Chapter 1
Introduction to Positive Relationships: Evidence-Based Practice Across the World

Sue Roffey

1.1 A Foundation for Wellbeing

The human race has developed technology almost beyond comprehension. We can perform what a century ago would have been in the realms of magic and fantasy. The Internet, air travel and the genome project are just a few examples of the way knowledge and its application has expanded to change our lives – especially for those in the privileged, 'developed' world.

And yet we have progressed much less in matters of wisdom and living well. Conflicts continue to rage across the globe, family breakdown is rife, parenting skills often lacking, antisocial behaviour, intolerance and addictions are all increasingly a concern. Many individuals and communities are 'languishing' rather than 'flourishing' (Keyes and Haidt 2003).

There is a disconnect between people that is partly framed by economics and the dominance of the individual. The world is increasingly focused on 'the bottom line', which is not about intrinsic value and meaning in our lives but about extrinsic monetary worth. We are living in times when the quality of relationships often matters less than our bank balance, profit margins and having the latest and best of everything.

The media – and often politicians – regularly feed us a diet of how *not* to get on well with people: fostering fear, revenge and contempt rather than understanding and compassion. We are encouraged to laugh at the downfall of others and immediately feel better about ourselves by comparison. Politicians are sometimes congratulated for how 'cleverly' they put others down and do not make the connection between this

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behaviour and the level of bullying in our schools. Our competitive world encourages us to believe that being more successful, rich, famous, beautiful or popular than those around us will bring us happiness. Positive psychology research is increasingly providing evidence that authentic and sustainable wellbeing lies elsewhere – confirming what many of us know already.

Human beings are social animals. We need each other. At the deepest level, we want to feel that we belong, that we are connected with others, and most of us seek relationships that nurture our mind, body and spirit. Reis and Gable (2003) consider that relationships may be the most important source of life satisfaction and wellbeing. From the fundamental importance of early attachment in infancy, through learning to make friends as children and belonging to teenage groups, onto romantic, sexual relationships and becoming parents and workers, relationships are threaded through every stage of life and are intrinsic to many things we do. We therefore need to know how to connect well in all the different relationships in our lives, at home, at work, at school and at play.

1.2 The Project

This volume on positive relationships is, to say the least, an ambitious project – some might say a foolhardy one. How can a handful of authors, however knowledgeable, encapsulate one of the most central and dynamic issues of all time – how we relate to each other in the diverse roles of our lives? Surely this has been done to death? Well, yes and no. There are certainly plenty of books – and journals – on parenting, conflict, work relationships, couple relationships and just about every other chapter here, but not, to my knowledge, on relationships as a theme across multiple dimensions and written primarily from a positive perspective: what we know about what is effective, builds the best between people, has a strengths and solution focus and aims not just to explore problems but enhance both individual and community wellbeing.

When I was asked to edit this book, I thought it was a great opportunity to disseminate important knowledge, but underestimated the extent of the endeavour I was taking on. It has been a demanding but also a fascinating and stimulating task. Every chapter has been doubly peer reviewed and re-crafted, often several times, to reflect current knowledge across the world. Undoubtedly significant evidence will have been omitted, and some researchers do not get the credit they deserve. Steve Duck springs to mind. His book *Friends for Life* (1983) inspired me when I first started being interested in these issues and his work since has been prolific. If this volume stimulates you to explore further, perhaps start with the (4th) revised edition of *Human Relationships* (Duck 2007). Further chapters around specific relational themes could have been included here but in the end decisions have to be made on what to include and what to leave out. What I have chosen are relationships and aspects of relationships that most people experience in a personal capacity.

There is a strong focus throughout the book on children and young people; education around relational issues is implicit or explicit in many of the chapters. Perhaps an emphasis on the next generation is more hopeful and optimistic. If we can support a

better understanding of positive relationships, and the values and skills to develop these, with those who will become the citizens, workers, parents and leaders of the future, then maybe our world will become a safer and more civilised place to be.

