WELLNESS WARFARE:

The Battle to Reconcile Employee Health vs Org. Profitability



THE EXECUTIVE CENTRE





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Introduction

This piece of research is a collective effort between four individuals, all whom come from different backgrounds, but whom all also share the same mission: to help organisations build resilience; understanding the complexity of organisational structure and the relationship between wellness and profitability, addressing uncertainty and change, and helping these organisations re-evaluate their workplace strategy through the lens of their people, their organisational culture, their business goals, and their workplace design.

Founded on extensive research and years of experience, the purpose of this piece is to shed light on the challenges that organisations have been facing for decades but that have become more tangible during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, most prominently the disconnect between employee wellbeing, inter-organisational relationships, work environment and business profitability. More importantly, however, it aims to challenge the idea that change comes organically. Rather, we argue that there needs to be a fundamental disruption in the way that organisations view their business operations and their people. Our goal is to provide a roadmap that organisations and their leaders can use to start questioning their systems, their policies, and their workspaces, and to act as partners to help them identify opportunities to make the essential changes that will lead to more healthy, profitable, resilient organisations.

If your organisation is feeling strain from the COVID-19 pandemic or other factors, internal or external, we are here to help. Please contact us to begin a conversation about how together, we can build safer and more satisfying working environments and relationships.



Dr Richard Claydon is the Chief Cognitive Officer of EQ Lab, an Extended Intelligence laboratory and network that accelerates the development of fresh insights and new ideas towards the evolution of future-ready leaders and future-fit organisations. Richard also founded roundPegz, a community of disruptive thinkers, and teaches leadership for Macquarie Business School's topten ranked Global MBA program. His research on high-performance behaviours during complex organisational transformations has been described as "a touchstone for the future of management".

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Chelsea Perino is the Managing Director of Global Marketing and Communications for The Executive Centre, a 25 year veteran in workplace design and strategy. With an undergraduate degree in Anthropology and Linguistics and an MA in Public and Organisational Relations, her expertise lies in understanding not just what people do, but who they are and how they work. Using these insights she creates informed workplace designs and communications infrastructures that address the needs of each individual and the many tasks they complete on a day-to-day basis, as well as build efficiencies through increased productivity and a smarter use of space.

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Becky Andree is the CEO of Vertical Leadership Consulting. As an international talent management visionary, leadership development expert and connections architect, Becky's 20+ years of experience with Fortune 100 companies allows her to understand first-hand the pressures and stress within organizations today. Her disruptive and visionary approach to talent management and leadership development have resulted in millions of dollars to an organization's bottom line. Her passion is evidence-based solutions to navigate the complexity of work – developing complex thinking and high-quality connections.

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Graham Barkus has 30 years of experience in guiding personal, organisational and systemic change, in senior organisation development roles and as an external coach and consultant. His focus is helping people master complexity, uncertainty and change, both to deliver and sustain peak performance and to reduce the costs of work-related stress on organisations, their people and the wider community. His work has typically involved spanning boundaries of language, culture, structure, interests and habit in personal as well as professional contexts.

This discussion is dense. Here's how to process it all.

How many people here attended a webinar in the last six months? (few whoops from the crowd)

All right, nearly all of the room. How many people created a continuous cycle of learning after you attended the webinar? (nervous laughter in the crowd)

We have two hands! Great job!!

- Becky Andree, Code Red! Leadership Development Has Flatlined!

Our argument is complex. While there is a great need for more complex thinking in organisations, there are very few learning delivery mechanisms. This is our method of correcting that. By combining lessons from the webinar with this document and the Sticky Notes listed at the end, learners can quickly develop a deep understanding of the subject.

We suggest breaking the reading of the document into chunks and supporting it by dipping into the podcasts, videos and blogs listed at the end. If possible, read, listen and watch it in different places. In the park, on the couch, in bed, at the office. Do it with different people. Take notes. Even do some when running or exercising.

Deliberately mixing your venues will strengthen the neural pathways related to the subject matter, which in turn will create multiple memory triggers that will allow you to recall information at ease.

