporate Challenge, 2013, p.1; Strauss, 2013). Employees may be uncomfortable taking time out of the workday to attend wellness seminars or fitness activities especially if their supervisors do not have habits of this nature; buy-in from all levels of leadership throughout the organization is needed along with a consistent message that spending worktime on these activities is okay and encouraged (Wellness Workdays, 2020).

Flexible work arrangements can allow for temporal or place-based flexibility, meaning employees can adjust scheduling of hours, number of hours worked, or the location of their work (Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2018, p.85). Some of the benefits of flexible work arrangements can be increased ability to manage work and personal responsibilities, increased

work efficiency, stress reduction, positive effect on health, saving time on commute, employee cost savings on travelling and food, employer cost savings on space and overhead, and improvement in employee engagement and productivity (Choi, 2018, p.47; Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2018, p.90; Conradie & de Klerk, 2019, p.1). Concerns with flexible work arrangements generally relate to the impact on productivity and the development of work relationships. While intentional effort to build relationships may be required when employees spend less time in the office, the benefits seem to dramatically outweigh any risks as significant improvements in employee engagement and productivity appear to be the norm (Angelici & Profeta, 2020, p.1, 23-24; Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2018, p.1).

Summary

There are a wide variety of theories about wellbeing and resilience with significant areas of agreement but no consensus on exactly how wellbeing and resilience are related to each other and which factors contribute to each. There is general agreement on some activities that significantly improve both, including a regular movement practice and strong, reliable relationships.

Many ways individuals, communities, and employers can contribute to the development of wellbeing and resilience have been identified and thoroughly researched. For individuals it is key to note that different things work for different people so when trying to improve one's wellbeing or resilience, curiosity, willingness to try new things, and interest in learning and growing are essential. Once an individual has good self-awareness or a commitment to developing self-awareness, they can find emotional regulation tools that work for them, build more enjoyment into their lives, develop a regular movement practice, and develop and rely on supportive relationships in good times and in challenging times. The role of communities and employers are focused on creating safe, comfortable, accepting, and enjoyable environments that help people to be at their best. Identifying the diverse needs of community members and employees and offering diverse mechanisms to help them thrive offers benefits to the individuals and to the communities and workplaces.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The aim of this study was to identify strategies that could be undertaken by individuals, communities, and employers to improve the wellbeing and resilience of public sector employees aged 24-39 in Edmonton. This chapter outlines the methodology and methods used in the conceptualization and execution of this research along with consideration of the researcher's biases and beliefs, which influenced the way this research was undertaken and

analyzed. This research process was approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Board (protocol number 20-0252).

Researcher Positionality Statement

This researcher positionality statement is inspired by similar reflections on how researcher biases and beliefs inherently influence research design and outcomes; acknowledgment of such influences on research can lead to a greater understanding of the findings and their applicability (Hamby, 2018; Ile, 2020, p.48). I identify as a white, cisgender, straight, middle-class, able-bodied female who lives and works on Treaty 6 territory, the traditional lands of First Nations and Métis people. I grew up in Newfoundland and Labrador on the traditional lands of Beothuk, Mi'kmaq, Innu, and Inuit peoples. My intersecting identity factors typically put me in a position of privilege as I am within the majority groups in a system that is oppressive towards most minority groups. I am on a personal journey to learn about my biases and the significant blind spots that come with benefitting from being in the majority. In designing and conducting this research, I regularly challenged my perspectives and considered how they might be influencing the study.

I have reflected on several areas of experience that have influenced by interest in this research and ways to limit or address problematic impacts my biases could have on the research. Several of my closest family and friends have navigated long and arduous journeys with mental health. Their journeys and perseverance have inspired my interest in wellbeing and resilience and have enlivened a curiosity about the roles different players have in the navigation of such challenging experiences. I challenged myself not to overattribute challenges to external variables such as the health system, as applying this lens too stringently can be disempowering and limiting to the goal of this study to identify the roles various players can have.

As an adolescent, I was very dedicated to team sports. This continues to have a significant influence on my views of teamwork and my belief that great things can be accomplished by groups when each individual is allowed to thrive and is supported in ways that align with their specific needs. Throughout my time in the Master of Arts in Community Development program at the University of Victoria, my beliefs about the need for true collaboration and co-development of supports have become stronger and more informed. My views on the benefits of asset-based, collaborative, and empowering approaches significantly influenced my choice of methodology for this research.

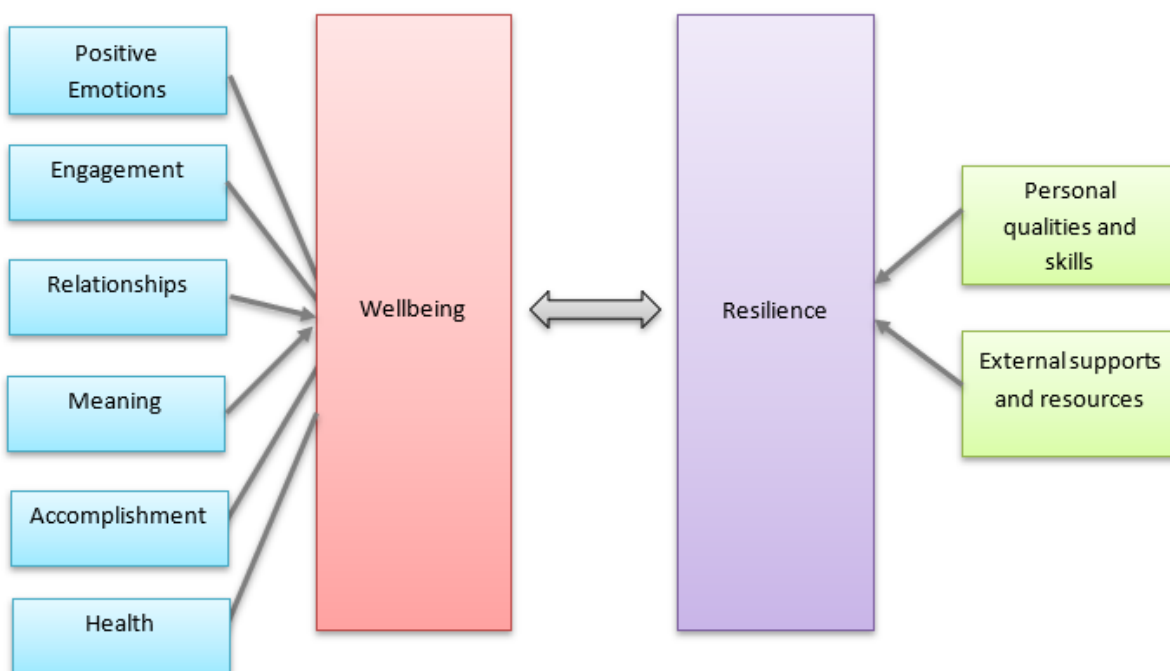
These things about myself tell me my interest in this research is closely tied to my life experience. My experience and existing knowledge about the subjects explored in this study needed to be challenged throughout the process. Additionally, as someone who works in the

public sector and may have much in common with some study participants, it was important for me to identify my positionality so I could acknowledge the potential for my perspectives to influence my interpretation of the data.

Methodology

Methodology is a set of principles and ideas that inform the design of a research study (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.4). When considering a study about wellbeing and resilience, and identifying what creates a good and meaningful life, it seemed an empowering, asset-based, and person-centred approach was an obvious choice. Research has shown top-down, paternalistic approaches where solutions are not co-developed can be experienced as victimizing while processes that encourage individuals and population groups to identify solutions that work for them are often experienced as liberating, empowering, and reversing internalized powerlessness (Mathie et al., 2017, p.54; Romeo, 2016). This research was designed using principles of appreciative inquiry, asset-based approaches, and strengths-based positive psychology approaches, all of which aim to create positive outcomes through empowerment and affirmation (Mathie et al., 2017, p.54-56). Figure 3 shows the framework that was developed for this study. It is based heavily on Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing and other wellbeing and resilience research described in the literature review.

Figure 3: Framework for the Study of Wellbeing and Resilience used in the design of this study. Developed based on the work of Seligman and other researchers (described in the literature review).



Appreciative Inquiry

In order to determine which tools, skills, and support systems were working well for this population group, and how these assets could be leveraged to address existing challenges, appreciative inquiry methodology was examined. Appreciative inquiry and appreciative interview approaches are beneficial because they generally put people in a positive state of mind where they value their own experiences, contributions, and skills and are better able to identify assets and strengths that they and others possess (Coaching Leaders UK, 2012; Whitney, 2010, p.73-74). This is aligned with and supported by the Broaden and Build Theory, which posits that negative emotions lead to narrow, focused mindsets while positive emotions allow a person to think more broadly, creates capacity for novel and creative solution development, and supports individuals to build their personal resources and confidence in the process (Fredrickson, 2004, p.1367). As such, it was hoped that by using appreciative inquiry and strengths-based approaches when designing this research, participants would be able to share a greater depth of information and also leave the interview feeling positive and empowered (Fredrickson, 2004, p.1375).

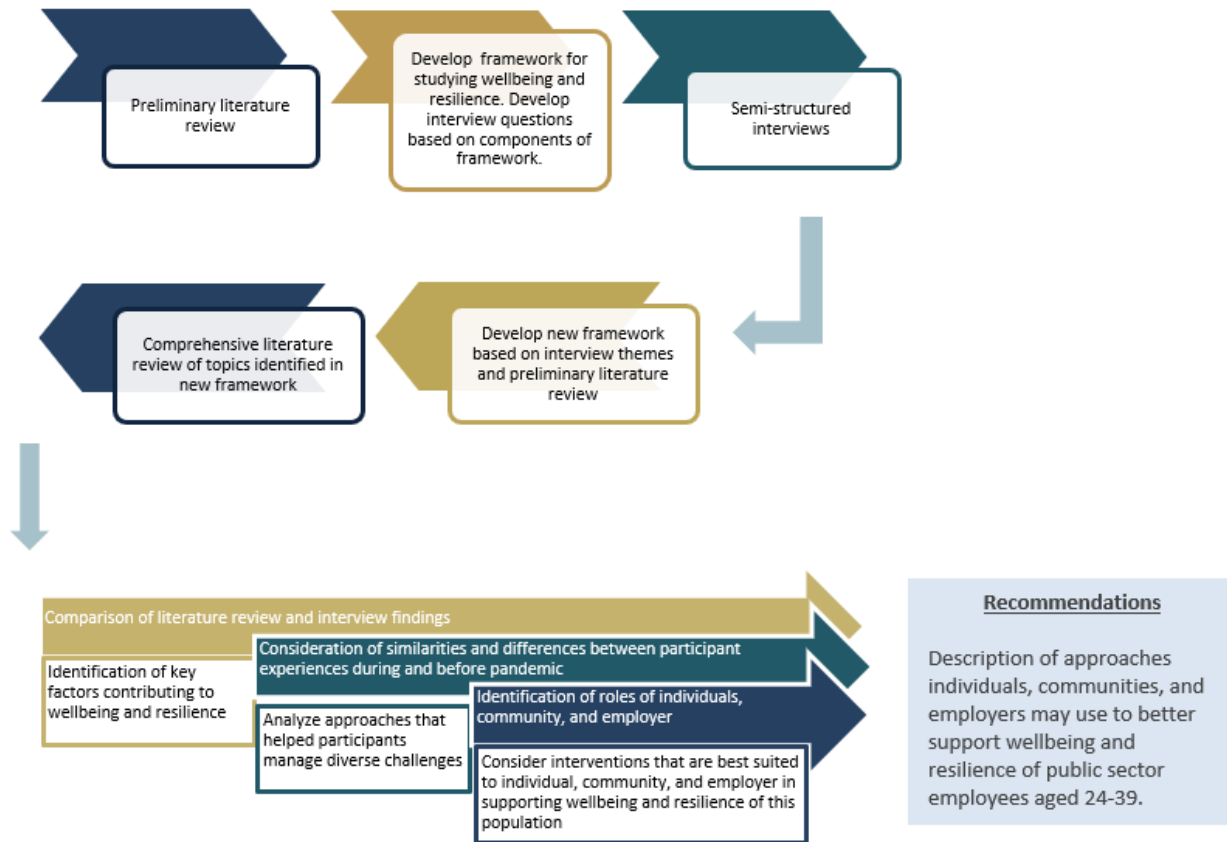
Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a research methodology that aims to explain a phenomenon from the context of those who experience it; grounded theory research is not based on existing theories, rather it is designed to produce a new theory to explain the experiences of a population group (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.16-17). This study did not intend to use a grounded theory methodology as there is a vast amount of thorough research in the areas of wellbeing and resilience. This project aimed to identify existing approaches within existing frameworks that were most applicable to public sector employees. However, the themes and relationships identified in the initial literature did not crystallize in the interview findings, which required the researcher to reconsider the approach and use grounded theory methods to analyze the data. This study does not fit the criteria of a fully grounded theory research approach because data was collected with a specific framework in mind and therefore did not use grounded theory in the early stages of study design (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.10-12); however, it has resulted in a new conceptualization of the ways in which the public sector employees interviewed experience wellbeing and resilience.

Research Design and Data Collection Strategies

Data for this study was collected through 14 semi-structured interviews and a two-phase literature review. Figure 4 provides a visual depiction of the research design and data collection strategies used.

Figure 4: Research Design and Methods for this Study



The first phase of the literature review identified key elements that contribute to wellbeing and resilience. This information was used to develop a framework for studying wellbeing and resilience based on a modified version of Seligman’s Theory of Wellbeing and it’s six elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health (Butler & Kern, 2016; Seligman, 2011, p.24). This conceptual framework (figure 3) was used to develop an interview guide for the semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are a powerful and flexible approach for capturing the voices of people and understanding the meaning in their life experiences (Rabionet, 2011, p.563). They are conducted conversationally with one participant using mainly open ended questions often followed up with “why” or “how” questions that allow participants to tell stories and share information they see as relevant (Newcomer et al., 2015, p.321, 492-493). Semi-structured interviews allow for the discovery of information that may not have been anticipated, provide significant depth of information, and can lead to a rich collection of qualitative data (Newcomer et al., 2015, p.385, 471).