The authors are a mix of practitioners and academics – some both – from Europe, Australasia, North America and Asia. The depth and breadth of knowledge gained by working in the field is often not given sufficient acknowledgement or credence, so we have deliberately encapsulated not only evidence-based practice but also practice-based evidence to explore what is healthy, sustaining and has the best outcomes. This evidence is both quantitative and qualitative – measuring what is effective and understanding the meaning and processes of how things work.

All authors were responsive to numerous editorial demands and dedicated to the task in hand. I am grateful to them for their patience and hard work, especially as many were also occupied with their own projects and on-going work commitments. Without exception, in the yearlong process of putting this volume together, they personified the qualities of positive relationships.

1.3 Positive Psychology

The science of positive psychology has transformed the direction of thinking. Rather than investigate problems in human functioning, researchers have focused on ways to achieve maximum wellbeing and 'authentic happiness'. This has led to some surprising findings, but also confirmed some of the basic wisdoms for living life well, many of which are encapsulated in these chapters.

The three pillars of authentic happiness, first identified by Seligman (2002) and widely extended by others, are:

- The pleasant life – positive feelings and experiences
- The engaged life – being absorbed by something you find deeply interesting
- The meaningful life – what is over and above the self – relationships, service to others and spirituality

Although the first is of great importance, it does not lead to sustainable wellbeing on its own. It is based in what is known as hedonic wellbeing: feelings of pleasure. These are gained in such experiences as a wedding, passing a test, having a new car or enjoying a meal with friends – all wonderful but temporary. Fredrickson (2009) has studied the value and benefit of positive feelings in optimising aspects of wellbeing, such as creativity and problem solving, but acknowledges that we also need to have sad or otherwise negative feelings from time to time to experience life fully. Meaning and engagement are based in 'eudaimonic' wellbeing, which comprises an approach towards life and a way of being that is deeper and more sustainable (Ryan and Deci 2001).

Seligman's most recent model for wellbeing goes by the acronym of PERMA: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment/achievement (Seligman 2011). Relationships may therefore have a higher profile in positive psychology in the future.

Critics of positive psychology sometimes say that it focuses too strongly on subjective wellbeing and risks people being blamed (or blaming themselves) for their situations – the tyranny of the positive (Held 2008). There is a related concern, particularly amongst community psychologists, that the discourse of wellbeing will undermine social efforts to improve the plight of the disadvantaged. As several authors demonstrate, positive psychology is linked more with social justice than might at first be apparent.

There is also at least one alternative theory for this lack of empathy in society: Belief in a Just World (Lerner 1980) is the theory or mindset that says everyone gets what they deserve. For instance, if you work hard at school you will be successful and get a good job – if you are lazy you won't. There is of course a reality to this statement – but it is far from the whole story. It is not surprising that young people get depressed or disengaged when they try their best but don't do as well as expected, or find they can never succeed in comparison to others, or that events outside school curtail their concentration or motivation. It also means that people who have terrible things happen to them – such as being a refugee, homeless or in a tsunami – are not seen as being in the wrong place at the wrong time but somehow responsible for their plight. The Belief in a Just World is the basis of the American dream – that everyone can make it – and faulty because it does not take account of chance events, including where and to whom you were born. Yes, we can do things personally to change our lives for the better, both in actions and attitudes; yes, other people are often involved in our life events for better or worse, but things also happen by accident or as a result of interactive dynamics – there isn't always someone to blame.

Positive psychology helps people understand not only what they can do to make a difference for their individual wellbeing but also that this is also intricately connected to our relationships with others. Taking that on board in various ways not only enhances our own happiness but also the wellbeing of the communities and societies in which we live. One simple example is that science has shown that performing acts of kindness has several outcomes that benefit the giver as well as the recipient (Lyubermirsky 2007). Increasingly researchers are finding that individual authentic wellbeing cannot be separated from what is best for all of us. The Prilleltenskys (2006) have made strong connections between individual, organisational and community wellbeing; Gardner and his colleagues (2001) consider the elements of what can be considered '*Good Work*', maintaining ethical relational values alongside a focus on excellence; Huppert (2005) is concerned with provision for whole populations in respect of positive mental health.

