Day 5: Well-Being and Resilience Building

Understanding Well-being

Well-being is a broad, multifaceted concept that encompasses emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions. It is influenced by a range of personal experiences and societal factors, making it a complex topic to define universally. Two primary perspectives on well-being exist: the hedonic view, which focuses on happiness and pleasure, and the eudemonic view, which emphasizes personal growth, self-actualization, and living a meaningful life aligned with one's values.

Well-being in Education

In educational contexts, well-being has become a central focus of policy and practice. Schools and institutions are increasingly implementing well-being programs to support both students and staff. These initiatives aim to equip individuals with the social and emotional skills needed to navigate challenges and contribute positively to their communities. However, there is no single definition of well-being, and its meaning can vary based on cultural, social, and individual differences.

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GenAI and Well-being

Viewing Generative AI (GenAI) as a cure-all for human well-being is problematic. Similar claims were made with the rise of the Internet and social media, only for negative impacts and unforeseen outcomes to emerge over time. Rather than asking if GenAI inherently improves individual and societal well-being, a more realistic question is how we can responsibly develop and use GenAI to enhance well-being while minimizing potential risks.

Potential Negative Impacts of GenAI on Well-being

GenAI presents several challenges to well-being, both at the individual and societal levels. One significant concern is job displacement. According to McKinsey, by 2030, up to 30% of work hours in the U.S. could be automated, with GenAI accelerating this trend. While professionals in STEM, creative fields, business, and law may see their work enhanced by GenAI rather than eliminated, sectors like office support, customer service, and food service are likely to experience continued job decline.

Misinformation and Bias

Another pressing issue is the role of GenAI in spreading misinformation and bias. GenAI's ability to create content indistinguishable from human-generated material has already contributed to the spread of misinformation. The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report* (2024) identified AI-fueled misinformation as a leading short-term threat to global stability and democratic processes. In the medical field, misinformation is a growing concern, with 30% of Canadians surveyed in 2020 reporting that it significantly contributes to their anxiety and distrust of medical information.

Ways GenAI Can Promote Well-being

Despite potential negative impacts, Generative AI (GenAI) also offers opportunities to enhance well-being when developed and used in a human-centered way. By focusing on augmenting tasks rather than replacing them, GenAI can provide valuable support in various areas, including work, learning, and personal development.

Augmenting, Not Automating Work

While much of the conversation around GenAI has focused on its potential to automate jobs, it can also augment tasks by reducing tedious activities. For example, tasks like copyediting can be handled by GenAI, allowing employees, faculty, and students to focus more on creative and fulfilling work. This shift from automation to augmentation can improve well-being by freeing up time for more meaningful contributions.

On-demand Coaching and Support

GenAI is already being used as a tool for on-demand coaching to help individuals tackle workplace challenges and achieve personal, educational, and career goals. With access to vast amounts of information and the ability to engage in dialogue with users, GenAI has significant potential in coaching, counseling, and other processes that support mental and emotional well-being.

Innovative Approaches to Learning and Well-being

GenAI also supports new ways of fostering academic resilience and well-being. By emphasizing formative assessments and self-reflection, GenAI tools like tutors and course bots guide students through learning challenges. For instance, Boston College's StuckBot helps students manage coding difficulties by offering tailored insights, while UBC Okanagan's Python tutor, developed by Raymond Lawrence, provides coding assistance that faculty or TAs can verify, ensuring accuracy and reducing stress for students.

A Human-centered Approach to GenAI

The extent to which GenAI contributes to positive well-being depends on a human-centered approach to its development. Prioritizing human values, ethical considerations, and the augmentation of tasks, rather than complete automation, is key. Building critical literacy around how GenAI can improve well-being, rather than hinder it, will be crucial as these technologies continue to evolve.

In a Nutshell

Well-being is a complex, multidimensional concept involving emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual aspects. In education, well-being programs are designed to help individuals navigate challenges and thrive within their communities. Although Generative AI (GenAI) presents some risks, like job displacement and misinformation, it also offers opportunities to augment tasks, provide on-demand coaching, and support academic resilience. The key to using GenAI to enhance well-being is a human-centered approach that focuses on ethical development and task augmentation rather than automation.

Key Expressions and Definitions

1. **Well-being:** A broad, multifaceted concept involving emotional, social, physical, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions influenced by personal experiences and societal factors.
2. **Hedonic View of Well-being**: Focuses on happiness, pleasure, and satisfaction in life.
3. **Eudemonic View of Well-being**: Emphasizes personal growth, self-actualization, and living a life aligned with one's values.
4. **Augmentation vs. Automation:** Augmentation involves using AI to support and enhance human tasks, while automation refers to replacing human tasks entirely with AI systems.
5. **Misinformation**: False or misleading information that can be spread, sometimes unintentionally, and is amplified by AI technologies like GenAI.
6. **Job Displacement:** The risk of jobs being automated, particularly in industries where tasks can be performed by AI.

Take-Aways

- Well-being in Education: Well-being programs in educational settings help individuals develop social and emotional skills to thrive and contribute positively to their communities.
- Generative AI and Well-being: GenAI can enhance well-being by augmenting tasks, providing on-demand coaching, and supporting academic resilience, but it must be developed with ethical considerations in mind.

- Human-centered Approach: The key to leveraging GenAI for well-being lies in augmenting tasks, promoting critical literacy, and avoiding complete automation, ensuring that human values and ethical considerations are prioritized.

References

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