The interview guide included questions asking participants to describe their experiences with wellbeing and resilience as it related to each of the six elements of wellbeing, as well as their experiences with community support and employer support for wellbeing. The interviews were

conducted one-on-one virtually through Zoom. Participants were also asked to complete a short online survey through the University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) that quantitatively measures the six elements of wellbeing. As the survey required them to sign up for a UPenn online account allowing UPenn to use the data, completion of it was optional. Many participants chose not to complete the survey. Ultimately, the survey data was not used in this study due to the small sample size.

Once the interviews were completed and analyzed, a new framework describing the relationship between wellbeing and resilience, and the elements that contribute to it was developed to reflect the interview findings. This new framework was used to conduct a more comprehensive literature review. Further analysis was then conducted to compare the literature review and interview findings, consider similarities and differences between the wellbeing and resilience tools participants used before and during the pandemic, and explore the roles of individuals, communities, and employers in facilitating improved wellbeing and resilience. All of this analysis was used to inform three broad recommendations and a total of ten sub-recommendations.

Sample

A mixed sampling strategy comprised of snowball/chain sampling and maximum variation sampling was used (McDavid, Huse, Hawthorn, 2019, p.229). To employ snowball sampling, the researcher sent the participant recruitment email (Appendix A) to known contacts who work for the Government of Alberta and municipalities in the Edmonton area. The email provided study information, researcher contact information, and asked them to pass the information to their contacts who may meet the criteria and may be willing to participate (McDavid, Huse, Hawthorn, 2019, p.229). Employing maximum variation sampling included seeking maximum variation in the areas of age (within the age range), gender, ethnicity, place of work/ministry/department, type of job, and position level. Selected participants were then provided with a consent form with additional information about the study and asked to confirm their interest in participating (Appendix B).

Study participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- Age: 24 to 39 years in 2020 (year of birth 1981-1996)
- Location: Live in the greater Edmonton area
- Employment: Active employment in public service (Alberta Public Service, City of Edmonton, or another local municipality) for a period that includes January 1, 2020 to the time of the interview in summer 2020.

About the participants:

- Participants represented six Government of Alberta ministries and two City of Edmonton departments. They all described working in office jobs in some form of public policy, corporate services, or program delivery role.
- Three participants were in supervisory roles, 11 were in non-supervisory roles.
- Four participants identified as male, ten identified as female.
- Three participants identified as South Asian, two identified as Black, one identified as Asian, eight identified as Caucasian/white.
 - Most participants who had immigrated to Canada described a multicultural experience where they identified with at least two cultures. Some participants who are People of Colour described challenges associated with racism and other systemic barriers that had a negative impact on their wellbeing. They also indicated having a strong cultural identity and sense of community, which positively contributed to their wellbeing and made them more resilient. As this was such a small sample, these issues were not able to be examined in depth.
 - This study had two white male participants. Both of them indicated a strong understanding of the privilege associated with being a white male in Canadian society and indicated a feeling that they should use their privilege to make a more positive impact. As there were only two participants indicating this, it was not a salient theme and was not explored in the findings; however, it is a notable attribute of these two participants.

Design of Instruments

Interview questions were developed using affirmative questions as recommended in appreciative inquiry/appreciative interview methodologies (Coaching Leaders UK, 2012; Moore, 2008, p.214). Participants were asked a series of similar questions on a number of topics. For example, participants were asked to describe a positive time for their health and what contributed to it. This allowed for the identification of assets that contributed to positive wellbeing related to health. Participants were also asked to describe a challenging situation that made them more resilient. They were then asked to describe the tools that helped them get through this experience. Although focused on a challenging experience, this question led to positive stories about their resilience, tools and approaches that helped them, often a description of the positive things they learned from the experience, and ways it helped them improve.

Interview questions (Appendix C) were in the following categories:

1. Introductory questions
2. Health

3. Relationships
4. Accomplishment
5. Engagement
6. Positive emotion
7. Meaning
8. Concluding questions
9. Recommendations

Most sections of the interview followed a similar series of questions of this nature:

- Tell me about a time when things were going well in this area of your life. What contributed to this positive experience?
- Tell me about a time when things were not going well in this area of your life. How did you get through it?
- How has this area of your life been going over the past six months/during the pandemic? What has helped you to get through this time?
- What is your advice for others who wish to improve their experience in this area of their life?

The interviews consisted of approximately 60 questions and lasted for between one and two hours. Interviews were conducted in July and August 2020, four-five months after Alberta declared a state of public health emergency due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was at a time when the first wave of the pandemic was coming to an end and some aspects of life had returned partially to normal and before the second wave of the pandemic and its associated isolation requirements began.

Methods of Analysis

The initial approach to analysis of interview findings was thematic analysis based on the conceptual framework ([figure 4](#)). Thematic analysis is an approach used to identify and analyze patterns and meaning in qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p.1947-1948). Thematic analysis is conducted through the identification of codes, which capture features of the data that may be relevant to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p.1947-1948). Coding is an analytical approach that identifies both surface meaning/use of language and deeper latent meaning (Clarke & Braun, 2014, p.1948). The interview transcripts were coded for expected themes in the areas of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health. When this was shown to be ineffective for the data collected for this study, thematic analysis was re-started using grounded theory methods including open coding/initial coding based strictly on the experiences described by participants without consideration of existing literature and models (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.10-14).

Process

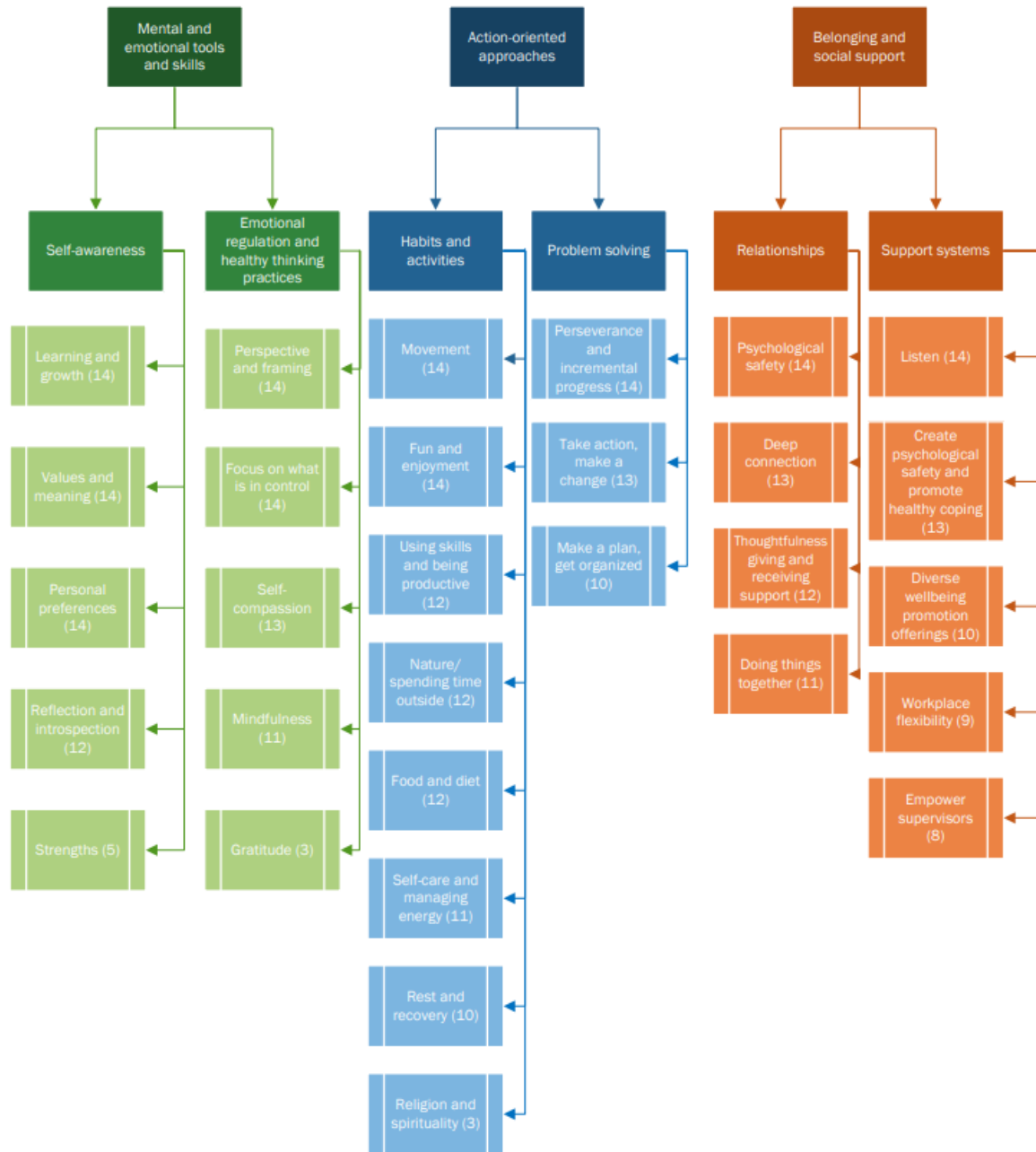
Audio recordings of the virtual interviews were produced by Zoom video conferencing software. Descript transcription software was then used to create interview transcripts. By re-listening to the audio recordings and reviewing the transcripts, the researcher was able to become immersed in the data and correct transcription errors. The transcripts were then reviewed and coded for themes using NVIVO software, which tracked and counted items coded by the researcher. The researcher expected participants to identify common and discrete approaches they use in each of the six elements of wellbeing. The expected themes did not crystallize so the researcher started over, using initial or open coding, meaning she reviewed the interview transcripts without looking for pre-determined themes or testing alignment with existing theories (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.10). Three broad themes began to emerge that spanned all six elements of wellbeing and applied to both wellbeing and resilience, but in different ways. The researcher began to develop a new theory, tested, and modified the relationships between each concept by re-examining and re-coding the interviews multiple times. Once a theory based on the participant experiences was developed, a final round of coding was conducted to test alignment followed by the second stage of the literature review – these final steps are referred to as advanced coding and theoretical integration in grounded theory approaches (Birks & Mills, 2015, p.10-14).

Coding the Themes

After the initial/open coding and several rounds of intermediate coding were complete, a code book was developed to align with the new framework. A codebook identifies all the themes that align with the new framework and their most salient relationships, often shown as a hierarchical structure with “parent themes” at the top and various sub-themes below (Guest et al., 2020, p.14). The three largest themes found in the interviews which were referenced extensively by all participants, their associated subthemes, and the number of participants who referenced the sub-themes are shown in figure 5. In addition to those shown in figure 5, other codes that spanned the three main themes were used. This included impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated sub-themes, which were used to answer specific questions that were somewhat outside the framework. This led to findings that helped confirm the applicability of the framework as a whole including that participants used similar approaches to resilience (in the areas of all three major themes) both before and during the pandemic. Once the codebook was finalized and aligned with the framework, the interviews were all fully coded using it. The researcher used manual coding in NVIVO where she read each section of each interview transcript and identified which codes it fit. For example, a statement indicating the participant spent more time doing their favourite physical activity of bike riding with their kids during the COVID-19 pandemic would be coded to “personal preferences”, “doing things

together”, “movement”, “fun and enjoyment”, and “pandemic”. Using multiple codes to describe one statement allowed for greater understanding of the inter-relationships between the concepts. The relationships between approaches that were often coded together are explored in the findings section.

Figure 5: Visual Depiction of the Codebook for the Three Major Themes and Their Sub-themes



Limitations

The generalizability of this study is limited due to the size of the sample and the sampling strategy. A criticism of snowball sampling is that the sample is not random and therefore may not be generalizable (McDavid, Huse, and Hawthorn, 2019, p.230). This study attempted to mitigate this concern by combining snowball sampling with maximum variation sampling; however, in spite of the maximum variation sampling there was notable homogeneity amongst the study participants. A significant number of participants were white females in their mid-late 30s (upper end of the age range). Given that only 29% of participants were male, 38% were People of Colour, and 22% were aged 24-29, the findings have particularly limited generalizability for these population groups. Given that all study participants were employed with the Government of Alberta or the City of Edmonton, the study is not generalizable to employees of other municipalities in the Edmonton area, as had been expected when the study was designed. Employers may wish to conduct more robust research in order to gather detailed information about the needs of their employees. For example, when the Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton conduct their bi-annual staff surveys, they may consider supplementing them with focus groups or semi-structured interviews with a sample of diverse staff to better understand the survey results and the needs of their employees.

FINDINGS

A Framework for Understanding Wellbeing and Resilience

Initially this research was framed around a modified version of Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing; however, the six areas of wellbeing did not crystallize in the findings. When asked about each of the areas of wellbeing (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplish, and health) three broad themes that spanned all these areas seemed more reflective of the ways in which people manage and improve their wellbeing and resilience. The three themes that emerged reflect approaches that help participants with both their daily wellbeing and their ability to be resilient in challenging times; they are mental and emotional tools and skills, action-oriented approaches, and belonging and social support. Within the three themes, there are approaches that support individuals more with their daily wellbeing and approaches that support them more with resilience; however, it was shown in both the interviews and the literature review that all of these concepts are extremely interrelated and a change in one wellbeing promoting habit can have impacts on resilience and vice versa. The framework in figure 6 shows the relationship between wellbeing and resilience and the approaches that promote each, as found in the interviews with participants. The themes and approaches

identified in the interviews align with many other studies although these relationships do not appear to be articulated in this way elsewhere in the literature.