1.4 Politics, Power and Equality

Money does increase our wellbeing, especially if we are short of it, but above a certain (surprisingly) low level, it does not make much sustainable difference. Whilst some people with many material advantages do *not* flourish, others who live in relatively disadvantaged circumstances perceive themselves as having high levels

of wellbeing (Huppert and So 2009). Even the boost to happiness that lottery winners experience decreases after a few months to their basic 'set point' for happiness (Brickman et al. 1978). Sonja Lyubirmirsky (2007) refers to this as 'hedonic adaptation', and it occurs in both positive and negative directions. What does matter in regards to money, however, exists in our relationship with others – if someone in a similar situation to us is getting a lot more than we are, we feel the inequality and it is this that affects our wellbeing. There appears to be an acceptance of bonuses for bosses, but when that becomes disproportionate – from several times as much as the average pay in an organisation to hundreds of times more – then anger and resentment surface. Fairness is a fundamental need for a healthy relationship – and a healthy society. Wilkinson and Pickett (2010) summarise research around the world that demonstrates this in many areas, including physical and mental health, criminality, violence and our 'social inheritance' – how we connect with others. The more equal the society, the more able we are to share, support and collaborate.

This book has not gone into depth on issues of power in relationships although this is often addressed by implication. It is apparent throughout that you cannot have a healthy relationship if you are only self-serving. It is imperative to consider the needs and perspectives of others as well as yourself. Where one person, community, company or nation tries to dominate a relationship for their own ends, not only does it impair the wellbeing of the weaker and infringe their basic human rights but it does not bring *authentic* wellbeing to the stronger either.

For me, the personal is political. If you hold the values of fairness, empathy and respect for others and believe that ethical behaviour matters, you will not only attempt to live by these principles in your own life but also aim to create a world in which they are fostered and will seek their representation in all aspects of government. The hard-line economists tell us that this not what really matters – the evidence in this book says otherwise.

1.5 Human (and Animal!) Nature

There are those who say that it is human nature to be acquisitive, aggressive and competitive, and it would be foolish to deny that these are powerful determinants of human behaviour. Our thoughts, attitudes and actions are, however, also socially constructed and even emotions are determined by how issues are discussed and cultural norms developed. We all learn what to do and how to be by listening to these 'dominant discourses', watching and copying others. This is true of the youngster who feels angry that someone has said something negative about his family in school and therefore 'duty bound' to punch the person who said it – to political rallies where people are led to feel that certain races are so unacceptable that their humanity can be dismissed and whole communities brutalised. Indigenous Australians were not fully classified as citizens of their own country and not counted in the census until the 1960s when cultural norms changed sufficiently to give them the vote.

A recent study of baboons also shows that aggressive behaviours in primates are not inevitable (Sapolski and Share 2004). During the mid 1980s, half of all males in a baboon troupe died of TB. The disease was transmitted through raiding human garbage, so it was the aggressive (alpha) males who ate more of the contaminated food and died – leaving a cohort of atypically unaggressive male survivors. A unique and more harmonious culture developed with more social grooming, affiliation with females, a relaxed dominance hierarchy and less stress among low ranking males. Sexual behaviours remained the same. A decade later, these behavioural patterns persisted, with young males joining the troop adopting the less aggressive behaviours.

Healthy relationships, and positive emotions within these, are essential for survival. Although the basic emotions of fear and anger in the face of threat get maximum attention, we also have other basic emotions of affection, interest and empathy that enable us to collaborate and support each other in times of need. Children are born egocentric for their own survival – they need to grow into being cooperative for the survival of the species (Roffey 2006). Crocker and her colleagues (2005) talk about the need to shift the paradigm in inter-group processes from an 'ego-system' motivation concerned with personal rights, self preservation and individual gain to one which explores what is supportive for everyone and is focused on the 'eco-system'. Egocentric emotions dominate our society. Threats are no longer just about physical survival but about preserving a positive sense of self that can be undermined in countless ways. Threats can be real but also conjured up, imagined or exaggerated. They all lead to behaviours that are about getting the better of others in order to protect the self. Eco-centric emotions – those that foster collaboration and understanding – are equally important, and their active development across all levels in society would perhaps be a sign of maturity.

