

The Wellian scale

From: Joe Maxwell from Joe Maxwell
joesystemica@substack.com

To: joseph.maxwell02@proton.me
joseph.maxwell02@proton.me

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The Wellian scale

A critique of scalar intelligence metrics

JOE MAXWELL
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I have never really liked the idea that intelligence is one ladder.

It feels too flat.

Too neat.

Too convenient for ranking people while missing the actual shape of what they can do.

A single score can tell you something. I am not pretending measurement is useless. But scalar intelligence metrics have a habit of compressing a whole internal landscape into one number, then acting like the compression is the person.

That is where the problem starts.

Because people do not think in one direction.

They build in different terrains.

Some people go extremely deep in one domain. They climb a narrow peak so far that, from the outside, they almost disappear into it. A mathematician, a surgeon, a musician, a systems engineer, a mechanic

who can hear a fault before the diagnostic tool finds it.

Some people move quickly across many domains. They do not always build the tallest tower in one place, but they notice patterns between places that other people keep separate.

Some people are brilliant at translation. They can climb high, come back down, and build a path for someone else.

Some people hold insight in areas that school, work, and formal measurement barely know how to value: survival, care, social reading, emotional patterning, risk detection, improvisation under pressure.

And some people are not less intelligent at all.

They are somewhere else.

That is the basic idea behind the Wellian Scale.

Not a scale in the usual sense.

More like a terrain map.

Instead of asking:

how smart is this person?

It asks:

what terrain have they mapped?

how high have they built within it?

how wide is their usable range?

can they move between domains?

can they build paths for others?

how much of their own landscape is accessible under load?

That last question matters more than people think.

Because intelligence is not only what exists inside someone.

It is also what they can reach.

You can have a deep internal landscape and still lose access to parts of it under stress, fatigue, trauma, pain, sensory overload, social pressure, or the simple nightmare of being asked a question in exactly the wrong tone at exactly the wrong time.

The mountain is there.

The bridge is just closed today.

Domain peaks

A domain peak is an area someone has built understanding in.

Maths.

Design.

Engineering.

Emotion.

Logistics.

Ethics.

Music.

Social reading.

Pattern detection.

Care work.

Survival.

Physical intuition.

Each peak has height, width, and steepness.

Height is depth.

How far can someone go inside that domain?

Width is breadth.

How many examples, contexts, and uses can they connect to it?

Steepness is the climb.

How hard is that domain for them to learn, enter, explain, or return to?

This is why two people can both be “good at maths” but in completely

different ways.

One person might climb formal symbolic terrain quickly.

Another might understand systems visually.

Another might have strong physical intuition.

Another might be excellent at explaining maths to someone who already feels excluded from it.

A scalar metric flattens those differences.

A terrain map keeps them visible.

The same applies outside academic domains.

Someone might not speak in formal language but understand social danger faster than anyone else in the room.

Someone might struggle with exams but be exceptional at practical repair.

Someone might not look articulate under pressure but can hold a complex care system together through memory, timing, and emotional calibration.

If the measuring tool only recognises one type of peak, it will mistake unfamiliar intelligence for absence.

Context gradient

The base of the terrain is shaped by lived experience.

That means some peaks are easier to climb because the ground underneath them is familiar.

If you grew up around machines, engineering intuition may feel natural.

If you grew up managing people's moods, emotional pattern recognition may become sharp.

If you grew up under threat, risk detection might become highly developed.

If you were given books, teachers, time, safety, tools, confidence, and encouragement, some terrains became easier to map.

If you were denied those things, the climb changed.

That does not mean the person has less potential.

It means the terrain had different weather.

This is one of the reasons communication breaks down.

People often explain from their own mountain and assume the other person is standing on the same slope.

They are not.

Sometimes they are in a valley.

Sometimes they are on a different mountain entirely.

Sometimes they are carrying a backpack full of fatigue, shame, trauma, pain, class pressure, disability, language barriers, or "I was made to feel stupid here before."

Then someone shouts a perfect explanation from the summit and wonders why it did not land.

The explanation may be correct.

The route failed.

Communication as gradient navigation

Good communication is not just saying the true thing.

It is building a slope.

If I have a high-level idea and you are not already near it, I have to come down first.

Not because you are beneath me.

Because that is how terrain works.

I need to find where our maps overlap.

Then I need to cross the valley.

Then I need to build a climb on your side.

That is why analogy matters.

A good analogy is like a rope gun between peaks.

It lets someone cross from familiar terrain into unfamiliar terrain without pretending the two places are identical.

But analogies fail when the rope misses.

No shared context.

Or the cliff is too steep.

The idea is too compressed.

Or the ground is unstable.

The person's terrain is not ready for that bridge yet.

That does not mean they are stupid.

