

Integrated Wellbeing

The need for personal and collective wellbeing is catalysing a new wave of dynamic places and experiences.

Introduction

Why invest in wellbeing?

Quite simply, we function best when we feel our best; we are more fulfilled, productive and openly give back to others. The case is also the same for communities. However, the stresses of modern life can impinge on personal and collective wellbeing. Hyper-connectivity, blurred work boundaries, challenges in urban density and pressures on community services can make life challenging, or even overwhelming, for those who don't have the necessary tools to cope.

As such, we are seeing new concepts for places and experiences that prioritise mental health and wellbeing in mainstream channels. Companies are following suit, understanding that employee wellbeing is linked to productivity, creativity — and, in turn, a company's ability to retain talent and remain competitive. Consequently, workplace culture is shifting, with new approaches to design now being undertaken and a wealth of experiences to facilitate employee fulfilment emerging.

Introduction (cont'd)

Why invest in wellbeing?

Wellbeing is an important consideration in the face of growing urban challenges in density, sustainability, gentrification, public health and equality.

Placemakers, urban designers, researchers and tech companies are collaborating to bring wellbeing to fore of new developments and municipal strategies through co-creative and 'city-as-lab' platforms. Such projects provide measurable learnings that can inform policy to create communities that are more socially connected and establish a higher quality of life.

Our key takeaways

- The need to shake the stigma of self-help is catalysing new approaches to wellbeing, tapping into tastes in food, culture and social experiences
- Employee wellbeing is linked to productivity, creativity and, in turn, a company's ability to retain talent and remain competitive
- For wellbeing in workplaces to be successful, a change in organisational culture is required, with the integration of new programs and spaces
- Research captured through city-as-lab projects has the potential to inform policies that enable wellbeing
- To enable wellbeing, the design of places should facilitate opportunities to learn, socially connect, co-create and give back to the community.

Ch. 1/3

Wellbeing in the mainstream

Sub-sections

- Wellbeing studios
- Cafes
- Rooftops & lobbies

Sold-out Beyoncé dance classes, serotonin cafes and psychology boutiques are modernising wellbeing, activating spaces and attracting new audiences

Most people live and work in environments that are hyper-connected and saturated with stimuli, with many now suffering from what author David Rock describes in his book *Your Brain at Work* (2009) as ‘an epidemic of overwhelm’. Mental downtime and ‘feel-good’ experiences are being craved now more than ever. Concurrent to this — and already led by Alain de Botton’s *The School of Life* — has been the need to reframe the image of self-help. Such drivers have catalysed the emergence of new operators and experiences in mainstream culture.



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The Indigo Project
Sydney

Wellbeing studios

Wellbeing studios are delivering mindfulness through photography classes, music sessions and ‘Get your shit together’ courses

The [Indigo Project](#) is a boutique psychology and mindfulness studio in Surry Hills, Sydney, founded by psychologist Mary Hoang. The studio offers a smart selection of workshops and therapies that modernise and normalise mental health.

Tapping into creative tastes, the workshops include bonsai-cutting, and How Music Makes Us Feel, a guided listening session with Indigo artist in residence and famed musician, Bertie Blackman.

There are also sessions of deeper inquiry, such as the eight-week ‘Get your Shit Together’ course covering stress management in life domains of relationships, values and future aspirations — as well as mindfulness training and contemporary counselling services provided by in-house psychologists.



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The Springs
Los Angeles

Another boutique wellness space with a strategic mix of aligned offers is [The Springs](#) in Los Angeles. The space is primarily anchored by a yoga studio and wellness centre, which offers alternative therapies, such as Bartholomew Method and Chi Renewal.

In addition, there is programming with leading practitioners and brands, an in-house kitchen serving nourishing meals and spaces for meetings and private events – all of which carry a cutting-edge wellness proposition.



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Serotonin
Melbourne

Cafés

Cafés now offer a wellbeing trifecta of mood-boosting food, exercise and education

Wellbeing and conscious eating are also influencing cafe culture, as diet and nutrition are central to being both physically and mentally healthy. The Hartman Group's A.C.T. (Anthropology. Culture. Trends.) Health & Wellness Now—and Next 2015 symposium noted that the most progressive food retail outlets are bringing together health, wellness and sustainability. Consumers are seeing this convergence in mindfulness and integrity regarding ingredients, craftsmanship and experience.