Figure 6: New Framework of Wellbeing and Resilience Developed in this Study



Relationship between Wellbeing and Resilience

Participants were asked to describe what the terms wellbeing and resilience mean to them. All participants displayed common understandings of these terms that were aligned with the literature. Participants used phrases like holistic health, overall picture of how you are doing, and how you feel in general when describing wellbeing. They often described an interplay between factors that influence physical and mental health and sometimes also noted emotional, spiritual, and social elements. All participants described resilience as managing challenging situations using phrases like ability to weather the storm, getting through tough times, and how you bounce back. There appeared to be consensus that the term wellbeing can be used to describe how life is going for a person at any point in time while resilience relates to how a person manages when faced with challenges.

Participants often described similar or related tools and approaches that could be used to improve both wellbeing and resilience. The main difference was the wellbeing tools were generally described as recurring activities and habits the individuals built into their lives while resilience tools were described as something they use only when needed. For example, one participant spoke about mindfulness and gratitude practices she engaged in to improve daily wellbeing including a regular activity where she and her family talk about things they are grateful for. She later talked about her ability to have perspective in difficult situations because she is able to find reasons to be optimistic and things to be grateful for even in the midst of a challenge. Another participant illustrated the relationship between the two concepts by saying

the way she was resilient in the face of challenges at work was to spend non-work hours taking care of her wellbeing by spending time with loved ones, eating good food, and exercising. Taking care of her wellbeing each evening better equipped her to handle the challenges she faced at work the next day.

The difference in the way participants talked about approaches to wellbeing and resilience were generally consistent throughout the interviews, with participants often describing how they leverage a tool or habit they use for everyday wellbeing differently in a situation that calls them to be resilient. The opposite is also true, participants often described experiencing growth and learning as a result of going through something difficult, which went on to improve their daily wellbeing long after the difficult experience was over.

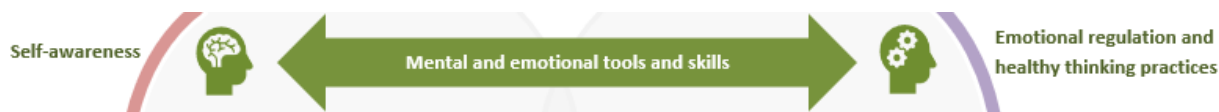
Approaches to Wellbeing and Resilience

All 14 participants referenced the three themes of mental and emotional tools and skills, action-oriented approaches, and belonging and social support in their interviews. All participants indicated some form of self-awareness, habits and activities, and relationships contributed to their wellbeing and all participants referenced some form of emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices, problem solving, and support systems as relevant to their resilience. Figure 7 shows the total number of times each of these approaches was referenced during the 14 interviews.

Figure 7: Total frequency of references to approaches to wellbeing and resilience in all participant interviews.

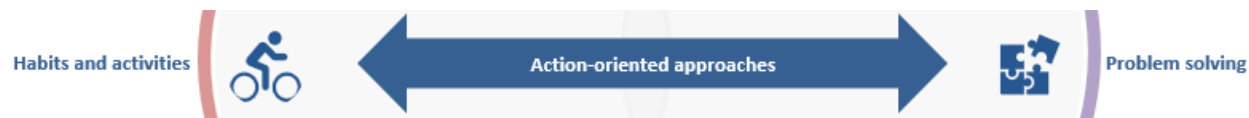


Figure 8: Mental and Emotional Tools and Skills section of Wellbeing and Resilience Framework



The most frequently cited theme throughout the 14 interviews was mental and emotional tools and skills with 524 references. The sub-theme, self awareness was most often referenced when individuals spoke about their wellbeing and the need to know themselves in order to adequately manage their wellbeing. The sub-theme, emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices was most often referenced when individuals talked about shifting their thinking when managing challenging situations. 34% of the time when individuals talked about emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices, they also referenced self-awareness. They explained a reciprocal relationship between the two concepts where higher self-awareness helped them identify effective emotional regulation tools and helped them to see the opportunity to learn about themselves in challenging situations and to become more self-aware. A participant described her experience with these two concepts when talking about challenging experiences with her family. She was able to use her emotional regulation skills to frame the struggles as an opportunity to learn from what she went through. This perspective allowed her to spend time self-reflecting and identifying her values and needs, which contributed to her wellbeing moving forward.

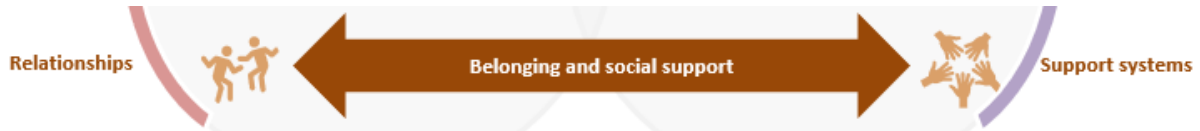
Figure 9: Action-oriented Approaches section of Wellbeing and Resilience Framework



Some participants described themselves as problem solvers or goal oriented. These participants referenced action-oriented approaches to wellbeing and resilience as being particularly useful to them. The sub-theme, habits and activities was most often referenced when individuals talked about regular actions that are built into their lives to promote their wellbeing. The sub-theme, problem solving was most often referenced when participants talked about taking action when faced with a challenge. When talking about habits and activities, individuals referenced problem solving 12% of the time. This was often the case when individuals wanted to develop a new wellbeing promoting habit but came across challenges in the process. Some participants talked about using their problem-solving skills in the area of perseverance and incremental progress in order to keep going with their goals to build a new diet or exercise related habit. While the goal of developing the habit was to improve their daily wellbeing,

participants also needed to rely on their problem-solving/resilience skills to keep going when those new habits became challenging.

Figure 10: Belonging and Social Support section of Wellbeing and Resilience Framework



All participants frequently talked about the importance of other people to their wellbeing and resilience. Participants often referenced the relationships they have with their family members, friends, co-workers, and community members as something that makes their daily lives more meaningful and enjoyable. Feeling as though they belong and are accepted by the people in their social and work environments was important to wellbeing for most participants. The feeling of being supported and having support systems to rely on was essential to resilience. This included needing support from close friends and family, community, and their employer when going through a challenging time. Some mentioned examples of challenging experiences that were made worse by lack of support, usually from their employer.

Approaches for Enhanced Wellbeing

As shown in the framework ([figure 6](#)), there were three types of approaches that participants described as significant contributors to their wellbeing. They are self-awareness, habits and activities, and relationships. Participants described extremely diverse and varied approaches to managing and improving their wellbeing. The summary below describes types of approaches used by most participants along with some items that were referenced by less participants but described as high impact.

Figure 11: Wellbeing Section of Wellbeing and Resilience Framework



Self-awareness

All 14 participants talked about the importance of self-awareness to wellbeing. Some talked about it extensively throughout the interview indicating it is the most important element for any meaningful improvements to the other areas of wellbeing. One person explained this saying “it has to start with working on yourself because if you have no self-awareness, how can you work on a relationship with someone else?”. Participants talked about the ways in which their everyday lives improved as they gained self-awareness through both life experience and intentional effort. 64% of participants indicated their wellbeing is better now than when they were younger; the primary rationale provided was increased self-awareness. Many participants talked about the importance of putting intentional effort into seeking to learn about oneself by trying new things, reading different books, or committing to self-reflection through a journaling practice or seeing a psychologist or a career advisor.

All participants referenced the benefits to wellbeing when a person has a good understanding of their values, things that provide them with meaning and purpose, and their preferences/things they enjoy doing. Most participants talked about the need to identify their preferences so they could make more space in their lives for the things they enjoy as shown by this comment “people find happiness through different sources or different experiences. Take the time to reflect and identify what makes you happy and then pursue more of those experiences.” Sub-themes referenced by most participants are values and meaning (referenced by all 14 participants), personal preferences (14), learning and growth (14), and self-reflection and introspection (12). Table 2 shows some participant comments in each of these areas.

Table 2: Self-awareness

Learning and growth (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning about yourself is a valuable thing to spend time on. Through a long journey with mental health, I have gotten to know myself really well and to see who I am and how my brain works.• Everyone has things they want to improve. Find ways to do the work, whether it’s therapy, talking to someone, reading books, listening to podcasts, whatever it is that will expand your mind or help you start to see or understand things differently.• Be open to new experiences. Go try things, some of them might help you find purpose, others might just be fun, or bring you something else.
Values and meaning (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find what’s important to you and what you value and go from there. I value family so I ensure I make time for the people I love. No matter what it is, if you make time for the things you love and value, you’ll find meaning and wellbeing in that.• I have become engaged in politics in a way that I hadn’t been before. Politics has recently put into focus my core values and it made me want to do more. I am really focused on the things that matter to me and the things I want to put out into the world.

- Personal preferences (14)
- I went through a process of trying to understand the things that used to make me happy and contribute to my wellbeing then I re-engaged in those types of things.
 - Find fun in fitness, whether that's playing a sport you really like or listening to a podcast or your favourite song while doing physical activity.
- Reflection and introspection (12)
- Some of the things that facilitated by understanding of myself is journaling, talking to a psychologist, talking to family members, and examining relationships.
 - When something goes wrong, there is opportunity for reflection and self-examination. By examining failures, you can learn about yourself as a person, who you are, and what you're looking for.

Habits and Activities

Of the six types of wellbeing and resilience promoting approaches, habits and activities was the category participants talked about the most. They spoke about many different habits that have added value to their lives and ones that did not. Of all of the specific approaches, movement was mentioned dramatically more often than all other approaches in all categories. Movement was referenced 144 times throughout the 14 interviews, meaning on average each participant talked about it ten times. Given the approach to coding, this means they talked about it on ten different occasions during the interview. Other categories related to physical health such as rest, diet, and self-care were referenced a total of 25, 32, and 41 times, respectively. Movement was described by most participants as one of the most important contributors to their daily wellbeing. For those who did not have a regular movement or exercise practice, they talked about it as a significant gap and area of concern for them. In addition to the benefits to physical health, participants talked about movement as a source of mindfulness, enjoyment, being challenged, spending time in nature, connecting with people, gaining perspective, and a way to manage mental health.

The types of leisure or structured exercise referenced were extremely diverse. In many cases, the forms of exercise referenced were unique and only mentioned by one participant. A notable exception was cycling; 50% of participants talked about cycling with three of them talking about it at length throughout the interview. For those three individuals, it was referenced as one of their greatest sources of positive emotions, engagement, accomplishment, and social relationships. These three participants appeared to be experiencing great joy even when talking about cycling. Having an activity that brings this much enjoyment and engagement seemed to be life changing for their wellbeing. One of those participants said "My first bike ride as an adult may have been the best experience of my life. I felt like a kid. I felt like I was going so fast. It was amazing." Another said "going for bike rides makes me really happy, especially long rides after work. It helps me decompress and when I get back, I'm not

thinking about anything, just the euphoria of having just completed the ride. It helps me mentally and physically”.

Most participants talked about the ways in which spending time outside has been beneficial to their wellbeing. When talking about nature and time outside, 96% of the time they also mentioned some form of movement. Many participants talked about going for a walk outside as a way to clear their head, gain perspective, and improve their mood. One participant talked about the profound impact a new habit of taking a walk outside each morning has had on her overall wellbeing.

Sub-themes referenced by most participants are movement (referenced by all 14 participants), fun and enjoyment (14), using skills and being productive (12), nature and time spent outside (12), food/diet (12), self-care and managing energy (11), and rest and recovery (10). Table 2 shows some key participant comments regarding four of those sub-themes.

Table 3. Habits and Activities

Movement (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I find going to the gym is physical health, mental health, stress relief, and social bonding. • When I was dancing, I felt connected with people, I felt challenged, free, and creative. • I used to exercise because I wanted to lose weight, be physically fit, or because it was on a to do list. Now I see it differently, it’s about doing something for myself and taking care of my overall wellbeing.
Fun and enjoyment (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I like connecting with friends and family, doing things we can all enjoy, good food, and good conversation. • A good joke always brings a smile to my face. While other things bring me happiness, it doesn’t compare to sharing jokes with people. • My favourite is when I find an activity to do with my kids and make a moment of it. When we can have those moments, it’s the best.
Using skills and being productive (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I had a job that I found really engaging and enjoyable. I was able to use lots of different skills to do different types of work, it was challenging but didn’t feel onerous, I would get in the zone and time would fly by, and at the end of the day I would see it all come together and feel like I accomplished something. • In undergrad, I felt hopeful and very motivated. I was doing schoolwork, volunteering, sports, and maintaining relationships. It felt natural to be able to tackle all of those things.
Nature/time spent outside (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We do long distance hikes over multiple days. It brings me so much joy because you’re in beautiful outdoor scenery, not worrying about anything except putting one foot in front of the other. • Spending time outside with my dog/my little best friend, moving my body always makes me feel present, in the moment, and positive.

Relationships

Most participants talked about the important people in their lives throughout their interviews with 50% of them describing relationships as the greatest source of meaning in their lives. Many described the importance of cultivating strong and deep relationships while also remembering to have fun and connect with people over shared interests, doing enjoyable activities together, and humour.

Participants described wanting to bring their whole self including flaws to relationships. They indicated wanting to feel seen, accepted, and valued for who they are. When describing challenging relationships, they have experienced, participants often talked about not being fully accepted or feeling betrayed by someone they had been honest and vulnerable with. All 14 participants indicated some form of trust as important to them in relationships. Two different themes related to trust emerged. One participant's comment that she values "the comfort of being around someone you trust and who understands you in a fundamental way" speaks to the desire for deep connection and truly knowing each other. Another participant's comment, "I value trust and acceptance in relationships. I need to be able to trust the people in my life and I hope they trust me. I accept them for who they are, and they accept me for who I am" speaks to psychological safety and the need to feel safe in a relationship regardless of how deep it is. Psychological safety and its associated trust were often referred to in relation to the workplace while deep connection and its associated trust was typically referred to in romantic partnerships and close friendships.