1.6 The Content

1.6.1 Section One: The Power of Positive Relationships and How We Learn These

There are five sections to the book. The first explores two major reasons why positive relationships are so significant for both individual and community wellbeing, and then goes on to detail how relationships are learnt. In Chap. 2, Toni Noble and Helen McGrath summarise the wealth of research that highlights the centrality of healthy connection with others for resilience and dealing with adversity. I know from my own work that vulnerable children, who are dealing with difficult situations and often presenting with challenging behaviour, can have their futures 'rescued' by sensitive and caring teachers who make them feel worthwhile, focus on their strengths and foster a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Violence is endemic in many societies and communities – particularly where inequality thrives. Aggressive and coercive behaviour in interpersonal relationships

is not, however, inevitable, despite TV soap dramas that often suggest that it is! It is possible for individuals to modify their responses in situations and become more aware of the benefits of cooperation, negotiation and mutual respect. As Wolfe et al. (1999) found, empowering people to develop healthy relationships provides an alternative to violence. Robyn Hromek and Angela Walsh are practitioners who have been involved in two different aspects of improving relationships to prevent violence. Their case studies in Chap. 3 provide vivid illustrations of what can be achieved. Robyn recounts her experiences in a school where efforts were made to reduce bullying and other aggressive student behaviour by ‘planting the peace virus’. Angela writes about the Love Bites project that helps young people think through issues of gender relationships to reduce sexual and family violence.

Chapter 4 in this section details what is required from infancy onwards in learning what is involved in a healthy and sustaining relationship and what helps someone grow to choose pro-social behaviours. Gretchen Brion-Meisels and Stephanie Jones outline the ‘stage-salient’ tasks required at different ages for children to become confident and empathic in their interactions with others. The authors also summarise innovative programmes in schools in the US and in Colombia that are helping young people to learn and develop positive relationships.

1.6.2 Section Two: Close Relationships

The second section deals with our most intimate relationships. In Chap. 5, Vagdevi Meunier and Wayne Baker refer, amongst others, to John Gottman’s seminal work on couple relationships and the factors that contribute to a happy marriage or romantic/sexual partnership. The ways in which individuals deal with differences amongst them appears to be crucial in whether or not relationships flourish.

Kimberley O’Brien, a child and family psychologist, and Jane Mosco, an educational psychologist, work extensively with children, young people, their parents and carers. In their chapter on parent–child relationships, these authors explore different parenting ‘styles’ and their outcomes for children. Baumrind’s authoritative style (1989) (also referred to as facilitative by later commentators) enables children to grow up to be independent, self-controlled, persistent and caring. The authors give examples of how this style might be incorporated into different life stages for these positive outcomes.

Breakdown in family relationships is now sadly commonplace in most of the Western world. Separation and divorce, however, do not stop people being parents. In Chap. 7, Emilia Dowling and Di Elliott, who work in mediation and family therapy, summarise what supports children in these situations of loss and change and what adults need to take into account. The rights of the child are paramount.

Friendship is important to most of us. We often experience positive feelings in interactions with friends that boost our resilience, confidence and a positive sense of self. Our friends may also provide the stable, positive alliance that families do not

always manage. Friendship is therefore critical for our psychological health. In Chap. 8, Karen Majors outlines the functions of friendship and the ways in which positive reciprocal relationships with peers enhance wellbeing. She emphasises the importance of children learning the skills that enable them to establish a threshold for friendship.

1.6.3 Section Three: Relationships at School and at Work

The third section moves away from the most intimate but includes important relationships that sustain wellbeing in different areas of life. Relationships in school are having an increasingly high profile, not only for wellbeing but also for an effective learning environment (Hattie 2009). Relationships in one part of the school system impact on others, so schools are either building a healthy environment with high levels of social capital and relational quality or maintaining one that is full of anxiety and of benefit only to those who can be 'successful' in tightly defined ways. I outline the ecology of positive relationships in schools in Chap. 9.