This is evident at Melbourne's [Serotonin](#), a cafe and exercise facility in one with education-based events. The eponymous cafe educates its visitors on the benefits of serotonin by serving a plant-based menu, rich in serotonin triggers as well as personal training sessions in the adjacent Golden Square Bicentennial Park. Documentary screenings on science, psychology and healthy eating also occur at the cafe.



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Feel Good Guide
by Broadsheet
Sydney
Melbourne

Rooftops & lobbies

City rooftops and gallery foyers make way for Beyoncé dance classes that set the tone for a powerful day

The furthest ‘pop’ extension of wellbeing is the [‘Feel Good Guide’](#) launched by hipster entertainment guide, Broadsheet. The guide presents wellness ‘without the boring bits’, curating a series of on-trend events and wellbeing content in great locations.

A favourite event was the rooftop [Beyoncé dance class](#), which tapped into the link between movement and a confident mindset. In an interview with Broadsheet’s Tim Byron, choreographer Liz Cahalan, reflects on beginning her classes with Beyoncé’s ‘power stance’:

‘When you allow yourself to stand with confidence, to move as if you think you’re important, people’s confidence naturally follows.’

For Cahalan, dancing helps students connect with a sense of empowerment.

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Wellbeing at work

Sub-sections

- Traditional work spaces
- Co-working spaces
- Holiday work spaces

Leveraging in-house programming and wellness spaces to retain talent and remain competitive

Workplaces are also taking heed of wellbeing. In a 2014 study conducted by Global Workplace Solutions (GWS) and CoreNet Global, 75 per cent of those surveyed said that when seeking a new position, it's important that a potential employer support health and wellbeing. Once in the job, 57 per cent said they would be likely to stay longer if their employer valued health and wellbeing. This is underpinned by a preventative mindset, whereby people are taking more control of their health. In order for employers and co-working spaces to retain talent, they must meet these new expectations. As a result, we are seeing wellbeing manifest in workplace design, the creation of external networks with health-aligned businesses, and 'work-cation'-based formats.



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Medibank Place
Melbourne

Traditional work spaces

Medibank Place – 720 Bourke Street offers 26 types of workspaces to facilitate wellbeing and collaboration

For workplace wellbeing to be successful, it must be equally met with a progressive organisation that is willing to adapt to new spaces and ways of working. [Medibank Place – 720 Bourke Street](#), in Docklands, Melbourne is taking the lead in the shift from activity-based working (ABW) to health-based working (HBW).

The new office offers 26 types of workspaces from indoor quiet spaces and collaborative hubs to wifi-enabled balconies and standing desks. The building also encourages movement with its central atrium, ramps and stairs forming the connective heart of the building. Located onsite is also a multipurpose sports court for employees to use throughout the day.

According to an internal study, 70 per cent of employees said they are healthier working at Medibank Place; 66 per cent of employees said they were more productive, and the call centre saw a five per cent reduction in absenteeism.



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Primary,
New York

Co-working spaces

New York's Primary leads in co-working with in-house yoga classes, on-hand acupuncturists and ethical eating

Co-working spaces are also responding to expectations in wellbeing by incorporating in-house wellness programming and partnerships with cutting-edge health operators.

[Primary](#), in New York's Financial District, is a co-working space with wellness as a core part of its proposition. A standard membership gives unlimited access to the fitness studio, which hosts functional fitness, yoga and meditation classes throughout the day.

The company has a partnership with New York's premier meditation studio MNDFL, and is in talks with spin studios and Equinox. Catering is provided by ethical eatery Dig Inn, a local operator specialising in nutritious meals.



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The Surf Office
Lisbon
Barcelona
Gran Canaria
Malaga

Holiday work spaces

Work-cations on Europe's beaches offer a change of pace to enhance productivity

Beachside locations and work-cations are emerging features of a wellbeing-focused work proposition. The driver is the growing workforce of digital nomads who want to combine work, travel and a high quality of life. Businesses that know rejuvenation is key to creativity are also heading to these places for productive retreats.

[The Surf Office](#), for example, is a popular chain of co-working spaces in Lisbon, Barcelona, Gran Canaria and Malaga, that is a perfect fit for businesses and start-ups seeking a better work-life balance. In an interview with Forbes, Czech entrepreneur Ondřej Krátký describes his experience at Lisbon's Surf Office as a success, working more productively with the incentive to surf and see the city. Another benefit of working abroad with like-minded people is creating enriching connections, building a wide network of remote workers as well as locals.

