

A New Standard for Measuring Wellness: Inside the WenWell™ Wellness Index Transforming How We Understand Capacity and Burnout

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The Problem We Have Been Measuring Too Late

Across healthcare, academia, and corporate environments, wellness has become a central priority. Organizations are investing in programs, leaders are prioritizing burnout prevention, and individuals are being encouraged to engage in self-care. Yet despite these efforts, many high-performing professionals continue to experience overwhelming demands, persistent stress, and diminishing capacity.

The issue is not a lack of awareness. It is a lack of meaningful measurement.

For decades, the dominant approach to measuring wellness has focused on identifying burnout after it has already occurred. Traditional tools assess emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and disengagement once individuals have reached a point of depletion (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). While these models are valuable, they do not capture what happens before breakdown. They do not measure sustainability in real time.

As a result, organizations remain reactive rather than proactive, addressing burnout only after it has taken hold.

The WenWell™ Wellness Index was developed to shift this paradigm by measuring what has long been missing: the capacity to sustain.

The Development of the WenWell™ Wellness Index

The WenWell™ Wellness Index was developed by Dr. Wendy Garvin Mayo, a doctorate-prepared oncology nurse practitioner, stress strategist, and founder of WenWell™, through her work across clinical practice, leadership, academia, and workforce engagement. The Index emerged from years of observing a consistent disconnect between how wellness was discussed and how it was experienced in real-world environments.

Through her work with clinicians, students, leaders, and caregivers, a pattern became clear. Individuals were not simply experiencing burnout; they were operating at or beyond their capacity

without adequate support, safety, or connection. Wellness was being treated as an individual responsibility, while the conditions influencing that wellness were often overlooked.

The development of the Index was further informed through applied work within the Connecticut Nurse Wellness Project (CTNWP), a clinician-led statewide initiative advancing nurse wellness as a workforce and systems priority. Facilitated sessions, statewide engagement, and structured WenWell™ Support Circles revealed a consistent need for a tool that could capture sustainability capacity in real time and translate lived experience into actionable data.

The WenWell™ Wellness Index was designed in response to this gap. Rather than focusing solely on symptoms, it was built to measure sustainability. It integrates established theories from occupational stress, resource-based models, psychological safety, and neurobiological regulation into a practical, real-world measurement tool. This approach aligns with the Job Demands–Resources model, which emphasizes the balance between demands and resources (Demerouti et al., 2001), and Conservation of Resources theory, which explains how stress emerges when resources are threatened or depleted (Hobfoll, 1989). It also reflects the role of psychological safety in enabling engagement and performance (Edmondson, 1999), as well as neurobiological models of stress regulation described in Polyvagal Theory (Porges, 2011).

What the WenWell™ Wellness Index Measures

At its core, the WenWell™ Wellness Index measures sustainability capacity, defined as the ability of an individual or group to continue functioning effectively within their current demands and environment. It is grounded in the WenWell™ Framework, which defines wellness through three interdependent domains: capacity, safety, and connection.

Capacity reflects an individual's ability to manage mental, emotional, and physical demands, including energy, stress regulation, and cognitive clarity. Safety reflects the conditions in which individuals operate, including access to support, responsiveness of leadership, and the presence of psychologically safe environments. Connection reflects the relational experience of belonging, trust, and support, which has been shown to influence both well-being and performance (Edmondson, 1999).

In addition to these domains, the Index captures clarity and sustainability confidence, reflecting an individual's perception of whether they can continue at their current pace without decline. This integrated perspective aligns with research demonstrating the interconnected nature of physiological regulation, emotional stability, and cognitive functioning (Thayer & Lane, 2000).

Rather than measuring how someone feels in a moment, the WenWell™ Wellness Index measures whether their current state is sustainable.

How the WenWell™ Wellness Index Is Measured

The WenWell™ Wellness Index is derived from a structured survey using scaled responses to assess multiple dimensions of capacity, safety, and connection. Individual responses are standardized and aggregated into a composite score ranging from zero to one hundred. Composite indices are widely

used in health and social sciences to improve reliability and interpretability when measuring complex constructs (OECD, 2008).