Most participants talked about enjoying both giving and receiving support in relationships. Some participants focused more on the importance of either giving support or receiving support, but most talked about giving and receiving in tandem. They appreciated relationships that had some level of reciprocity where both parties do thoughtful things for each other, they feel they are on the same team, and neither party is taken advantage of. This is illustrated by one participant's description of a mutually supportive friendship "My friend and I are constantly boosting each other and motivating each other. We talk about future goals and even though we're across the country from each other, we find time to keep in touch and keep each other accountable. To find the potential in somebody and really cheer them on, I think that's a really good relationship".

Sub-themes referenced by most participants were psychological safety (referenced by all 14 participants), deep connection (13), thoughtfulness, giving, and receiving support (12), and doing things together (11). Table 4 shows some key participant comments regarding the sub-themes.

Table 4. Relationships

Psychological safety (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I value social safety in relationships, as in the ability to feel vulnerable around someone without fear of shame or ridicule. • Sometimes you have to be told something you don't want to hear. It's easier when there is good communication, mutual trust, respect, and you know they are looking out for your best interests.
Deep connection (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm not about having acquaintances. I want strong relationships and I'd rather have a small number of deep, meaningful relationships. • I prefer having just a few important deep connections because that way you can get the most out of relationships. You don't want to be telling everybody your business.
Thoughtfulness, giving, and receiving support (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our morning routine is that he will go upstairs, make coffee, then bring some down to me. He doesn't have to do that, it's a small way he chooses to show he loves and appreciates me. • When my grandmother got sick, she needed support. When she was palliative, I was with her, I read to her, talked to her, helped change her clothes, and tried to feed her. It made me feel like I was doing something that matters by caring for someone I love who was sick.
Doing things together (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My spouse, my son, and I went on a really long bike ride in the river valley and to the zoo. The whole time my son was like weeeee and making little ba boom, ba boom, ba boom, sounds with the bike. It was really freeing and I was really happy. • I get joy out of doing things with other people that make them happy. If somebody else is getting joy out of things I enjoy like cycling or laughing with me, that makes me very happy.

Building Resilience

Participants described resilience as their ability to get through challenging experiences. As shown in the framework ([figure 6](#)), there were three types of approaches that participants described as helping them be resilient. Figure 12 shows the resilience section of the framework and the categories; emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices, problem solving, and support systems. The summary below describes the type of challenges participants experienced before and during the pandemic and the approaches they took to managing and getting through them.

Figure 12: Resilience Section of Wellbeing and Resilience Framework



Challenging Experiences

Participants were asked to speak about challenging experiences both before and during the pandemic that helped them to become more resilient. Pre-pandemic life experiences described by participants were highly varied and included personal mental illness, loved ones struggling with addictions, losing a loved one to suicide, difficult family situations in childhood, financial struggles, becoming a new parent, challenges while pursuing post-secondary education, workplace interpersonal challenges with bosses, staff, or colleagues, and generally feeling stuck in situations and in life.

There was much more commonality between the experiences of participants during the pandemic. Most described their experience with the pandemic as challenging but privileged as none of them had lost a loved one to the illness or had lost their job. While none of them had lost their jobs (this is expected as a requirement for study participation was current employment in the public sector), many participants spoke about job insecurity as a new challenge they were experiencing. There was a high level of awareness of the financial situation of government with participants noting recent layoffs and ongoing re-organizations expected to result in more job losses. One participant indicated “it’s a lot of change on top of change and we have layoffs expected in September; the tension of not knowing what’s happening with that has been going on for the whole time that COVID has”. This was of greater concern for Government of Alberta employees although City of Edmonton employees also referred to budgetary challenges facing their employer. Some individuals spoke about their spouses and other loved ones losing their jobs during the pandemic resulting in financial hardship even though they themselves had remained employed. Many participants indicated that they were

able to use the resilience skills they developed through past challenges to help them cope with the challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Information overload is an issue that was brought into sharper focus for some participants with 29% of them raising it as a significant issue for them during the pandemic. Several participants described putting limits on their consumption of news and social media that they didn't have in place before. One participant said, "watching the news a lot and being obsessed with the topic of coronavirus was not helpful" and another said, "I tried setting up app limits on my phone but found I was overriding them when I wanted to look at Twitter or the news". These participants talked about working to find a balance of being informed and connected while not letting the largely negative news and discourse on social media have an undue negative impact on them.

All participants referenced some form of changes to routines and to relationships as a result of the pandemic. Most talked about a mix of positive and negative experiences associated with these changes; 11 participants talked about perspective, gratitude, and positive emotions felt during this time and 10 participants talked about uncertainty and negative emotions experienced at this time. Many of the positive changes were associated with seeing it as a wake-up call to refocus on things that are important to them, spending more time with immediate family, having less obligations, and time to slow down. 57% of participants talked about the benefits they have experienced from having extra free time with one saying, "the world kind of stopped, it gave me time to take a break and just recover". Some of them cited using the extra time for wellbeing promoting habits such as exercise, cooking healthy meals, or spending time with family. Table 5 shows some key participant comments regarding their experiences during the pandemic.

Table 5. Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Changes to routine (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figuring out what to do in the house without others and without our routines was tough. Eventually we figured it out and started re-engaging in things we did before in new ways like doing karate online through zoom. • My health has definitely been worse because of the sedentary element of the pandemic, being isolated, working from home, not moving around as much. • I am getting what I always wanted, more time with my kids and family while still working. I am spending seven hours at work instead of ten hours for work and commute.
Changes to relationships (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My long-distance friendships with people from a long time ago were rekindled. When everyone was staying at home, there was time to have those conversations, which was really nice. • Some relationships became more strained whereas my personal romantic relationship got stronger.

Perspective, gratitude, and positive emotions (11)

- COVID has made me re-evaluate my wellbeing, my health, and some other personal things. The mind shift it has caused has been interesting. It brought to light for me that I was taking things for granted.
- I have been finding ways to take advantage of the extra time we have now. I am making sure to appreciate the extra time because I know a lot of other people can't because they are sick, or lost their job, or a number of other things.

Uncertainty and negative emotions (10)

- Managing the general anxiety and what happens next was quite challenging initially. There was work change and uncertainty for me, my brother was laid off, my father was laid off, my sister was a nurse on a COVID floor. So, there was a lot happening around me and I spent a lot of time worrying.
- I have experienced more anxiety, stress, and fatigue during the pandemic. This often related to things I cannot control like people not wearing masks or social distancing or being respectful of other people who could get sick.

When talking about the tools they used to get through challenging situations, participants generally talked about using the same type of approaches to get through pandemic related challenges as other challenges they had experienced in life. The resilience promoting tools referenced by participants are described below.

Emotional Regulation and Healthy Thinking Practices

Many participants talked about the importance of challenging their initial reaction to a situation and making changes to the way they think about things. Taking a moment to pause and make a choice about how to think about a situation is at the core of most of the emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices described by participants. All 14 participants talked about perspective and reframing – they described challenging situations where they could have thought about it one way and chose to re-frame it and find a new perspective. For example, one participant said, “anytime something has challenged me in a negative way, I have been able to learn from it”. This person could feel resentful or frustrated with the negative experiences, but they increase their resilience by trying to let those feelings go and see the challenges as a way to learn and grow. All 14 participants also referenced focusing on what is in control. This is exemplified by one participant’s description of her experience in a past job when people were being laid off; “Keeping the bigger picture in mind and what really matters helps with resilience because you could look at that situation and think this is awful and stressful or instead look at the power and control you do have and try to do your best with that”. She went on to talk about the ways in which she supported her team through this difficult time and found meaning in doing what she could to make the situation a little easier rather than focusing on the things that were outside her control. The 93% of participants who talked about self-compassion and having a positive view of oneself often explained that while managing an already challenging

situation, it is not helpful to also be hard on oneself. Instead, they suggested being kind to oneself and trusting that they will be able to figure it out and get through it, is a more effective approach that avoids a lot of unnecessary emotional anguish.

The fourth type of emotional regulation that participants talked about frequently was different from the three described above. Rather than spending time thinking about the situation and finding a way to change the way they see it, the mindfulness and meditation examples were focused on either clearing the mind or focusing on something else for a while. For some participants mindfulness and meditation was used as a first step that allowed them to become less attached to the issue so they could later use one of the healthy thinking practices described above to change their thinking. For others, mindfulness and meditation was the primary coping mechanism and allowed them to let go of and not dwell on issues. This was a tool used by one participant when she was recently experiencing anxiety, “I spent time walking my dog and just being more present. I can’t worry about next year without getting through this year first”. She explained that in order to stop catastrophizing issues related to the pandemic and other large societal issues; she was able to use mindfulness to let it go. Table 6 shows some key participant comments that further illustrate these four sub-themes.

Table 6. Emotional Regulation and Healthy Thinking Practices

<p>Perspective and framing (14)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have learned a lot through different struggles. I learned challenges are not the end of the world. Breakups are just breakups, losing money or a job is just that, and you will bounce back. • Having perspective on what health and wellbeing means to you is helpful. Fostering a perspective oriented towards functional strength and fitness and avoiding or reversing illness in the longer term is more helpful than focusing on superficial goals. • I was happy to fail because it wasn’t meant to be.
<p>Focus on what is in control (14)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don’t take things very personally and find that I don’t seem to go through the same lines of thinking as other people about negative situations. I usually accept it and move to problem solving quickly. • I managed the stress of others not following public health measures during the pandemic by controlling what I could. The only places we go are the homes of our cohort members and the grocery store.
<p>Self-compassion (13)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People should go easier on themselves when they don’t achieve their goals in the initial timeframe, which may have been unrealistic. Being kinder to yourself and giving yourself the time and space, you need is helpful to both accomplishing your goals and taking care of yourself. • I used to feel ashamed of having mental health issues. I thought there was something wrong with me and it was something I had to hide. But it’s okay. It’s part of me, it’s part of the person I am, and I have realized it’s okay not to be okay.

Mindfulness
(11)

- Paying attention to things makes me feel good. I like to pay attention to how my feet feel on the ground when walking, drinking coffee and just enjoying how it tastes, dancing, and holding hands with my husband.
- Sometimes I'm in my backyard picking raspberries and don't pause to think the sun is out and I'm doing something that brings me joy. Mindfulness when you are truly enjoying something allows you to feel that joy.

Problem Solving

When participants were describing using action-oriented problem solving approaches, one third of the time they also talked about self-awareness. For many participants self-awareness led them to identify a solution and take action. One participant referred to herself as “hardwired to be a quitter” and indicated realizing and acknowledging that about herself allowed her to put structures in place to be more successful, saying “just find work arounds so you don't give up on things”. She solved the issue of not being able to create a regular running habit by setting weekly distance goals, which helped her find motivation to run a few kilometers at lunch each day.

A common sentiment related to both self-awareness and problem solving was “figure out what you want, then do it”. Participants described needing to have enough self-awareness to figure out what they wanted, which could then be followed by taking action. After identifying the problem that needed to be solved, ten participants said they make a plan or get organized in some way. One participant described herself as very organized and indicated “making lists really helps me to get perspective on all the pieces. If it's a big overwhelming challenge, this helps me a lot.” The importance of taking action in the form of making a change, starting something new, or taking a risk was referenced by 93% participants. They explained this in many different ways all sharing the attitude that if you want something you have to take action to make it happen. While many of these participants also talked about planning and getting organized, they emphasized the significance of moving beyond planning. Some noted that it might not feel like the perfect time, but they try to take action anyway.

All 14 participants referenced using perseverance and incremental progress in the face of challenges. Regarding her experience trying to finish her degree, one participant said “There were so many times I wanted to quit. Anything worthwhile is going to be hard and it's about pushing through, persevering in the tough times, and accepting that it's okay when things are not perfect.” Seven participants talked about needing to create boundaries in relationships, all mentioned how challenging this can be and several of them indicated they had to keep trying and making incremental progress in order to eventually put healthy boundaries in place. One participant said, “it took a long time to figure out boundaries with my mom” and explained that

after making multiple attempts and incremental progress each time, they built a healthier relationship. Another participant explained the process he went through to create healthy boundaries in romantic relationships. After multiple experiences with toxic patterns including jealousy, he found himself less and less susceptible to those patterns and increasingly effective at putting boundaries in place.

Table 7. Problem Solving

Perseverance and incremental progress (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is something you want to achieve, you need to stay focused, keep your eyes on the goal, and keep moving towards it. • If you want to run a marathon, try running one kilometer and it's okay if you have to walk most of it. As long as there is incremental, tiny progress, that's great. It's okay if there are setbacks.
Take action, make a change (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try. Some people will visualize their goals but never take the first step in trying. Just try and if you're not successful, learn from it. • Just start. Find something you enjoy and just start. Don't get in your head about why you can't do it. • Be vulnerable. You are going to get hurt but that's the only way you're going to be able to make changes.
Make a plan, get organized (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm always an advocate for a good list. With long term goals, I break them down into smaller ones, otherwise it's too overwhelming. • We moved in two years ago and hadn't unpacked the basement. So, we set up a schedule with the days we were going to spend an hour in the basement. We have been slowly organizing and tidying and it feels nice.

Support Systems

Support systems were described by participants as essential when they were facing a challenge. The types of support systems they relied on and their suggestions for ways wellbeing and resilience can be better promoted and supported are described in this section.

Friends and Family. All participants talked about relying on the support of close friends and family to some extent. For some participants this was a huge part of their lives and something they talked about extensively throughout the interview, others described having close friends and family but only relying on them for support occasionally. When facing a challenging situation, one participant indicated “talking about it with someone helps me feel accepted, that my feelings are valid, and like it's okay and will get better. Having those conversations with someone I love is probably the first thing that I do”. Another participant said “I find my family is incredibly thoughtful, kind, and they will do anything for you. We just try to take care of each other.” One specific example this participant provided was during the pandemic her family members all messaged each other when going to the grocery store to see if anyone needed anything. This was an effort to limit each other's exposure to the virus and to show they care.