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Wellbeing in urban communities

Sub-sections

- Tech-led wellbeing
- Design-led wellbeing

City-as-lab projects capture evidence to inform policies enabling community wellbeing

In recent years, a number of urban initiatives and organisations have emerged which use the urban environment to trial initiatives that promote community wellbeing. Such programs have the opportunity to make a strong impact through their ability to capture research and share evidence-based insights that can change the way architects, developers and policy makers shape the urban environment.



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The Capstone Project
London

Tech-led wellbeing

Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park leads the way as a tech test-bed for new approaches in community wellbeing

[The Capstone Project](#) at the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park (QEOP) in London is a collaboration between the Future Cities Catapult, Intel Collaborative Research Institute (ICRI), University College London, and Imperial College London.

The project is a research initiative that seeks to help residents, visitors and other stakeholders of QEOP establish healthier behaviours.

Some of the key themes covered include responding to diverse audience needs, facilitating social connections, leveraging local biodiversity to support wellbeing, night-time safety and security for late-night exercisers.

Capstone will function as a flexible test-bed, whereby tech interventions will be iterated and have the potential to become permanent fixtures in the QEOP.



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Paddington Central
London

Design-led wellbeing

British Land engages The Happy City Lab to embed wellbeing in its portfolio

Another organisation that consults on urban wellbeing is [The Happy City Lab](#) in Vancouver. Its recent collaboration with [British Land](#), one of the UK's largest commercial real estate companies, looked for ways to integrate wellbeing principles into its developments.

Principles were created in light of Happy City's extensive research that notes social connectedness as the most powerful driver of human wellbeing (after core needs are met). As such, British Land's wellbeing principles encompass place of delight, sociability, inclusivity, meaningfulness and resilience, to name of few.

A collaborative site audit of [Paddington Central](#), influenced the design and programming of the new development. This consists of significant areas of landscaping, including green walls and a



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Paddington Central
London

woodland walkway, provision of canal boats to active a waterfront area, running clubs, circus workshops, public art, a sunshine lounge to combat Seasonal Affective Disorder, free fresh fruit on Fridays, a Foodbank collection point and a variety of food offers including a regular food market.

British Land has also created a mandate to ensure all their sites are autism and dementia friendly, through the training of onsite staff and provision of additional signage.

Working on a precinct and place level at an early co-creative stage has a number of positive implications. If successful, communities at large can become more inclusive, healthier and put less pressure on the public health system. The public realm is utilised in new and engaging ways that can make fitness and social connections easy and commonplace. If larger scale projects are well researched and controlled with measurable outcomes, the collected data can be used to influence changes in government policy and shared with other cities facing similar challenges.

Conclusion

Wellbeing: Putting it into practice

For those in the business of creating places and experiences — entrepreneurs, business owners, event curators and urban planners, to name a few — there are a number of design considerations that can facilitate wellbeing.

Professor of psychology Rhiannon Corcoran and urban designer Graham Marshall at the University of Liverpool Institute of Psychology, Health and Society have developed a preliminary [framework for 'well-design'](#).

These are based on the New Economic Foundation's 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' foresight report and are outlined below. It is important to note that, in order to be successful, well-design needs to be met with culture and systems that give people permission to play, work and engage in new ways.

‘Five-ways to Well-being’

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Courtesy of the New Economic Foundation

1. Connect to others

Well-design should prioritise and facilitate connections to and between potential hubs and gathering places, and remove the barriers to everyday interactions.

2. Giving and altruism

Well-design should include flexible places and environments that prioritise, accommodate and give consent to cooperative community activity and stewardship.

3. Take notice of the world around you

Well-design should promote people’s conscious awareness of place, of each other and their relationships.

4. Keep learning

Well-design should embrace ‘engaged design’ to enable individuals to learn about and develop an allocentric response to place.

5. Be active

Well-design should promote active movement to and between potential hubs and gathering places to facilitate the pursuit of everyday physical activity.

Appendix

Image credits

Indigo Project

Images courtesy of Justin Nacua and Indigo Project

Serotonin Eatery

Images courtesy of Serotonin Eatery

Broadsheet Feel Good Guide / Dance classes

Images courtesy Theresa Harrison, Bri Hammond
& Naomi Matthew

Primary

Images courtesy of Primary

Medibank

Images courtesy of Earl Carter

Surf Office

Images courtesy of Surf Office

Paddington Central

Images courtesy of British Land

QEOP

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