Authors

The Complex Situation

Salutogenesis

High Quality Connections

Contextually Appropriate Workplaces

Dimensions of Knowledge Work

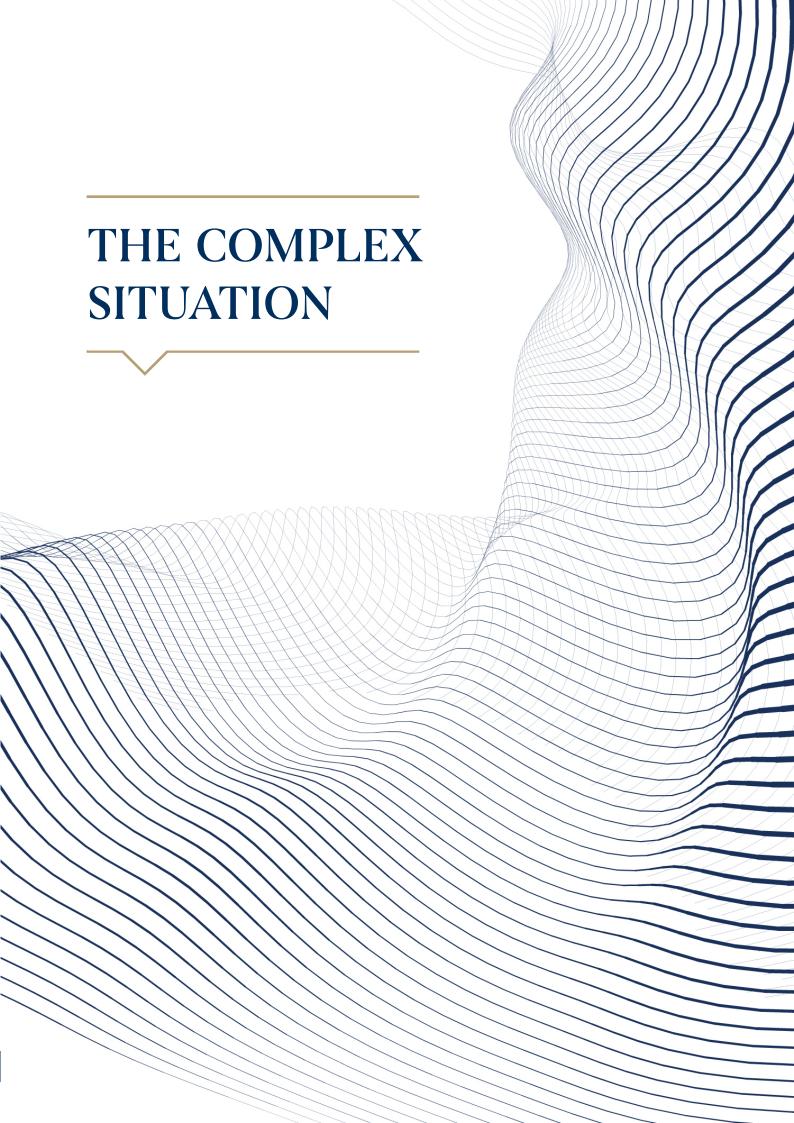
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The Complex Situation

Work is Killing Us

Organisations are making people ill.

The rapid evolution of the what we do at work, impacted largely by technology communication infrastructure, is not being mirrored by why we work, how we work and where we work; this disconnect is negatively affecting the workforce.

Doctors already know that, for many, work is toxic. There are more heart attacks on a Monday than on any other day of the week, thought to be due to a sudden surge of cortisol — known as the stress hormone — as the prospect of a new working week hits with a vengeance.

We don't know how to stop this happening.

Why?

There is very little established managerial and leadership training for it. In a 2011 survey of 100+ of the UK's top business schools, 0% provided any education at all on the wellbeing dimensions of work. With hardly any formal development in this field, there is an inadequate understanding of the degree to which poor well-being impacts the bottom-line.

The consequence is dire. Poor workplace designs and managerial practices cause cognitive overload, cortisol flooding, exhaustion and anxiety in knowledge workers. This disables any ability they have to be creative and curious. Or to learn. Or connect with others. Or collaborate with the team. Or focus enough to do any good productive work.

Managers simply don't notice how poor wellbeing interrupts the performance of good work. They just focus on reducing sick leave, because the cost to productivity of lost hours is measurable. Because their focus is so narrow, they end up implementing badly constructed wellness programs that are ignored by 75 percent of employees. These save, at best, a statistically insignificant amount of money. And they don't help many people become healthier.

Things must change.

It doesn't matter if your motivation is to look after your employees, sort out the bottom-line or contribute to greater societal well-being. The methodology is the same.