Many participants talked about the meaningfulness of small gestures and how much they can influence their resilience during a challenging time.

Community. When participants talked about communities that they are part of and the ways in which they engage with those communities, the multiplicity of meanings for this term was apparent. Their descriptions made it clear that community has a positive connotation; it was seen as a group that they chose to be part of and where they feel accepted. For some participants, community meant getting to know their neighbours and checking in on each other. Some described common interest groups with several mentioning a vibrant cycling community in Edmonton. Others described larger communities that are not place-based such as the LGBTQ2S+ community, religious communities, and communities based on heritage (e.g., West African community) that they identify with and that give them a sense of meaning and belonging. Some described being highly involved in community-based organizations and supporting their community through volunteer work and advocacy. One participant talked about volunteering with a non-profit to launch a youth summer camp, two others described volunteering for election campaigns, and several others mentioned various types of structured and casual volunteer and advocacy work. When talking about these experiences, they described connecting with others over a shared purpose and a desire to give back. Participants described their communities as sources of enjoyment, meaning, and acceptance. One participant expressed appreciation for the support of the cycling community during the pandemic, as they adjusted programming and “did their best to replicate some sense of normal”.

Employer. When speaking about the workplace, participants described some positive experiences; however, a much greater number of concerns and gaps were raised. One person said the workplace is the area of life where they feel the least supported. While not stated as directly, this sentiment about the workplace seemed to be common among many participants. They were much more likely to speak positively of their direct supervisors than of higher-level leadership. Some participants referenced having a generally positive and supportive work environment as a result of their supervisor or co-workers with some indicating they felt their good experiences were in spite of higher-level leaders and not because of them.

Several participants mentioned that one unique challenge to working in the public sector is that elected leaders appear to make decisions based on optics and politics rather than the interests of staff. Some said it is hard to feel supported or valued in this type of environment. When talking about the provincial government’s support for employees during the pandemic, many participants said they were disappointed, especially Government of Alberta employees. They indicated capacity was in place to be more responsive to the needs of staff rather than switching between mandating all staff either work from home or work in the office at various

times with limited regard for their individual circumstances. Some participants described this approach as non-collaborative, disrespectful, and archaic noting that talented employees are hard to retain in this kind of work environment. The level of dissatisfaction with higher-level leadership seemed more prominent for Government of Alberta employees than for City of Edmonton employees.

Interventions. When talking about being supported in community and through their employer, participants described some approaches they have seen work well that could be leveraged. They also proposed ideas for addressing the concerns and gaps they raised.

The only approach that was referenced by all participants was the desire to be listened to when they have a concern or challenge. When participants described a situation where they were able to safely raise a concern and were listened to, they expressed great satisfaction, contentment, and appreciation. Most positive experiences with being listened to were in close relationships. Participants expressed significant concerns about this in the workplace where most do not feel listened to, respected, and often do not have the opportunity to share their perspective even on topics that affect them directly or where they have expertise. One person highlighted their frustration with this by saying “I wish they would listen to us. Everyone says it’s so great you work for the government and yeah it is great in some ways but honestly, they’re not about us and they don’t listen to us”. A few participants had positive experiences being listened to with one describing an initiative where staff were given the opportunity to pitch their ideas on any topic to executive leadership. He indicated it resulted in some innovative improvements to the workplace and operations and has had a positive impact on morale for some staff.

The need for psychological safety and the promotion of healthy coping was raised by 13 participants. This was mostly discussed in relation to the workplace where the hierarchical environment can make people feel unable to speak up in certain situations. One participant illustrated this concern by saying she and others feel their leaders think they are just there to do a job and do not promote or support healthy coping. She said “they don’t care about mental health. People are afraid to say hey, I’m struggling, or I need help”. Participants suggested that ways to address these kinds of challenges can be for leaders to model desired behaviours such as being curious and supportive when a concern is raised, encouraging work-life balance, and themselves working reasonable hours and doing what is in their control to support manageable workloads.

Ten participants indicated communities and employers can be more effective by offering diverse supports that meet the needs of diverse community members and staff. A participant explained this by suggesting they “examine the multitude of factors that impact people. It’s

recognizing people's different needs. We are all experiencing things together, but people are experiencing it differently and have different needs". This can mean identifying who they are trying to support, asking them how they want to be supported, developing programming that meets the identified needs, and checking back to see if it is working. One participant who works in policy said "it's like policymaking, you need to have an appreciation for the audience of the policy before you can ever hope to enact a good policy".

The benefits of workplace flexibility were raised by 64% of participants. Some indicated access to flexibility was what they appreciated most about their work environment while others indicated they did not have access to flexible work hours or work from home arrangements. Several participants mentioned internal reports that show even with the entire workforce working from home during the pandemic, productivity has been maintained or improved. 57% of participants indicated working from home gave them more time to focus on wellbeing promoting activities such as exercise, cooking healthier meals, spending time on their hobbies, or spending time with their families. A mom of two young children who previously spent three hours a day commuting talked about the profound impact working from home has had on her wellbeing. She said "I have time to go for walks with my kids or work out, which is life changing for me. I have more time to spend in the kitchen, so I make healthier meals for my family as well. Before when I got home from work, I was already exhausted. I used to wake up at 4 or 5 in the morning, now I wake up just before I start work".

Many participants saw direct supervisors as one of the greatest assets that could be leveraged to improve employee wellbeing. Eight of them suggested that rather than focusing on organization-wide wellbeing promoting efforts, there be a shift towards empowering supervisors to better support their direct reports. Participants expressed this by saying "there have been some large initiatives that had a lot of fanfare but appeared to have no impact" while supervisors know more about their staff and "want to do more but [their] hands are tied". Participants in supervisory roles expressed frustration with the significant limitations on how they can support their staff. One key example that was raised by almost all participants who work for the Government of Alberta was the executive level decision to require staff to return to the office in late summer 2020. COVID-19 case numbers had declined but the Chief Medical Officer of Health had expressed there could be a second wave in the fall. Staff expressed frustration about being unable to advocate for work from home arrangements in cases where they were working well, and supervisors also struggled with their lack of authority to decide the best approach for their team members.

Table 8. Community-based and Workplace Supports and Interventions

Listen (14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's very hierarchical and it's like the one guy way up there, his thought is the thought. • On teams where there is openness and employees are part of the solutions and innovations, I have found engagement and morale was great.
Create psychological safety and promote healthy coping (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a safe space where people can bring forward their concerns and they will be taken seriously. • Truly foster a culture of plurality in the workplace. Right now, it's being done in a very tokenistic manner. • Our deputy minister just posted a video encouraging people to take vacation. He seemed very sincere about work life balance. He was taking vacation himself and made a point to model that behavior.
Diverse wellbeing promotion offerings (10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's important to hear from community members about what they appreciate or don't appreciate about existing programming and why they are part of the community. Most communities are diverse and there is a spectrum of ways people want to participate. • For me, I would like more encouragement of physical health through access to a gym or a gym pass. But for people who have low paying jobs, and their stress is money, the main solution is probably not a pamphlet telling them to exercise more.
Workplace flexibility (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting flexible work arrangements could be huge for a lot of people like parents and people who have a long commute. • I struggle with social anxiety and usually have to interact with people at work all day long. Now that I am working at home, my anxiety is zero. I can't explain how beneficial it has been for me. I feel free. • Doing the daily grind, working nine to five, it seems so archaic. Our workplace needs to adapt. • The willingness to do flex work arrangements in my area is quite helpful. We can adjust to the various demands of our schedules in a way that lots of people can't. I value that.
Empower supervisors (8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most impactful thing an employer can do is enable direct supervisors to legitimately care about their employees' wellbeing. I have never been impressed by the organization wide approaches, but I have been impressed with my direct bosses' approaches at times. • I feel bad for the people I supervise because I don't have answers for them or much control. I am not given good information.

Summary

The way participants talked about their personal approaches to wellbeing and resilience was very different from the way they talked about accessing external supports. All participants were committed in some way to taking control of their own lives and taking steps to enhance their

wellbeing and resilience. When talking about their personal approaches, they appeared optimistic and empowered. When talking about external supports, particularly gaps they see in employer support, they appeared frustrated and disappointed. Many talked about using emotional regulation tools to accept work related things outside their control, however, the lack of employer support for wellbeing seemed to be a significant challenge for some participants. Not surprisingly given this context, a significant majority of the recommended interventions and improvements to support systems were focused on the employer.

All participants used approaches in the three broad categories of mental and emotional tools and skills, action-oriented approaches, and belonging and social support. Each person appeared to rely more heavily on one category over the others. Four participants seemed to focus on mental and emotional tools and skills more than the others, six appeared focused on action-oriented approaches, and four seemed to find belonging and social supports most beneficial. These are approximations based on themes that seemed to run through individual interviews; however, some participants talked about two categories a significant amount and a few talked about all three categories frequently. Participants appeared to typically rely on the same category for both wellbeing and resilience. For example, participants who focused on building wellbeing promoting habits and activities in their lives, tended to also take an action-oriented approach when dealing with a challenging situation while those who significantly enhanced their wellbeing by cultivating deep relationships generally relied on those relationships and their support systems during challenging times.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This section considers why Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing, did not align with the findings of this study, and how the new framework could be relevant and add to ongoing discussions in the academic community about conceptualizations of wellbeing and resilience. The literature and interview findings are then examined to consider the more practical implications of how this information can be applied to answer this study's research question: What strategies can be undertaken by individuals, communities, and organizations to improve wellbeing and resilience of millennial public sector employees in Edmonton?

Why is This New Framework Relevant?

This study was designed to consider how wellbeing and resilience can be improved for this population group – it was not intended to determine a new way to conceptualize the interrelated dynamics of wellbeing and resilience. The study was designed using the elements known to contribute to wellbeing, based primarily on Seligman's Theory of Wellbeing and

supplemented with findings of other researchers, which included adding health as a sixth element in addition to Seligman's five elements of wellbeing (Butler & Kern, 2016, p.2; Seligman, 2011, p.24). Study data was analyzed using the six elements (positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and health) with the expectation that participants would identify specific actions they take within each area that contribute to their wellbeing and resilience. The researcher noted that rather than describing specific activities related to each element, participants described things they do that contribute to many elements at once and it was nearly impossible to attribute a wellbeing promoting activity to any one category. Once the researcher stopped looking for discreet items that fell under each element of wellbeing, she found three broad themes and used them to form a new framework that more accurately reflected the experiences participants described ([figure 6](#)). All of the concepts shown in the framework are extremely well known and well researched; however, the way this new framework describes the relationships between the concepts appears to be unique.

The identification of these relationships is thought to be a result of the design of this study. Most studies on wellbeing and resilience appear to focus on the components that contribute to only one of wellbeing or resilience, or on the relationship between the two concepts (Tonkin et al., 2018, p.110). When wellbeing and resilience are studied together, it tends to be with the aim of defining and measuring them separately as opposed to looking at similarities and differences between the contributing factors of each (Hamby et al., 2017, p.172-176; Mguni et al., 2012, p.12). Additionally, the semi-structured interviews were quite long (up to two hours in length) so participants were able to tell in depth stories about times when they experienced a high sense of wellbeing, what contributed to it, times they experienced challenges, and how they got through them, which revealed nuances about the similarities and differences between the tools they used in each type of situation.

Seligman has worked extensively with the United States military to develop measures and programming to improve the wellbeing and resilience of military members (Seligman, 2011, p.126-135). While resilience is not built into his theory, he discusses it extensively as an outcome of wellbeing. Figure 13 shows this researcher's understanding of Seligman's theory and how it applies to resilience (Seligman, 2011, p.126-135). With this perspective in mind, figures 14 and 15 consider an example of how perseverance may apply within Seligman's theory and how it may apply within the framework developed in this research.

Figure 13: Framework based on Interpretation of Theory of Wellbeing (Seligman, 2011, p.24)

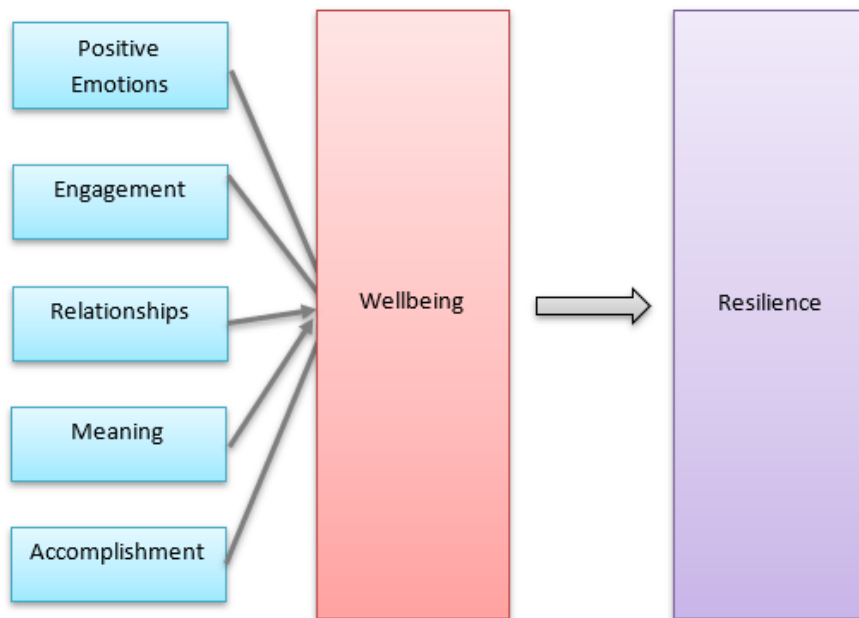
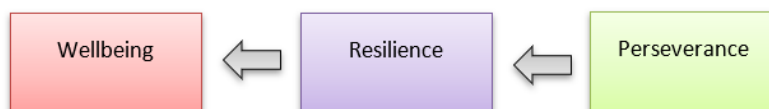


Figure 14: Conceptualization of relationship between perseverance, accomplishment, wellbeing, and resilience as applied to Theory of Wellbeing



Figure 15: Conceptualization based on the findings of this research



Seligman’s conceptualization of the elements of wellbeing suggests perseverance leads to accomplishment, accomplishment then leads to improved wellbeing, which can then lead to improved resilience (Seligman, 2011, p.18, 118, 126-129). Extensive existing research on grit certainly does show that perseverance leads to greater accomplishment of long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016, p.269); however, this study suggests actually accomplishing the goal is not always necessary to improve wellbeing or resilience. When an individual achieves a large goal,

they do experience improved wellbeing and study participants did describe that; however, more often they seemed to talk about persevering making them more resilient long before they accomplished anything of significance and even if they did not ultimately achieve their goal. One participant described setting a goal to run a half-marathon and was not able to achieve this goal. She talked about the early stages of training and persevering even when it was really hard to keep going. Even though she did not achieve this goal, she described herself as more resilient because of the training she did and because of the emotional skills she used to accept that she was not going to be able to achieve her goal. This is aligned with existing literature on endurance athletes where they describe an experience of becoming more resilient when they keep going during hard parts of a race; even if they do not finish the race, the experience of keeping going during some hard parts mimics the experience of life and helps them build resilience skills that can be used in the future (McGonigal, 2019, p.125-151). This example is used to illustrate ways in which participant experiences did not quite fit within Seligman's theory and why a different conceptualization was needed to explain the experiences with wellbeing and resilience they described.

