THE GOOD SOCIETY FRAMEWORK – PSYCHOSOCIAL ERGONOMICS AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Patrick W. Jordan

Digital World Research Centre
University of Surrey, UK

Good societies are those in which the conditions enable their citizens to have a high standard of wellbeing. Traditionally, the main measures used to quantify a society’s level of wellbeing have been financial measures, in particular ‘standard of living’, which is mainly a measure of people’s income and spending power. More recently, attention has been focused on wider and more far-reaching measures of wellbeing which look at quality of life in a broader sense. A variety of indices for measuring quality of life have been developed, but currently there is little consensus on what the key dimensions are. The Good Society Framework (GSF) is a model which identifies a number of dimensions of quality of life. It is conceived as a comprehensive model of wellbeing incorporating all of the major factors included in the various indices and grouping them into nine dimensions. Which of these dimensions can ergonomics and human factors address?

Dimensions of a good society

The dimensions of a good society are as follows (how these were arrived at is explained later in the paper):

• Relationships – the quality of people’s social, family and interpersonal relationships; the extent to which society is coherent and harmonious.
• Economy – people’s degree of economic prosperity and spending power; the extent to which jobs are rewarding and offer potential for growth and development.
• Environment and Infrastructure – the pleasantness and sustainability of the natural environment; the degree to which the built environment is pleasant and functions well and the infrastructure is effective and efficient.
• Health – whether people have access to good healthcare and healthy food; whether work, home and public environments are generally safe.
• Peace and Security – whether crime is low and people feel safe in their homes and public areas; whether or not society is affected by war or terrorism.
• Culture and Leisure – whether there is a rich and rewarding culture, both ‘high’ and ‘popular’; whether there are opportunities to participate in rewarding leisure activities.
• Spirituality, Religion and Philosophy – whether there is access to religious and spiritual teachings and the opportunity to practice one’s religion of choice; whether there is access to philosophical teachings and ideas about how to live.
• Education – whether there is education that enables people to function effectively in society; whether the education is intellectually enriching.
• Governance – whether there is democracy, fairness and freedom of expression; whether justice is transparent and consistent, and whether society is governed with compassion and equality.

Introduction

In recent years, ergonomics and human factors has expanded as a discipline, focussing not only on issues such as usability, safety and productivity, but on wider issues such as emotions and wellbeing.

Taken as a whole, the discipline of ergonomics is about quality of life – looking at how products, services, and systems can make life better for people.

If ergonomics, as a discipline, is to fully meet the challenge of improving quality of life, then we need to fully understand what quality of life is.

Quality of life indices

Currently, quality of life is a ‘hot’ issue, both in academia and government. There have been many approaches to defining it. These include (in no particular order):

• Quality of Life Index
• Gross National Happiness
• Human Development Index
• Genuine Progress Indicator
• World Values Survey
• Life Quality Index
• Satisfaction with Life Index
• Happy Planet Index

Each is described below.

Quality of Life Index (Economist Magazine)

Contains following dimensions: health, family life, community life, material wellbeing, political stability, climate, job security, political freedom, gender equality.
**Gross National Happiness (Government of Bhutan)**

Dimensions are: economy, environment, physical health, mental health, work, society and politics.

**Human Development Index (United Nations)**

Evaluates quality of life based on a combination of life expectancy, education and wealth.

**Genuine Progress Indicator (Methodist Church)**

Based on a combination of economic conditions and environmental sustainability.

**World Values Survey (University of Tilberg)**

Rates quality of life based on people’s subjective ratings of how happy they are.

**Life Quality Index (University of Waterloo)**

Based on wealth, life expectancy and leisure time.

**Satisfaction with Life Index (University of Leicester)**

Evaluates quality of life based on people’s subjective ratings of how satisfied they are with their lives.

**Happy Planet Index (New Economics Foundation)**

Based on: subjective ratings of happiness, life expectancy, and ecological footprint.

**The Good Society Framework (GSF)**

The GSF was created from a content analysis and cross referencing of these indices, followed by a grouping of the content into a manageable number of dimensions.