The advent of positive organisational psychology is an exciting development with an increasing evidence base of what makes a difference. Sue Langley works with organisations across the world to bring higher levels of emotional intelligence into the workplace. In Chap. 10, she explores what promotes a cooperative, effective and flourishing working environment. She also identifies the strengths and qualities of relationships that increase motivation, commitment and build social capital in an organisation. This not only enables people to achieve fulfilment in their work but also leads to more creative and effective outputs.

Chapter 11 is also about relationships at work but from a different perspective. Elizabeth Gillies writes about positive professional relationships and what is required in a relationship between client and a provider of services in order to gain the best outcome. This can be for artisans such as builders through to therapeutic services. This chapter explores solution-focused and strengths-based approaches for effective engagement with others along with a consultation model for interaction.

Ann Brewer, in Chap. 12, writes about how a mentoring relationship can nurture potential by contributing to life learning, enhancing perspectives of thinking and values as well as improving outcomes for both individuals and organisations. She explores the bi-directional influence within mentoring relationships and what is needed to ensure they work well. She also identifies different ways of conducting a mentoring relationship.

The final chapter in this section, Chap. 13, addresses leadership and what positive psychology offers for a new paradigm. Hilary Armstrong makes the point that leadership skills often focus on measureable technical knowledge rather than the relationship skills that make the most difference. She refers to a specific study on organisational coaching to illustrate the importance and effectiveness of social intelligence in leadership.

1.6.4 Section Four: Relationships in the Wider World

This section goes beyond the interpersonal to the wider community. I first experienced a small shift in community relationships at a street party in London. The little terraced houses were 100 years old that year, and my neighbours and I thought this was worth a celebration. In the 40 or so houses in the street were representatives from Ireland, Scotland, Poland, Cyprus, the Caribbean, India and England. The 6 months of meetings to discuss and plan what we would do on midsummer's day led to greater connection and understanding between people. Even families who were not much involved in the planning 'came to the party' on the day and joined in with decorating the street, dressing up, cooking and dancing. The street was closed to traffic and everyone brought out tables and chairs onto the pavement and shared food. The sun obligingly shone! From that time onwards we knew who our neighbours were, could greet them with a smile and sometimes stop for a chat on the way to the shops. The more we knew about each other, the less we could prejudge on the basis of stereotypes and assumptions. Barriers came down as we shared a common goal, and the benefits lasted long afterwards.

In Chap. 14, Margaret Vickers and Florence McCarthy have written about the complexities of community relationships in rural Australia. They present a case study that illustrates how positive community relations can be created, overcoming complex real and symbolic boundaries. As in the example above, this also occurred through the development of joint activities bringing disparate groups together. In this case, these included school staff and students, university students, community organisations, a non-government organisation and indigenous elders with the common goal of promoting the teaching and learning of indigenous languages. The authors conclude that community wellbeing can only grow out of reconstructed relationships replacing marginalisation and discrimination with respect and inclusion.

Zalman Kastel is also concerned with promoting positive interactions between people of different cultures, although his focus is specifically the difference in religious beliefs. He initiated the organisation now known as Together for Humanity where adults of different faiths (Jewish, Muslim and Christian) work with young people in schools and communities around Australia to enhance interfaith understanding and tolerance. As Chap. 15 illustrates this is a far from straightforward task, but there is evidence that concerted, sensitive and thoughtful efforts do make a difference to how people perceive each other.

1.6.5 Section Five: Responding Positively to Challenges in Relationships

In my experience, many people are skilled at establishing and maintaining positive relationships but get lost when dealing with direct challenges or situations that create tension. They put their head in the sand and pretend it isn't happening, duck

out of confrontation and agree with everything for a quiet life or explode with frustration and anger. This final section is therefore as important as all those that have gone before in exploring how we use a positive approach in potentially negative situations.

Lois Edmund, in Chap. 16, explores how healthy conflict can strengthen a relationship and ways in which to mitigate negative outcomes of conflict. She makes the link between the science of positive psychology and the study of conflict resolution.