Seligman's theory has experienced some criticism and he himself has recently acknowledged that it may be insufficient and suggested that health, vitality, and responsibility are other elements that may need to be added (Goodman et al., 2018; Seligman, 2018). The way his theory relates to resilience does not appear to be a focus of existing criticism, which is the primary reason a new framework was conceptualized in this study. Seligman's elements have been shown to correlate almost perfectly with other measures of subjective wellbeing, which can be seen as an endorsement of its relevance in some contexts, especially in the area of quantitative measurement of wellbeing (Goodman et al., 2018, p.321). While his theory is often referenced in relation to resilience, it seems it does not sufficiently address the complexity of the reciprocal relationship between the two concepts and may undersell the significance of interventions that could increase resilience without having a strong connection to any of the elements of wellbeing.

Seligman's theory plays an essential role in understanding wellbeing; however, it is possible it was simply not well-suited for this study. While Seligman's work indicates this theory can and has been applied to resilience work, ways in which the elements of wellbeing relate to resilience do not appear to be well fleshed out and the simplicity of the relationship between wellbeing and resilience did not align with the findings of this study. The framework developed in this research may be able to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how wellbeing and resilience relate to each other and whether the elements of wellbeing currently used by researchers around the world are the right ones.

Practical Considerations on How to Apply This and Help Individuals Flourish

While participants' life experiences differed considerably, the way they managed highly varied challenges was remarkably similar and well aligned with existing concepts in the literature. Their experiences and learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and other life experiences have informed this discussion of the roles of the individual, community, and employer in improving the wellbeing of this population.

Learning about Wellbeing and Resilience Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

Most participants described the pandemic as challenging for them in some way. When describing the challenges, all participants indicated they learned something new about themselves and how they manage change or noted confirmation that tools they used in the past continue to work well for them. All participants experienced changes to their routines and some form of changes to their relationships and the way they interact with people they care about. These challenges seemed manageable for all participants and they often discussed relying on resilience skills they had built during past challenges. Many participants talked about gaining new perspective that reminded them about what is most important to them in life. The only new challenge and intervention described by multiple participants was related to information overload. Some participants talked about the experience of increased anxiety and stress as a result of watching the news or spending time on social media and needing to put structures in place to limit their consumption. The literature suggests information overload and excessive social media consumption have been significant issues for a number of years (Twenge, 2013, p.11); however, many participants seemed to only start to experience it in an unmanageable way during the pandemic. Although this was not one of the most salient themes in the interviews, individuals may wish to consider changing the way they consume information and limiting the amount of time they spend on social media and online, as the literature indicates this is expected to become an increasingly significant mental health challenge (Grau et al., 2019).

The Role of the Individual

Personal responsibility as it relates to wellbeing and resilience is complex. When participants talked about the things they do to improve their own wellbeing, they seemed empowered, motivated, and proud. While there are a wide variety of things individuals can do to influence their experiences, it is essential to acknowledge that there are also social determinants and systemic barriers to wellbeing that are the responsibility of governments, institutions and broader society to address; these external circumstances which are outside the control of the individual can have a profound influence on their ability to flourish (Wyn et al., 2015). With this

limitation in mind, the items described below are approaches participants described as being within their control and having immense influence on their personal wellbeing and resilience.

Building Self-awareness and Emotional Regulation Skills. All participants talked about self-awareness as being important to wellbeing and resilience. They provided a variety of examples of ways their daily lives have improved as they gained self-awareness through both life experience and intentional effort. Approaches participants used to enhance self-awareness included trying new things, reading a variety of books, seeing a therapist, seeking feedback, and committing to self-reflection practices such as journaling. Most literature aligns with this; however, some suggests that self-reflection and introspection practices can be ineffective and even cause individuals to become more entrenched in inaccurate beliefs about themselves (Eurich, 2018, p.6-7; Grant et al., 2002, p.841). A way to address this is by asking oneself 'what' questions rather than 'why' questions when self-reflecting; for example, rather than "why do I feel frustrated at work?" ask "what situations make me feel frustrated and what do they have in common?". What questions are more likely to help a person to be objective, future focused, and empowered to act on their insights while why questions can lead to more emotional and inaccurate explanations based on fear and insecurities (Eurich, 2018, p.6-7). Awareness of values, strengths, and personal preferences all positively influence motivation, which helps individuals to have a greater sense of meaning, make healthier choices, and experience more vitality and pleasure in their lives (Selig, 2016). This is aligned with the view shared by all participants that working to identify their values, what gives them purpose, and/or things they enjoy has enhanced their wellbeing. Many participants talked about the importance of identifying these things and working to build their lives around them.

There are highly varied emotional-regulation tools and healthy thinking practices that can help people to be more resilient. While participants described diverse approaches, most were in the areas of perspective and reframing, focusing on what is in control, self-compassion, and mindfulness. All participants talked about the benefits of taking a step back, gaining perspective, and reframing situations. They described experiences where they re-framed challenges and were more resilient and able to manage the situation as a result. This is consistent with research that shows reframing helps improve problem solving, decision making, and learning by creating a sense of personal control; adjusting perceptions of negative or distorted beliefs; converting self-destructive ideas into supportive ideas; and changing behavior (McNamara, 2012; Robson & Troutman-Jordan, 2014, p.55). All participants also described situations where they focused on what was in their control when faced with a challenge. One participant described her experience of feeling worried about the spread of COVID-19 and people who were not following public health restrictions. The way she described her experience aligned almost exactly with Covey's Circles of Influence ([figure 2](#)). She described coping by

letting go of worries about things outside her control, focusing on her own behaviours by closely following public health guidance, and influencing her loved ones to do the same. Focusing on what is in control can be very empowering as it allows the individual to move from negative feelings to acceptance to taking practical action (Hayes et al., 2006, p.6-9).

Self-compassion was mentioned by 93% of participants as a resilience tool they use or try to use. When talking about this, many participants encouraged others to practice self-compassion saying things like “people should go easier on themselves”. Some participants indicated they admittedly were not good at following their own advice in this regard and can be hard on themselves. This is not surprising as western culture tends to foster self-criticism and the belief that individuals should be strong and push through their suffering (Neff & Germer, 2017, p.372). Participants recognized that when managing a challenging situation, isolating themselves and being hard on themselves creates additional and unnecessary anguish. This is well aligned with the literature which indicates self-compassionate behaviours include three components: self-kindness, common humanity (noting that hard things are part of life and happen to others), and mindfulness that helps one to not overidentify with negative feelings (Neff, 2003, p.85).

Participants who talked about mindfulness rarely mentioned a structured meditation practice. 79% of participants talked about mindfulness, usually in reference to focusing on the present moment. Many of them talked about mindful movement such as nature walks where they focused on their surroundings and tried to take a break from thinking about other things. In all instances, mindfulness was described positively, as something that makes them feel better. Other research shows that mindfulness is associated with improved mood, wellbeing, and cognition (Behan, 2020, p.256; Crescentini et al., 2017, p.81). Mindfulness practices have been shown to be particularly impactful in times of prolonged struggle including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Behan, 2020, p.256). While none of the participants talked about developing a new mindfulness practice during the pandemic, some mentioned feeling very distracted and mentally exhausted during this time and may have seen benefits from a more structured practice.

Taking Action to Solve Problems and Promote a Healthful Lifestyle. Participants frequently discussed self-awareness and problem solving together indicating that self-awareness helps them to identify solutions. They often said things like “figure out what you want, then do it”. Many participants also described planning or getting organized in some way before acting. The forethought or pre-action phase of problem solving described in the literature is aligned with participant comments about figuring out what they want and making a plan. The performance or action phase of problem solving is aligned with their comments to “then do it” (Perels et al.,

2005, p.123-127; Shaffer, 2020, p.1; Zimmerman & Campillo, 2000, p.239). Many participants emphasized the importance of moving past the pre-action phase and taking action even if it does not feel like the perfect time. Once working towards a goal or working to solve a problem, all participants described perseverance and incremental progress as essential. All participants suggested that if it is a worth while goal, there will be failures and challenges and it is most important to keep going after such setbacks. This is aligned with the concept of grit, which describes having passion, perseverance, and stamina for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2013, p.2). Grit and the related concept of growth mindset help people to continue to move forward in the face of hardships; grit and growth mindset perspectives and qualities help people to perceive hardships as temporary and help them to maintain a commitment to learning, growth, and progress towards their goals (Duckworth, 2013, p.2; Dweck, 2019, p.26).

In the interviews and the literature review, movement stood out as the most salient theme; there appeared to be unanimous agreement that some form of regular movement practice that is enjoyable is a critical contributor to wellbeing. The literature indicates that individuals who have a regular movement practice experience more gratitude, love, and hope, feel more satisfied with life, have a stronger sense of purpose, and feel more connected to community; these benefits appear to apply across cultures, socioeconomic status, physical ability, and throughout the lifespan (McGonigal, 2019, p.3; Sharma et al., 2006, p.106). Almost all participants made comments that strongly aligned with this and talked repeatedly throughout the interviews about using movement to feel good. All participants talked about it as important to daily wellbeing and most used some form of movement as a tool for reducing stress when going through a challenging time. The participants who indicated they do not currently have regular movement practices in their lives, generally indicated regret about that and reflected on times when they were exercising regularly and felt much better. Many participants talked about their positive experiences participating in physical activities they enjoy. They suggested that forcing oneself to go to the gym if it is not enjoyable is not a sustainable approach. One participant mentioned advice he read on a sports forum where individuals asked how much weight they could expect to lose by playing tennis. There were numerous responses from tennis players providing the advice not to play tennis to get into shape, rather to fall in love with tennis and you will find yourself getting into shape in order to play better tennis. This is well aligned with the literature and advice from other participants, which suggests movement is meant to be a joyful experience and engaging in any form of movement that is accessible and enjoyable will lead to numerous benefits to wellbeing (McGonigal, 2019, p.214).

Most participants talked about experiencing benefits when spending time outside, almost always while moving in some way. When talking about nature and time outside, 96% of the time they also referenced movement. The literature suggests that spending two to five hours

per week in nature results in significant improvements to health and wellbeing (White et al., 2019). Spending time outside has been shown to reduce stress and increase relaxation (Song et al., 2016, p.782). Many participants talked about using this as a resilience tool – they often found it beneficial to go for a walk to clear their head, gain perspective, and improve their mood so they were better equipped to address the challenges they were facing. While participants did not indicate that they use exercise as a way to build resilience, there appeared to be some evidence this may be an unintended benefit. The participants who described a long and consistent history with exercise seemed to also exhibit high levels of self-regulation and ability to manage challenging situations; this is well documented in the literature especially among endurance athletes (McGonigal, 2019, p.185-189).

Building and Maintaining Healthy Relationships. Participants described wanting to bring their whole self including flaws to relationships. They indicated wanting to feel seen, accepted, and valued for who they are. When describing challenging relationships, they have experienced, participants often talked about not being fully accepted or feeling betrayed by someone they had been honest and vulnerable with. This is aligned with the literature regarding belonging, which is described as the innate human desire to be part of something larger than us; it is not “trying to fit in”, instead it is characterized by presenting one’s whole authentic and imperfect self and being fully accepted (Brown, 2017, p.31-34). Most participants talked about the important people in their lives throughout their interviews, with 50% of them describing relationships as the greatest source of meaning in their lives. Using data collected over 80 years, the Harvard Study of Adult Development has shown the greatest determinant of happier, healthier, and longer lives is the quality of a person’s relationships; not just being in a committed partnership or having a lot of friends, rather having deep and meaningful connections with people who can be relied upon (Mineo, 2017; Vaillant, 2002, p.4; Waldinger, 2015). Participants described the importance of cultivating strong and deep relationships while also remembering to have fun and connect with people over shared interests, doing enjoyable activities together, and humour.

The Role of Community

When participants talked about community, it always had a positive connotation and was described as something they chose to be part of. For some participants community was place-based and meant getting to know their neighbours and checking in on each other. Many others described non-place-based groups such as common interest or identity-based groups such as the cycling community, the LGBTQ2S+ community, religious communities, and communities based on heritage (e.g., West African community). Their comments about these communities aligned with literature indicating involvement in community fostered a sense of belonging and feelings of contributing to something bigger than themselves (Block, 2018, p.xi-xii).

