



Wellbeing Insight

Capacity Can Grow

We all have different capacities. At first glance, this feels obvious. We can see it in the physical world all around us. Some of us can run further, lift more, recover faster. Some of us are built this way, some have trained this way, and most of us are some blend of both. We understand this. We accept this. We rarely judge this. And yet, when we move from the physical to the less visible forms of capacity, our understanding can become less generous.

Because we don't just have physical capacity. We also carry mental capacity – our ability to concentrate, to process, to think clearly under pressure. We have emotional capacity – our ability to regulate, to respond, to stay steady when things feel unsteady. We have social capacity – our ability to engage, to connect, to be present with others. And importantly, we have limits in all of these.

Perhaps the more subtle wellbeing insight is this: not only do we have different types of capacity, but there is also a wide range of capacity across people. In any team, family, or community, there will be variation. Some can hold more. Some can carry less. Some are at their limit today, even if yesterday looked different. The question is – do we accept this as readily as we accept physical differences? **When someone says, “I'm at capacity,” do we believe them?** Or do we question, compare, or quietly judge?

In our work through *My Manifesto*, we often return to a simple but powerful idea: to know yourself, to care for yourself, and to believe in yourself are three of the greatest gifts you can receive. Understanding your capacity sits right at the heart of this.

To know yourself is to recognise your limits.
To care for yourself is to respect them.
To believe in yourself is to trust that they are not fixed.

There are two beliefs that seem to sit underneath a more compassionate and constructive view of capacity. The first is this: Most people are trying their best. While we know this is not universally true, choosing to begin from this assumption changes how we meet others. It softens our response. It invites curiosity instead of judgement.

The second is this: Capacity can grow. And here, the science offers us both encouragement and direction. Research in recent years suggests that mindfulness-based and cognitive-behavioural practices can support growth in attention, executive functioning, emotional awareness, and emotional regulation – reminding us that many forms of capacity are not simply fixed, but can be shaped over time with practice, support, and the right conditions (e.g., Zainal & Newman, 2024; Pickerell et al., 2023).



Similarly, research into stress and resilience highlights that, in supportive environments, individuals can expand their ability to tolerate challenge and uncertainty over time. In simple terms: with effort, support, and practice – capacity can grow. Not always quickly. Not always evenly. Not always in the way we expect. But growth is possible.

This is where the tension sits so beautifully – and so importantly. We can hold compassion for current capacity, while also holding hope for future capacity. We can say to ourselves, or to others: “I understand where you are right now.” And also: “I believe there is more available to you, over time.” This is not about pushing harder. It is about growing wisely.

In our experience, this growth is often supported by the quiet, consistent use of character strengths – hope, perseverance, bravery, gratitude, teamwork. These are not just nice ideas; they are the levers through which capacity is stretched, supported, and sustained.

And sometimes, the growth is not in doing more – but in becoming more.

More patient.

More understanding.

More able to sit with discomfort.

More able to love and be loved.

Of course, we also want to acknowledge an important truth. There are circumstances – medical, psychological, situational – where capacity may be limited in ways that cannot simply be trained or expanded. In these moments, the conversation shifts.

From growth...to care.

From expansion...to preservation.

From striving...to wisdom.

And perhaps, even here, capacity grows in a different direction. So, where does this leave us?
With a gentle invitation.

To recognise that we all have different capacities.

To respect when someone is at their limit.

And to hold onto the quiet, hopeful belief that capacity – in many forms – can grow.

Your capacity is, in many ways, unknown and unknowable. But what you can know is this: with support, with effort, with care, and often with others beside you – growth is possible. And in that possibility, there is both compassion... and hope.

Go well.