It means the route was badly built, badly timed, or trying to carry too much weight.

This is one of the reasons I care so much about explanation.

Teaching is not dumping content from a higher place.

Technical writing is not just making things sound professional.

Communication is terrain work.

You are trying to move structure from one internal landscape into another without destroying it on the way.

Different terrain shapes

The Wellian Scale is not trying to create personality types, but you can roughly see different cognitive shapes through it.

Some people are vertical ascenders.

They go deep in one or two domains. Specialists. Technical experts. People who build very high, but may struggle to descend or explain the route to others.

Some people are lateral wanderers.

They move across many areas quickly. Generalists. Pattern-finders. Neurodivergent linkers. They may see connections early, but struggle with long climbs when the signal drops.

Some people are climbers with rope.

They build height and translation together. They do not just understand. They can teach, bridge, compress, decompress, and help others climb.

Some people are terrain editors.

They do not only climb existing peaks. They change the map. They create new categories, new frames, new routes, and new ways of seeing the landscape.

None of these are better in a simple way.

They are different shapes.

Different strengths.

Different risks.

A vertical ascender can become isolated.

A lateral wanderer can drift.

A bridge-builder can spend all their energy translating for others.

A terrain editor can become unintelligible before the world has enough pathing to follow.

The point is not to rank these shapes.

The point is to stop pretending they are the same thing.

Neurodivergence and access

This is where neurodivergence starts to make more sense to me.

ADHD can look like rapid terrain switching.

Fast movement.

High association.

Strong pattern jumps.

A mind that can suddenly spot a path between distant peaks, but may struggle to keep climbing one slope when the signal goes quiet.

Autism can look like high-detail terrain with strong internal structure.

Deep peaks.

Precise slopes.

Strong local coherence.

But transitions between terrains can be expensive. Switching routes can cost more than people realise.

AuDHD can be both at once, which is frankly rude from a systems-design perspective.

High slopes.

Volatile bridges.

Strong depth when everything aligns.

Sudden access loss when the system gets overloaded.

CPTSD can add fault lines and sinkholes. Whole areas become hard to access, not because the person lacks ability, but because the terrain has been made unsafe.

This is why "ability" is not enough.

Access matters.

State matters.

Load matters.

A person's map under calm conditions is not always the same as their map under pressure.

If you only measure someone at the moment their bridge is down, you are not measuring their terrain.

You are measuring the weather.

Structural unfairness

The terrain is not shaped fairly.

Some people are given maps early.

Some are given tools.

Some are taught how to climb.

Some are told the mountain they are standing on does not count.

Some peaks are culturally rewarded: formal maths, polished speech, institutional confidence, speed, written abstraction.

Other peaks are quietly devalued: emotional literacy, survival cognition, care work, bodily knowledge, practical repair, social risk detection, community memory.

That matters.

Because a scalar intelligence metric does not only measure cognition. It often measures access, training, familiarity with the test terrain, comfort with the format, safety in the room, and whether the person's strongest peaks are even being recognised.

This is not an argument that all measurement is oppressive.

It is an argument that measurement has terrain.

And if you forget that, you start mistaking the map for justice.

Intelligence under constraint

The Wellian Scale is really a way of refusing lazy ranking.

It does not say everyone is the same.

People clearly have different strengths, depths, speeds, capacities, and access profiles.

Some people have built extraordinary peaks.

Some people have wide terrain.

Some people have rare bridges.

Some people can edit the map itself.

But a single number cannot tell you the whole shape.

It cannot tell you what someone can access under load.

It cannot tell you what domains they were never allowed to climb.

It cannot tell you whether they can teach.

It cannot tell you whether they can translate.

It cannot tell you whether their strongest intelligence is illegible to the institution measuring them.

And it definitely cannot tell you whether the person in front of you is "lower" or just standing somewhere you have never learned to value.

Practical use

The practical version is simple.

Before explaining something, ask:

Where am I standing?

Where are they standing?

Am I shouting from a peak?

Do I need to descend?

What shared terrain exists?

Is this analogy actually a bridge, or am I just throwing rope into fog?

What load is this person under?

What part of their map is accessible right now?

That is not lowering standards.

It is improving navigation.

The point is not to make everything easy.

Some climbs are hard because the terrain is hard.

The point is to stop pretending difficulty always means lack.

Sometimes it means no path has been built yet.

Sometimes it means the wrong path is being used.

Sometimes it means the person can climb, but not from where you started them.

Closing

The Wellian Scale does not rank intelligence.

It maps it.

It says the greatest thinkers are not always the ones standing on the tallest towers.

Sometimes they are the ones who can build bridges, paths, and maps for others to rise.

And sometimes the person you think is below you is not below you at all.

They are just standing on a mountain you have never climbed.

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