Some described being highly involved in community-based organizations and supporting their community through volunteer work and advocacy. In alignment with the literature on asset-based community development, these participants indicated feeling a sense of pride and purpose in using their skills to contribute to their communities. Communities that provide diverse opportunities for individuals to access supports and get involved create environments where individuals are not labeled as vulnerable and can instead access supports and contribute to their community simultaneously (Block, 2018, p.13; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996, p.26-27). Participant suggestions and the literature were well aligned, indicating a combination of diverse wellbeing promoting initiatives, an environment where social connections can form, opportunities to contribute in a meaningful way, and fun activities together allow communities to have a significant impact on the wellbeing and resilience of their members (Block, 2018, p.2-5; Campbell & Burgess, 2012, p.379-380; Kreitzer et al., 2020, p.6-11; McGonigal, 2019, p.174-176).

The Role of Public Sector Employers

Surveys of employees across industries around the world have shown a vast majority of employees feel uninspired, disrespected, and not listened to at work (Worline & Dutton, 2017, p.ix, 14-15). This is aligned with the findings as most participants referenced a desire for a more collaborative work environment where they were able to contribute in a meaningful way and feel listened to when raising a concern. While there were some exceptions, the majority of participants expressed a perceived lack of organizational support and a dissatisfaction with high-level leadership (executive and/or elected leaders). Some acknowledged and appreciated employee assistance programs and health benefits; however, most felt internal initiatives related to employee morale and building a supportive work environment were lacking.

The literature shows thriving at work is most strongly correlated with relational factors including perceived organizational support and positive relationships (Kleine et al., 2019, p.992). Participants were much more likely to speak highly of their supervisor or co-workers than higher level leaders. Likewise, they were more likely to speak positively about their supervisor's approach to promoting wellbeing and resilience than organization-wide initiatives. Almost all participants from the Government of Alberta mentioned decisions made at "a very high level" about when staff could and could not work from home during the pandemic, which some described as an example of broader organizational culture issues associated with the extremely hierarchical environment. Supervisors' lack of autonomy and ability to support staff seems to be a prominent challenge in the public sector as elected officials set the direction and have competing priorities such as public perception, which lead to employee wellbeing not being a significant consideration in decision making.

While there may be limited ability to influence the priorities of elected officials, executive leaders likely have some ability to influence the hierarchical environment that is below them and create a supportive environment where supervisors have more autonomy. Executive leaders influence the perception of organizational support and the psychological wellbeing of individuals throughout the organization by setting a tone that lends itself to a safe and supportive work environment, and by hiring and training leaders with the skills to bolster a culture of teamwork, empathy, and support (Arnold et al., 2007, p.193; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006, p.941; DeSteno, 2016, p.3). Creating a supportive team environment can help team members feel they have a workplace support system and are positioned to be more resilient when challenges arise. Leveraging the already good relationships most participants described having with their supervisors and co-workers to build even stronger and more connected teams can be a way to create a more supportive environment at the supervisor/team level. Environments where employees know their colleagues well and feel their colleagues and supervisor care about their wellbeing tend to be more compassionate, highly productive, and passionate about delivering good work (DeSteno, 2016, p.2-4; Friedman, 2014, p.102).

Integrating wellbeing promoting activities into organizational culture improves impact; if employees have to find time in their schedules or feel uncomfortable asking their supervisor to allow them to attend wellness seminars or physical activities, they may choose not to participate (Global Corporate Challenge, 2013, p.1; Strauss, 2013; Wellness Workdays, 2020). One way to support this can be through an organization wide wellbeing, resilience, and mental health education program for all staff, describing organizational commitment to employee wellbeing at all levels and providing common vocabulary and skills needed to seek and offer emotional support (Lieberman, 2019). This would address participant concerns about knowledge gaps and misconceptions about mental health. Education programs can also be helpful at an individual level when focused on sharing empowering facts such as 'resilience is not a personality trait rather it is made up of thoughts and behaviours that anyone can learn and develop' (American Psychological Association, 2012) and providing practical tools individuals may find helpful.

Each participant described highly varied mechanisms for improving their personal wellbeing and resilience. Research shows this level of variability between people to be the norm, which is an issue when health related initiatives are targeted only to dominant groups (Heard et al., 2020, p.866). A lack of targeted programming can further exacerbate health inequalities; although there are many, one commonly underserved group with physical wellness initiatives are women with disabilities (Heard et al., 2020, p.866). Many participants raised this issue and indicated the need for employers to engage with diverse employees to determine their needs

and preferences, co-develop relevant programming, and seek feedback about whether it is having positive outcomes. This could be done through employee surveys and interviews, assessment tools for existing initiatives, and the creation of employee wellness committees that are part of the co-development of solutions (Wellness Workdays, 2020).

Low employee participation in physical and mental wellness programming can be a challenge for a number of different reasons including employees are unaware of programming, they feel they do not have time to participate, and employers are not offering the supports they really want or need (Global Corporate Challenge, 2013, p.1; Robroek et al., 2009, p.26-36; Spence, 2015, p.109; Strauss, 2013; Wellness Workdays, 2020, p.1). A review of publicly available information about wellbeing, resilience, and mental health supports for Government of Alberta and City of Edmonton employees showed there are already a significant number of initiatives with varied supports underway; however, almost none of the participants mentioned any of them when asked about their employer's approach to employee wellbeing. Most were only aware of large initiatives offered in the past, which were often described as having little impact. A new communications approach may be needed to raise awareness and increase employee participation in existing programming.

Time and workload pressures can have a significant impact on participation in wellness activities (Spence, 2015, p.115). In high pressure work environments, taking time to participate in wellbeing promoting activities may actually cause more stress. When employees can take time to recharge and recover without the feeling they are doing something wrong, it reduces burnout and increases productivity (Malek, 2020). In cases where participants had access to flexible work arrangements, they often described it as the thing they appreciated most about their work environment. All participants were required to work from home at some point during the COVID-19 pandemic, with most finding this to be a positive experience. Many of them described the ways that saving time on the commute freed them up for things that improved their wellbeing including sleep, exercise, cooking healthy meals, spending time with family, and generally feeling less rushed and stressed. While working from home is not for everyone, providing increased access to this option at least some of the time would be beneficial. Other flexible work arrangements such as adjusted start and end times and the ability to work slightly longer hours in order to earn extra days off were described as beneficial by those who had access to this flexibility and as desirable by those who did not have access. As flexible work arrangements have been shown to improve employee engagement and productivity (Angelici & Profeta, 2020, p.1, 23-24; Ciarniene & Vienazindiene, 2018, p.1), increasing access to them would be beneficial to both the employee and the employer. A few participants also talked about workload pressures and working in an environment that required them to work through lunch or work late in order to meet expectations, which reduced their

ability to spend time on wellbeing promoting activities and, in some cases, caused high levels of stress. They suggested leaders at all levels could help address this by modeling desired behaviours such as encouraging work-life balance and themselves working reasonable hours and doing what is in their control to support manageable workloads. Clear communication, colleague support, and ability to take leave are also known to be essential in the face of work overload to reduce risk of burnout (Gauche et al., 2017; Simon, 2019). Developing internal mechanisms or using online tools that help with the prioritization of work can also help. Mechanisms of this nature allow teams to track work collectively, identify conflicting deadlines, and determine solutions to capacity pressures (Simon, 2019). Managing work overload is essential to organizational effectiveness and managing employee wellbeing and resilience (Gauche et al., 2017; Simon, 2019).

Future Research

Given the limitations of this study regarding sample size and sample variability, it is not possible to confirm the validity or generalizability of the wellbeing and resilience framework that was developed ([figure 6](#)). It would be beneficial to test this framework on different population groups and with larger samples to see if it is applicable more broadly.

Given the breadth of this research in looking at a range of contributors to wellbeing and resilience, many items were explored in a superficial way. The research confirmed that people have highly varied needs and experiences when it comes to wellbeing and resilience. More focused analysis and research in some of these areas is needed. Most significantly, analysis with a much more comprehensive intersectional lens is needed. “Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life” and as an analytical tool it looks at the ways in which identity factors including gender, race, ability, age, and socioeconomic status can influence a person’s experience (Collins & Blige, 2020, p.5). As wellbeing and resilience are highly individual experiences, intersecting identity factors are sure to have a significant influence on a person’s experience in these areas. Looking at specific barriers will help with the development of appropriate supports and recommendations for personal action. Each employer and community group may consider doing intersectional research to better understand the needs of their members, how they can expand their reach in order to support a wider range of members, and how best to support those who have low wellbeing and are disengaged. Employers and community organizations have the ability to significantly impact wellbeing and resilience; however, in order to do so, further enhancing their understanding of the needs of members through community engagement, collaboration, and co-development of supports is needed.

The importance of movement stood out as the most salient theme throughout the interviews. Given the extent to which participants focused on movement, more research is needed to determine how this can be leveraged to enhance individual and collective wellbeing among this and other population groups. Participants who did not have a regular movement practice talked about this as a problem for them. Intersectional research that investigates the supports and barriers for diverse individuals to develop a movement practice would be highly beneficial.

Further research into other age group cohorts not studied in this research is also needed. At 27% of the population, millennials are the largest generation in Canada (Heisz & Richards, 2019, p.1) and as such, it is possible issues identified as “millennial issues” may actually be broader societal issues that are a result of societal changes that are impacting everyone. Framing large societal issues as belonging to only one generation can do a disservice to others who are experiencing similar challenges (Hitchcock, 2021). One participant highlighted this by saying “I think the supports that millennials would ask for are supports that benefit everyone, like more flexible workplaces, the ability to integrate exercise into our lives in a better way, having more diversity with the people that you work with, and being able to see yourself represented in the leadership of your organization.”

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that wellbeing and resilience are extremely personal experiences and different approaches work for different people. Information about the specific needs and preferences of diverse population groups is needed if improvements to individual and collective wellbeing and resilience are to be made. Thriving individuals can create thriving communities and societies, so it is of collective benefit to identify and co-develop supports that enhance the experiences of diverse individuals.

The purpose of this research has been to gather insights into supports that work for public sector employees, aged 24-39 (millennials) in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. By conducting 14 semi-structured interviews with Government of Alberta employees representing six ministries and City of Edmonton employees representing two departments, and an extensive literature review, the roles of individuals, communities, and employers were examined. This has resulted in recommendations for how each can contribute to improved wellbeing and resilience of this population. As millennials move into mid-life and take on increasing responsibility and leadership roles in their families, communities, and work, it will be important for them to remember times when their needs were not well understood and commit to supporting others who have needs different from theirs.

Based on the interrelated relationship between wellbeing and resilience, the interventions that support either of these areas are likely to improve both. As such, some of the recommendations described below are focused on wellbeing, others are focused on resilience, and some have strong connections to both. The collective interventions described below are initiatives public sector employers or community organizations in Edmonton could conceivably implement. In recognition of the budgetary limitations related to the current recession and political context in Alberta, the initiatives described could be implemented at little or no cost or using existing staff resources. The individual interventions described are things people can implement in their own lives to improve their personal wellbeing and resilience.

Recommendation 1

Individuals may wish to make a personal commitment to improving their wellbeing and resilience and pursue approaches that work for them within the following five areas.

The experience of wellbeing and resilience is personal and unique for everyone. For anyone who wishes to improve their own wellbeing and resilience skills, personal commitment and action is likely to be the most effective option. While support from community and employment environments is beneficial, waiting for such approaches can be disempowering. It is recommended individuals empower themselves to improve their own wellbeing and resilience by developing a movement practice they enjoy, building self-awareness, learning emotional regulation and healthy thinking practices, strengthening relationships, and getting involved in their communities. Individuals may choose to embark on these approaches alone or with the support of people in their lives, health care providers, psychologists, or other types of coaches or supportive professionals.

1a. Develop a movement practice. It appears one of the most important things a person can do to bolster their wellbeing and resilience is to develop a regular movement practice they enjoy. Individuals may wish to make a dedicated effort to finding a form of structured exercise, team sport, or leisure movement that they truly enjoy and find ways to participate in it regularly. Doing outdoor exercise offers added mental and emotional benefits, doing long endurance exercise is thought to enhance resilience skills, so individuals may wish to explore these forms of movement.

1b. Work to build self-awareness. High self-awareness enhances wellbeing and resilience by allowing individuals to identify their values, strengths, personal preferences, and what works well for them. Everybody is different and self-awareness is key to determining how best to take care of oneself. Ways to enhance self-awareness include seeking personal development, learning, and growth opportunities; trying new or challenging things; and self-reflecting.

1c. Learn emotional-regulation and healthy thinking practices. Individuals may consider working with a mental health professional, participating in wellbeing and resilience workshops, reading psychology books, or doing their own research on emotional-regulation and healthy thinking practices in order to develop a diverse set of tools and skills they can draw upon when needed. Particularly helpful tools may be in the areas of mindfulness, focusing on what is in control, gaining perspective and reframing situations, and self-compassion.

1d. Strengthen connections and relationships. Relationships are among the greatest contributors to wellbeing, resilience, longevity, and a meaningful life. Having a sense of true belonging, trust, safety, reciprocity, humour, enjoyment, and deep care of others provides most people with a profound sense of meaning. Individuals may choose to seek out and build new friendships with individuals over shared interested and enjoyable activities. They may also consider spending more time with loved ones, sharing feelings of gratitude and positive feedback with them, providing support when they are going through both challenging and positive experiences, seeking their support in similar situations, and other intentional efforts that may contribute to strengthening existing relationships.

1e. Get involved in community. Those who are actively involved in their community experience a variety of benefits including greater sense of belonging, purpose, and enjoyment in their lives. Individuals may consider finding opportunities to get involved in communities and connect with people over shared hobbies, interests, activities, or causes in order to contribute to their community, and improve their wellbeing and resilience.

Recommendation 2

Community groups may consider increasing the availability of diverse supports, diverse ways to get involved, and inclusive and welcoming environments.

