

Improving Personal Wellbeing – Developing and Applying a Wellbeing Scaling Tool based on King's Research

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1. Theories of Well-Being



Observation 1: 'well-being' (or 'welfare') indicates what is non-instrumentally *good for* person, i.e. how *well* life is going *for* person

Observation 2: the question of what well-being *consists in* is of *major importance* in philosophy, economics and public policy

Observation 3: theories of well-being are commonly divided in *mental state*, *objective list* and *preference satisfaction* theories

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Still from © Pecan Masterclass

PROJECT SUMMARY

The "Improving Personal Wellbeing" project was a collaboration between Roberto, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Economy at King's College London, and Pecan, a London-based charity dedicated to enhancing individual and community wellbeing. The project aimed to bridge academic theories of welfare and wellbeing with practical applications in the charity sector.

Drawing on Roberto's research on defining and measuring wellbeing, the initiative sought to empower Pecan's staff and service users with tools to better assess and improve their own wellbeing. The collaboration involved knowledge exchange activities, including a masterclass and a series of workshops, to develop bespoke wellbeing scaling tools tailored to Pecan's unique context.

By tailoring academic insights to the specific context of Pecan's service delivery, the project fostered a deeper understanding of how theoretical knowledge can inform practical strategies to improve wellbeing. This collaborative exchange not only enriched the charity's approach but also provided Dr. Fumagalli with new perspectives on how academic work can be adapted to support and enhance community-led initiatives.

HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

The project emerged from a collaborative event designed to connect academics with external partners to tackle pressing societal challenges. During this event, Roberto, whose research focuses on theories and measurements of wellbeing, was paired with Pecan, a London-based charity dedicated to supporting vulnerable communities. This partnership was a natural fit, as Pecan's hands-on welfare initiatives complemented Roberto's academic insights into wellbeing.

The collaboration evolved organically, driven by a shared ambition to bridge theoretical frameworks with practical applications. Pecan's commitment to improving the lives of their service users aligned with Roberto's desire to explore how his work could inform and enhance real-world welfare practices. Together, they set out to create a project that would both deepen Pecan's capacity to serve their community and offer Roberto a unique opportunity to test and adapt his academic ideas in a practical, impactful setting.



Photo © Pecan Website

WHAT HAPPENED?

The collaboration unfolded through a series of carefully planned activities designed to integrate academic insights with practical welfare initiatives. Roberto began by visiting Pecan to gain firsthand understanding of its welfare-supporting activities, such as food distribution and social support programs. This visit was instrumental in shaping the project's direction, as it provided insights into the practical needs and priorities of Pecan's staff and service users.

In January 2024, Roberto delivered a tailored masterclass for Pecan's staff, focusing on the latest theories of welfare and wellbeing. The session was designed to balance academic knowledge with accessibility, offering practical insights on how these concepts could be applied to Pecan's work. It also introduced staff to diverse perspectives on welfare and exploring how these ideas could inform their work. The masterclass encouraged Pecan's team to reflect critically on their existing practices and consider the theoretical underpinnings of their activities.

Following the masterclass, Pecan staff took the lead in organizing six workshops and coaching sessions, which were designed to adapt Roberto's theoretical insights into actionable tools. These sessions focused on developing wellbeing scaling tools tailored to their staff and service users. Roberto provided guidance during the early stages, ensuring the tools were grounded in his research while remaining relevant to Pecan's context. The workshops fostered collaboration, empowering staff to integrate these new frameworks into their existing services and enabling them to address the specific needs of their service users more effectively.

Through this collaborative process, the project navigated the challenges of translating complex academic theories into actionable practices. It emphasised the importance of co-creation and mutual learning, fostering a meaningful exchange of knowledge and expertise between the academic and charity sectors.



THANK YOU

From all at Pecan &
Southwark Foodbank



Photo © Julia Hawkins

WHAT WAS THE PROJECT'S IMPACT?

The “Improving Personal Wellbeing” project generated significant impacts for both Roberto and Pecan. For Roberto, the collaboration provided a unique opportunity to step outside of academia and engage directly with a community organization. The experience enhanced his public engagement skills and broadened his understanding of how philosophical theories of wellbeing can be applied to real-world challenges. For Pecan, the project offered tools and perspectives that reshaped how the organisation approached wellbeing.

The masterclass Roberto delivered allowed staff to critically examine the assumptions underlying their day-to-day practices. Staff members reported that the session helped them gain a deeper understanding of the theoretical frameworks of welfare, enabling them to reflect on and refine their approaches to supporting service users. The discussions sparked by the masterclass encouraged them to think beyond immediate needs and consider broader questions about how wellbeing can be better measured and improved. The workshops offered Pecan tools to better assess, monitor, and enhance wellbeing across their programs, fostering a more targeted and effective approach to welfare.

The project demonstrated that collaboration between academia and the third sector can generate meaningful results. While some aspects of the project’s influence—such as changes in organisational culture and staff perspectives—are difficult to measure, they reflect a broader and enduring legacy. The project also underscored the importance of funding and partnership in enabling charities like Pecan to innovate and sustain their vital work.

Overall, the project highlighted the potential for academic research to enrich community practice while offering academics a chance to learn from the practical realities faced by charities. The collaboration’s outcomes extended beyond the immediate deliverables, leaving both Roberto and Pecan better equipped to tackle future challenges in promoting personal and collective wellbeing.

ROBERTO'S TOP TIPS FOR IMPACT

1. Mutual Understanding Early On: Start by investing time in understanding your partner organization's priorities, needs, and context. This mutual understanding ensures that the collaboration is relevant, meaningful, and aligned with shared goals.
2. Flexible and Adaptable: Be prepared to adjust your approach and expectations. Recognising the gap between academic frameworks and real-world applications is crucial for effective knowledge exchange.
3. Recognise and Embrace Different Timelines and Impacts: Community engagement projects often unfold on longer timelines and deliver impact in ways that differ from academic expectations. Be patient and open to these broader, non-linear forms of impact, which can leave a lasting legacy.

FURTHER READING

1. Fumagalli, R. (2021). *Theories of Well-Being and Well-Being Policy*. *Journal of Economic Methodology*, 28(2), 124–133. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1350178X.2020.1868780>
2. Fumagalli, R. (2022). *A Reformed Division of Labor for the Science of Well-Being*. *Philosophy*, 97(3), 509–543. Available at: https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/117186/1/a_reformed_division_of_labor_for_the_science_of_well_being.pdf
3. Fumagalli, R. (2023). *Preferences Versus Opportunities: On the Conceptual Foundations of Normative Welfare Economics*. *Economics and Philosophy*, 39(1), 79–101. Available at: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/economics-and-philosophy/article/preferences-versus-opportunities-on-the-conceptual-foundations-of-normative-welfare-economics/1CEE4AE377520E0BE147B21F0BDD060>



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