Finally, Chap. 17 looks at how relationships might be repaired after they have been damaged. Peta Blood gives an account of the practice and value of restorative approaches to reconnect individuals and communities and importantly to encourage offenders to take authentic responsibility for their behaviour. These approaches are increasingly being seen to have value in various spheres from the justice system to schools. Not only are they more likely to rebuild healthy communities but also reduce the potential for further harm.

1.7 Threads and Connections Between Chapters

One of the challenges of putting together a book on a single theme is to make each chapter discrete and offer some specific and unique insights. The authors have, by and large, achieved this. Inevitably, however, there are commonalities that run through many chapters. This also has benefits in showing how certain principles and ways of thinking are relevant to many different interpersonal situations and circumstances.

As well as positive psychology, several authors refer to other theoretical approaches that they have found useful and congruent. Purists may be dismissive, but many applied psychologists are eclectic in their thinking and employ what they find helpful. The following themes are mentioned throughout the book, although not in every chapter.

1.7.1 Ecological (Systems) Theory

There is rarely linear causation in matters of human behaviour. Outcomes at any one time are the result of bi-directional, circular and accumulative causation. This assertion by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979) on ecological systems theory is reflected in many chapters. This theory, originally on child development, says that we all live in nested systems, and there is bi-directional influence between them. The most influential is the micro system, comprising the day-to-day experiences with those in our immediate circle. For young children, this is the interaction with their families and carers. What happens here, however, is affected by other systems, from the resources provided by the local neighbourhood to the expectations in workplaces and schools to socio-political dimensions of the

whole culture and the dominant values expressed there. Bronfenbrenner later added the chronosystem – an acknowledgement that ecologies do not remain static but change over time.

1.7.2 Social Constructionist Theory

This theory emphasises the importance of meaning and how individuals and groups have different 'realities' based in how people around them – including in the media – talk about things – often referred to as 'dominant discourses'. Several chapters touch on how language matters in the creation of the world we live in, our priorities, perspectives and behaviour. It is useful to reflect on how these discourses come about in society and in whose interest they might be. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) has some interesting things to say about this in relation to education and creativity.

1.7.3 Connection and Resilience

Although Chap. 2 deals with this directly, the importance of feeling you belong somewhere and that at least one significant person believes that you are worthwhile is referred to several times in other chapters. Emily Werner and her colleagues began their longitudinal study in 1955 in Hawaii with babies born in circumstances of multiple disadvantages which put them at risk of negative outcomes. They followed up the life trajectory of nearly 700 children into adolescence and adulthood and found that certain factors made the difference to their ability to overcome adversity. Of these, one of the most powerful is positive connection with others (Werner and Smith 2001). This begins, but doesn't end, with attachment; the early experiences in infancy where parent/carer responsiveness and emotional nurturing have such a powerful impact on how we feel about ourselves and our place in the world and therefore our future relationships (Bowlby 1969). There is also evidence that the quality of attachment affects the development of the brain (Gerhardt 2004).

1.7.4 Emotional and Social Intelligence/Literacy and Learning

Although still open to academic debate, emotional intelligence (intrapersonal knowledge and skills) and social intelligence (interpersonal skills) have become widely recognised as the symbiotic abilities that underpin both positive functioning and healthy social interactions (Ciarrochi and Scott 2006; Schutte et al. 2001; Goleman 2006). First given prominence by Howard Gardner in his early work on multiple intelligences (1983) and later widely publicised by Daniel Goleman (1995, 2006) with extended research by Peter Salovey, John Mayer (1990) and

others, emotional and social intelligence has become part of the twenty-first century zeitgeist.