Communities where individuals are able to access supports and benefit from community offerings, while also finding ways to contribute in some way appear to have the greatest impact. Community was described by participants as something they choose to be part of and that brings them enjoyment and purpose. Given this positive impact, community groups may wish to consider ways to expand their reach to benefit more community members.

2a: Seek input from community members to create diverse offerings and opportunities to contribute. Community members have diverse preferences and ways they are interested in or able to engage with their communities. Having diverse offerings and ways to contribute makes it easier for community members to fully participate. Community groups may consider enhancing engagement with the community to reach more diverse groups in order to

determine the types of supports they want and need, and ways to enhance existing programming.

2b. Create inclusive and welcoming environments that foster social connection. One of the greatest benefits of community involvement is the development of social connections. When developing supports and opportunities for involvement, community groups may wish to consider the experience of the volunteers/members/recipients of support and determine if there are ways to increase interaction, socialization, and to make the environment more inclusive and comfortable for them.

Recommendation 3

Public sector employers may consider taking targeted approaches to supporting the wellbeing and resilience of employee sub-populations in several key areas.

The type of supports described as beneficial by the millennial public sector employees interviewed relate to a psychologically safe organizational culture, diverse supports for the improvement of physical and mental wellness, and management of time and workload pressures. With regards to all three areas, some participants described the need for supervisors to have more autonomy. Part of implementing initiatives in any of these areas could include empowering supervisors.

3a. Build collaborative environments where psychological safety and healthy relationships are fostered. The primary mechanism for achieving this may be executive leaders setting the tone for a compassionate and supportive workplace culture along with providing supervisors with the training and resources they need to feel empowered to support their staff. Supervisors can then take action to create space for the formation of healthy relationships and team dynamics, and meaningful opportunities for staff to contribute.

3b. Provide diverse wellbeing supports that are aligned with employee needs and preferences. This may be done by implementing more robust mechanisms to identify employee needs and seek feedback on existing initiatives. Given there are already a variety of supports in place, of which employees seem to have limited awareness, new ways of communicating about existing initiatives and letting employees know their supervisors encourage their participation may be beneficial. When employers conduct regular employee surveys, they may consider also doing some focus groups or semi-structured interviews with a sample of diverse employees in order to get a more in-depth understanding of employee needs and whether existing supports are having the intended impacts.

3c. Support management of time and workload. Flexible work arrangements can help individuals manage their personal and work responsibilities, sometimes reducing stress and

creating space for them to participate in wellbeing promoting activities. As flexible work arrangements often lead to increased productivity, this could help with workload pressures; however, it is also important for organizations to develop a mechanism to identify priority work and delay lower priority work. Employers may implement workload prioritization mechanisms that aim to create an environment where on any given day, staff and management throughout the organization have workloads that allow them to be productive, engaged, and contributing to organizational priorities while not being overwhelmed by unmanageable workloads and arbitrary deadlines.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

I am a Master of Arts student working under the supervision of Barton Cunningham in the School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. I am conducting a study about the wellbeing of public sector employees during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Study participants must meet the following criteria:

- Age: 24 to 39 years in 2020 (year of birth 1981-1996)
- Location: Live in the greater Edmonton area
- Employment: Public sector (e.g., Alberta Public Service, City of Edmonton, another local municipality) for a period that includes January 1, 2020 to present

Participating in the study will require approximately 2 hours of your time and will include the following:

- First, you will be asked to provide some personal information through a brief phone or email conversation (age, gender, type of job, position level, marital status, education level, and places you have lived outside Edmonton). This is to help with participant selection, which is attempting to select participants from diverse roles and experiences.
- You will then be provided with a consent form that provides more detail about the study and the interview. You will be asked to email a signed copy back if you are still interested in participating.
- Next, a time will be arranged for you to participate in a virtual interview.
 - The interview will begin with a 5-10 minute, 23-question online survey about wellbeing. You will be provided with a link and asked to sign in and complete the survey. This survey was designed by University of Pennsylvania researchers to quantify individual wellbeing.
 - You will then be asked a series of open-ended questions about your experiences before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. We will discuss what has been positive and not-so-positive for your wellbeing in the past and during the pandemic.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and anonymous. Overall findings and recommendations will be shared with study participants in hopes the information may be of value to you personally in maintaining and improving your wellbeing. This study has been reviewed and approved by the University of Victoria Research and Ethics Board].

If you are interested in participating, please email melissakean@gmail.com indicating your willingness to participate. If you know anyone else who may be interested in participating in this study, please share this email with them. As this research is not commissioned by a specific employer, it is preferable to communicate with potential participants through their personal email addresses.

Thank-you for considering participating in this research and for sharing this email with other potential participants.

Sincerely,

Melissa Kean

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM



**University
of Victoria**

Participant Consent Form – An Exploration of Wellbeing
and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic

You are invited to participate in a study entitled An Exploration of Wellbeing and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic that is being conducted by Melissa Kean.

Melissa Kean is a graduate student in the Faculty of Human and Social Development, School of Public - Administration at the University of Victoria and you may contact her if you have further questions at melissakean@gmail.com or 780-718-4535. This research is a requirement for the Master of Arts in Community Development program and is being conducted under the supervision of Barton Cunningham. He may be reached at bcunning@uvic.ca or 250-598-9878.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this research project is to add to the body of knowledge about wellbeing and resilience during challenging times. It will focus on the experience of millennial public sector employees before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research aims to clarify what is working well, where there are gaps and challenges, and aims to identify strategies that can be undertaken by individuals, communities, and organizations to improve wellbeing and resilience of this group.

Importance of this Research

Research of this type is important because millennials have been shown to have high rates of depression, anxiety, burnout, and to be experiencing their current stage of life (end of young adulthood, approaching middle adulthood) more negatively than past generations. Research in the area of positive psychology and wellbeing aims to determine what makes life worth living and to help individuals apply it so they can thrive in life. There is a great deal of theory available in this field and there is opportunity to determine how the specific elements of wellbeing apply to the lives of specific population groups. On top of some common millennial experiences and the challenges of the pandemic, many public servants are experiencing changes in their work environment while attempting to deliver necessary services to the public. Enhanced understanding of how this group coped at this time could offer insight into ways they can thrive moving forward.

Participants Selection

You are being asked to participate in this study because you responded to an email expressing interest. Participants were selected using the snowball method where the research information was shared with known contacts who were asked to forward to anyone who may meet the criteria and be willing to participant. Participants are born between 1981 and 1996, live in the Edmonton area, and work in the public sector.

What is Involved?

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include a time commitment of up to two hours for an interview outside regular work hours. The interviews will be conducted virtually through the Zoom platform. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to complete a short online survey that has been developed by positive psychology researcher Dr. Margaret Kern at the University of Pennsylvania. This survey will provide you with measures of your subjective wellbeing. The interviewer will then ask you a series of open-ended questions about your experience before and during the pandemic in the elements of wellbeing. Audio will be recorded, and a transcript of the conversation created. The transcripts of all interviews will be analyzed.

The University of Pennsylvania survey you will be asked to complete at the beginning of the interview will come with its own privacy statement. Please be advised that information about you that is gathered in that survey is located in the U.S. and as such, there is a possibility that information may be accessed without your knowledge or consent by the US government in compliance with the US Freedom Act.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, due to the interview time commitment and the need to conduct the interviews outside work hours.

Risks

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research.

Benefits

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include:

Overall findings will be shared with study participants, so you may gain access to new information that is beneficial to you in your wellbeing. These findings may be beneficial to broader society in the same way by highlighting specific measures that may be beneficial to millennial public sector employees. This research will also be beneficial to the state of knowledge by determining how Seligman's Wellbeing Theory applies to a specific cohort. This may suggest further opportunities for research on how the six elements of wellbeing impact specific population groups.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed and will not be used in this study.

If you choose to participate in the survey, please review their terms and conditions when creating an account. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, we are able to destroy your interview data but will not have access to the information you provide to the University of Pennsylvania through the survey and will not be able to destroy it.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants

The researcher may have a relationship to potential participants as a colleague or acquaintance. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, we remind you that there is a

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Confidentiality Statement

This interview is anonymous and confidential. Your participation is voluntary. You can refuse to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with. Whether you participate or choose not to participate is confidential. Please be assured that all information provided by you will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will never be associated with any of the comments you make. We are simply interested in the collective responses of a number of people who offer a perspective on this issue.

Introductory Questions

- What does the term wellbeing mean to you?
- Please tell me things you have found to positively contribute to your wellbeing.
- What does the term resilience mean to you?
- Please tell me about a challenging time in your life that made you more resilient.
 - Please tell me about things you do when faced with challenging situations.
 - Tools – tell me about things you do when you experience challenges.
- The following questions about you are to help contextualize your stories and examples.
Prompts:
 - Current living situation
 - Education – where did you go to school, what kind of education do you have
 - Type of job/level of responsibility/career progression
 - Childhood family/where you grew up
 - Culture/heritage
 - Is there anything else about you that you think might be helpful for contextualizing your perspectives on wellbeing?

Health

For these questions, health refers to physical health and vitality.

- Please tell me about a time in your life when you felt positive about your health.
- Please tell me about a not so positive time for your physical health.
- Please tell me about your physical health in the past six months.
Possible prompts:
 - Was it any better or worse than before?
 - How did you manage any challenges that arose?
- What is your advice for someone who wants to improve their physical health?
 - Is there anything specific that has worked for you that others would benefit from knowing about?

Relationships

For these questions, relationships refer to feeling valued, loved, or supported, by others. This can include romantic partnerships, friendships, family members, work colleagues, and communities you are part of.

- What qualities do you value in relationships?
- Please tell me about a good relationship you have experienced.
 - What was good about it?
 - How did this relationship demonstrate the things you value in relationships?
- Please tell me about a not so positive relationship you have had.
 - What was problematic about it?
 - What did this teach you about what is important to you in relationships?
- What is more important to you? Having a large number of relationships or having fewer, deeper relationships? Why?
- Tell me about any changes you experienced to your relationships during the pandemic.
Possible Prompts:
 - How did you manage these changes?
- What is your advice to someone who wants to improve their relationships?

Accomplishment

For these questions, accomplishment can refer to objective measures of accomplishment like awards or certifications, it can also be subjective measures of accomplishment such as feeling good at something, feelings of staying on top of responsibilities, or feelings associated with working towards and accomplishing goals.

- Please tell me about a time when you felt positive about your accomplishments or a goal you achieved.
- Please tell me about a time when you did not feel good about your accomplishments. This might be a time when you failed to achieve a goal.
- Tell me about your feelings of accomplishment during the pandemic.
Possible Prompts:
 - Did you feel any more or less accomplished during this time?
 - How did you manage this?
- What is your advice for someone who wants to get better at achieving their goals?

Engagement

For these questions, engagement refers to being absorbed, interested, and involved in an activity or your life. Very high levels of engagement are known as a state called flow also known as being “in the zone” in which you are fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in what you are doing. Some common examples of activities that lead to flow are playing sports, working on a challenging work deliverable with a tight deadline, or reading an interesting book. It is characterized by being challenged, interested, and able to use your strengths while not feeling overwhelmed.

- Please tell me about activities that cause you to feel engaged or experience flow.
 - Can you think of a time in your life when you committed a lot of your time to activities that felt engaging?
 - Can you think of a time in your life when you did not spend much time doing engaging activities?
 - What was different about how you felt during these times?
- Please tell me about your experience during the pandemic.
 - Were you able to participate in activities you usually find engaging more or less often than before?
 - Were you able to find new engaging activities?
 - Did this change impact you in a significant way?
- What is your advice for someone who want to experience more engagement or flow?

Positive Emotion

For these questions positive emotions are defined as pleasant feelings like joy and contentment. You may think of it as feeling happy.

- Please tell me about things that cause you to feel positive emotions.

Possible prompts:

 - Tell me about a normal moment in your life that brings you joy.
 - Or you could tell me about a once in a lifetime experience that made you very happy.
- Please tell me about emotions you experienced during the pandemic.
 - Do you think you experienced more or less positive emotions than before?
 - Do you think you experienced more or less negative emotions than before?
 - How did you manage these changes or experiences?
- What is your advice for someone who wants to experience more positive emotions?
 - Possible prompt: Is there anything that has worked for you?

Meaning

For these questions, meaning refers to having a sense of purpose in life, a direction where life is going, feeling that life is valuable and worth living, or connecting to something greater than ourselves, such as faith, a charitable cause, or personally meaningful goal.

- What areas of life give you the most meaning?

Possible prompts: Some examples could include work, friendships, family, community involvement, sports, other activities, faith.
- Please tell me about a time in your life when you felt a strong sense of purpose.
- Please tell me about a time when you didn't feel a strong sense of purpose.
- Please tell me about how the pandemic has impacted your sense of purpose.
 - Did life feel any more or less meaningful during this time?
 - How did you manage the changes?
- What is your advice for someone who wants to find more meaning in their life?

Concluding Questions

- How does your overall wellbeing at your current age compare to when you were younger?
 - Is it any better or worse now?
 - What do you think has changed?
- Are any of the elements of wellbeing more important to you than others?
- Are there any actions you take to improve your wellbeing that tend to be your starting point and snowball to improve other elements of your wellbeing? I.e., your highest value actions.

Your Recommendations

- What are your suggestions for how your employer can support employee wellbeing?
 - Before or during the pandemic, what has your employer has done in the area of employee wellbeing that has worked well?
 - How has the pandemic impacted your perception of your employer?
- This question is meant to be broad and relevant to any community you identify with or have observed.
 - What have you seen communities do in the area of wellbeing that you think has worked well?
 - What are your suggestions on how communities can support the wellbeing of their community members?
- Based on your age, you are considered to be a millennial. Do you have any thoughts on how millennials can be supported?
- Is there anything else you would like to share that is relevant to this discussion?