The aggregated score is then categorized into capacity bands that provide immediate interpretability. These bands indicate whether an individual or group is operating within sustainable limits, approaching strain, or functioning in a supported and thriving state. The purpose of these bands is not to label individuals, but to signal conditions and guide appropriate response.

The Index can be used at both the individual and group level, allowing for real-time assessment as well as longitudinal tracking across programs, teams, and organizations.

What the WenWell™ Wellness Index Means

The WenWell™ Wellness Index is not a diagnostic tool, nor is it intended to measure personality or resilience. It is a signal of sustainability within a given set of conditions. It provides insight into whether individuals have access to sufficient internal and external resources to meet ongoing demands.

Lower scores reflect a state in which demands are outpacing resources, increasing the risk of burnout, disengagement, and reduced performance over time. This aligns with research demonstrating that chronic workplace stress leads to emotional exhaustion and diminished effectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Higher scores reflect a state in which individuals are supported, regulated, and able to engage meaningfully within their roles.

Importantly, the Index reframes wellness as a shared responsibility. Evidence increasingly shows that burnout is not solely an individual issue, but one deeply influenced by organizational conditions and system design (National Academy of Medicine, 2019). The WenWell™ Wellness Index makes this visible by measuring both experience and environment simultaneously.

How the WenWell™ Wellness Index Is Used

The WenWell™ Wellness Index is designed for real-world application across individuals, teams, organizations, and academic settings. It provides a structured way to assess capacity, identify gaps, and guide intervention.

At the individual level, it supports self-awareness and reflection by helping individuals understand their current capacity and sustainability. At the organizational level, it provides leaders with actionable data to inform decision-making, resource allocation, and culture strategies. In academic environments, it can be used to assess student readiness, stress load, and learning conditions, supporting both performance and well-being.

The Index is also used to evaluate interventions through pre- and post-assessment. Short-term changes in perceived capacity are supported by evidence that even brief interventions focused on reflection, regulation, and connection can influence stress response and cognitive processing (Porges, 2011; Thayer & Lane, 2000).

What the Results Reveal

The results of the WenWell™ Wellness Index provide actionable insight into patterns of sustainability. They allow for early detection of strain and measurement of change over time, making it possible to intervene before burnout occurs.

In one application, participants engaged in a six-week program focused on nutrition, stress management, emotional intelligence, and movement. During the final session, a pre- and post-assessment conducted around a shared journaling intervention demonstrated a shift from an average capacity score of 70, categorized as stabilizing, to 76.25, categorized as thriving. This measurable change reflects an increase in perceived sustainability capacity following a brief, structured intervention.

While interpretation should consider response rates and sample size, these findings align with broader evidence that supportive environments and reflective practices can enhance regulation, clarity, and perceived resource availability.

Why the WenWell™ Wellness Index Matters Now

The WenWell™ Wellness Index arrives at a critical moment. Across industries, there is growing recognition that burnout is a systems issue requiring structural solutions. However, without meaningful measurement, organizations remain reactive.

The Index provides a way to measure what has historically been difficult to quantify. It translates lived experience into data and creates a bridge between awareness and action. It enables leaders, educators, and clinicians to understand not only whether individuals are struggling, but why—and what conditions need to change.

Most importantly, it supports a shift from reactive burnout management to proactive capacity building, positioning wellness as infrastructure rather than initiative.

Conclusion: Measuring What Matters

Wellness cannot become the standard of care without a way to measure it meaningfully. The WenWell™ Wellness Index provides a clear, interpretable, and actionable way to assess sustainability capacity within real-world conditions.

It shifts the central question from whether someone is burned out to whether they have the capacity to continue. In doing so, it reframes wellness as a shared responsibility across individuals, leadership, and systems.

This is not just a new tool. It is a new standard.

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About the Author

Dr. Wendy Garvin Mayo is a doctorate-prepared oncology nurse practitioner, stress strategist, and founder of WenWell™. Her work spans clinical practice, leadership, academia, and workforce engagement, with a focus on advancing nurse wellness and mental health across healthcare systems.