Many authors refer to the need for children to learn to become socially and emotionally literate – to be able to understand and manage their feelings, construct positive interactions with others and cope well with adversity. The work of CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning) in the US and Antidote in the UK have resulted in both countries putting SEL high on the educational agenda. Other countries are following this lead. Skills include emotional recognition, regulation and expression, empathy and concern for others, positive communication, responsible decision-making and goal setting. Social skills alone, however, can be self-serving and manipulative. To ensure that relationships develop in healthy and reciprocal ways, they need to be embedded in relational values and be learnt in congruent contexts (Roffey 2010). The relational value mentioned most often here is respect. This is not the respect that comes from deference to authority, but from being willing to listen to someone else even if you don't agree with them (Roffey 2005). It means treating someone as worthy, not putting them down or making them feel inferior. Pro-social behaviour puts this into practice by acts of inclusion, kindness, interest, generosity and acceptance. For all but the most hardened individuals, this meets a basic psychological need for feeling valued and connected.

1.7.5 A Strengths and Solution Focus

Traditional psychology addresses problems and deficits. Positive psychology has moved away from this focus into exploring what is going well and how to get more of it. This includes personal qualities, the strengths of organisations and the positives within any situation.

Positive relationships are more likely if people seek to identify not only their own strengths and use these to reach goals but also do the same with others. Self-concepts and the resulting behaviours are influenced by how significant others describe individuals. A child who is told she is helpful will begin to see herself that way; a young man who is told he is lazy will have nothing to live up to.

Many authors refer to a strengths approach. Although there are many versions of these, the VIA inventory (Values in Action) devised by Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman (2004) identifies 24 specific strengths classified under the six virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence.

Rather than deconstruct a problem into its component parts, asking questions such as 'what went wrong?', a solution focus explores what people want and the extent to which they are already there (Greene and Grant 2006). This is not only optimistic and future-focused but also ensures that energies are utilised in constructive action rather than negative rumination.

There are strengths to celebrate in the field of positive relationships and these are that we look to build on. There are couples in supportive, loving partnerships, and when these work well, they may meet the needs of both parties possibly better than

ever before. I look around at some of my friends' long-lasting marriages and see equality, companionship and mutual support. Many families are aware of good parenting practices, and children grow to be strong, independent and caring of others. Although it still exists, racism is less acceptable in society than it once was, and workplaces in the civilised world are no longer workhouses where employees live in fear of the unrestrained power of the bosses. There is much to be learnt from these developments, to hold on to and to evolve.

1.7.6 Social Capital

Physical capital comprises hardware resources such as buildings and equipment and human capital comprises knowledge and skills. Social capital here refers to the quality of relationships within an organisation or community and the social cohesion they promote. Although basically a term originating in sociology, social capital is increasingly recognised by psychologists working in organisational and group settings and can be found here in several chapters. Although there is still debate over the precise definition, the concept continues to gain ground as a useful way of describing and analysing the relational quality of organisations and communities. High levels of social capital are developed by positive everyday interactions between people. These are marked by mutual trust, reciprocity and shared responsibility towards meeting agreed goals that put the common good over self-interest. Toxic environments, marked by cliques, negative communications and interactions, where power is wielded for the benefit of a few, have low social capital. For most people, they are uncomfortable places to work, live or learn. Where there is goodwill towards others in the norm, life becomes not only more pleasant but also more productive. Helliwell and Putnam (2004) have found from large samples of data from several countries that social capital, as measured by the strength of family, neighbourhood, religious and community ties, supports both physical health and subjective wellbeing.

1.8 Summary

This book is not presented as a panacea but as a search for the possible. Positive relationships are what people really do seem to want in their lives – at home, at work and in their communities. Nearly everyone wants to feel valued, connected and supported. A baby learning to smile at only 6 weeks shows just how deeply embedded this need for social connection is in our biology as well as across cultures. Despite the complexities of establishing and maintaining positive relationships, this book demonstrates what might be involved across different contexts in doing just that. Most of this isn't rocket science – at one level we have always known it – now we have the evidence to prove it. Perhaps we need to reflect on whether or not, individually

and collectively, we will take note of this evidence and put it into practice – choose what works. Like going on a diet to lose weight, good intentions do not always translate into sustained action. You are more likely to succeed when you take up the challenge with others – the more we talk about it together, the more likely we are to believe that this is achievable and take action to make it happen.

> We are bound together by the common thread of humanity; when this is broken we are all undone.

Perhaps only when we recognise this can we all achieve authentic, sustainable wellbeing.

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