Based on this analysis, the dimensions of the quality of life are:

**Relationships**

This category is about the relationships between the people within society.
Good societies are those that have friendly, supportive communities. They are well integrated, for example people of different races interact and live in harmony with each other.

They are also societies in which personal relationships can flourish. This includes people finding love and having good friendships, and effective parenting of children.

*Economy*

This category is about the benefits that the economy brings to the people.

Good societies are economically prosperous. They enable their citizens to enjoy a good standard of living which covers the essentials and also gives plenty of disposable income.

The jobs in good societies are highly rewarding, both financially and in terms of the fulfilment that they provide to those that do them.

*Environment and Infrastructure*

This category is about the physical conditions in which people live.

Good societies have a pleasant and sustainable natural environment, with little pollution. They also have an attractive and functional built environment that is pleasant to live and work in.

They have an effective infrastructure with good transport and communication links.

*Health*

This category is about how well a society supports the good health of its citizens.

In good societies healthy food and drink is plentiful and affordable for all. There is effective healthcare and the conditions in which good health can thrive.

People have a long life expectancy and good physical and mental health.

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Peace and Security

This category is about whether a society creates a peaceful, secure environment for people.

In good societies, crime is low and people and people are (and feel) safe. Citizens are not at risk from domestic or foreign conflict, nor do they provoke war or terrorism with other nations.

Culture and Leisure

This category is about opportunities for rewarding activities outside of work.

Good societies have a rich culture with people having access to excellent arts, literature, music, movies and plays, sporting events and other forms of both ‘high’ and ‘popular’ culture.

People have time for a wide variety leisure opportunities that are affordable to participate in.

Spirituality, Religion and Philosophy

This category is about having access to teachings which look at the meaning and purpose of life.

In good societies people have access to a wide variety of religious and spiritual teachings and the opportunity to practice the religion or belief of their choice.

They also have access to philosophical teachings and different views about how to live.

Education

This category is about the quality of education a society provides for people.

In good societies people have access to a good education. This education enables them to thrive within society and enriches them intellectually and culturally.

Governance

This category is about the way society is governed.

Good societies are democratic with full political and civil liberties. They enable their citizens to have freedom of expression, freedom of religion and freedom of movement and action.
They are compassionate and grant equal rights and responsibilities to all regardless of age (except minors), race, religion, or sexuality

**Discussion**

As can be seen from the nine dimensions of the GSF, quality of life is a multifaceted and complex issue.

Ergonomics has a strong track record in areas such as economy, health, environment and infrastructure but less of a tradition of contributing to areas such as governance, relationships, and spirituality.

A question which arises here is whether the profession is inherently suited to contribute in only some of these areas or whether it has the potential to contribute to all.

Advances in technology and changes in social values and lifestyles may expand ergonomics’ ability to contribute.

For example, the expansion of the internet and other information and communication technologies are changing the nature of the way people interact with each other and the way that government communicates with its citizens. Ergonomics can have a role in making these technologies more effective, usable and engaging.

Similarly, the rise of ethical consumerism has increased the role that purchase choices have as a means of expressing people’s spiritual and philosophical values, leading to a potentially increased role for ergonomics on this dimension through user-centred design.

**Conclusion**

As quality of life gains increasing prominence as an issue and is considered in increasingly broad terms, the challenges facing all professions – including ergonomics – are also increasingly broad and far reaching.

This has implications for ergonomics practice, research and education and the influence that these can have on the wellbeing of societies all around the world.

In order that the positive effects of ergonomics can be maximised, we may have to rethink the boundaries of the discipline to ensure that it becomes even more relevant to the wellbeing of people in the twenty-first century.
Statement of Relevance

A model of the dimensions of quality of life is proposed and the role that ergonomics can play in addressing these is discussed.

Bibliography/references

For more detail of the indices that were used in compiling the GSF see the following references.

*Quality of Life Index*: Economist Intelligence Unit 2005, *The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Quality of Life Index, The World in 2005*


*Happy Planet Index*: New Economics Foundation 2009, *The (Un)Happy Planet Index 2.0: Why Good Lives Don’t Have to Cost the Earth*