The Bottom-Line

Firstly, you need to understand the scale of the problem so let's look at the numbers. Perfect measurement is tricky, so we'll look at some ranges.

Firstly, the scale of the productivity challenge. 77 percent of 94,000 workers surveyed in Gallup's Well-Being Index across 14 different industries fitted the survey's definition of having a chronic health condition. The costs, related to their lost productivity extrapolated across these industries across the US, totaled \$84 billion annually.

77% of US workers might be chronically ill! Just reflect on that for a second.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDCP) reports that productivity losses linked to absenteeism cost employers \$225.8 billion annually in the United States, or \$1,685 per employee.

\$225.8 billion is difficult to comprehend. Fortunately, the *Society for Human Resource Management* has some helpful figures that you can easily apply to your organisation.

- They estimate that the direct costs of unplanned time off (absenteeism and sickness) is 10.4% of the company's payroll.
- Even if you can minimise this with a decent coverage plan, productivity suffers. On average, co-workers are 29.5% less productive when providing coverage for a "typical absence day;" supervisors are 15.7% less productive.
- These additional indirect costs of unplanned time off works out to 6.2% of the company's payroll.

Basically, poor wellbeing resulting in unexpected absence costs a company, on average, 16.6% of its payroll total.

And people are absent and ill a lot.

For example, in the United Kingdom, an estimated 13.5 million working days were lost to stress-related absence between 2007 and 2008, and an estimated 1.1 million people who worked in 2011 to 2012 were suffering from a work-related illness.

This level of chronic, work-related illness takes us to the really scary figures.

The CDCP reports that in the US, 75 percent of the more than two trillion dollar annual health-care spending was accounted for by people with chronic diseases. The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that productivity losses from employees with chronic disease are as much as four times the already-large direct costs of treating those diseases.

That's six trillion dollars.

It's also increasingly difficult to find healthy workers.

- 80% of the obese population in the US are metabolically ill (meaning they have metabolic syndrome conditions like diabetes, hypertension, lipid problems and heart disease)
- 40% of the normal weight population also have metabolic syndrome
- That works out to 130M (56M + 74M) chronically ill people in the USA (45% of all Americans)

The potential cost is existential for US social systems. At the current rate:

- US Medicare will become insolvent in 2026
- US Social Security will become insolvent in 2034

Why am I picking on the US so much here? Largely, because they are the leading indicator for other nations.

Firstly, the rest of the world is catching up with the US in terms of metabolic syndrome.

- Obesity is increasing worldwide by 1% a year
- Diabetes is increasing worldwide by 4% a year

Secondly, the US self-reports as being the most digitally transformed country in the world. We can use data there to predict what might happen elsewhere during digital transformation. This is overviewed in the next section.

The Diseased Organisational Experience

So what has digital transformation and toxic organisation got to do with all the above? If we are talking about people with unhealthy, sedentary lifestyles and bad diets who don't exercise enough then a gym membership and a lot of salad will solve the problem.

That's the simplistic interpretation and it's why wellness programs fail. As Jeffrey Pfeffer, author of *Dying for a Paycheck* says:

You can't expect people to adopt healthy lifestyles when their work environments reinforce or even cause poor habits.

What does he mean?

In essence, that the way we work, which is largely underpinned by unproven and outdated assumptions about human behaviour in the managerial and economic sciences, productivity and performance demands from the early-mid 20th Century onwards, is making 21st Century workers, specifically knowledge and service workers, very ill. Without rectifying this, no wellness program will make even the slightest bit of meaningful difference.

Let's take a look at some examples.

Long hours and work intensity: Due to digital and workplace distractions, many people find they have to come in earlier and work later to get things done. This is bad for the employee and the company. If this becomes a long-term strategy, employees won't have enough time to rest and recuperate. They will start making mistakes, and their performance will suffer.

Unfortunately, the alternative strategy of trying to work more intensely so they can rapidly complete core tasks in their few pockets of uninterrupted time, is worse across every psychological and physiological well-being marker there is. Eventually it will kill them.

Expectations of happiness and impression management: Since the 1930s, there has been a notion that a happy worker is a productive worker. This has been amplified by the organisational culture and positive psychology movements of the last few decades. It is not entirely true.

- There is, at best, a tenuous correlation between happiness and productivity
- Happiness is such a fuzzy concept that measuring it is infeasible
- The emotional labour of trying to look happy when you are not is deeply damaging
- The fear of being labelled negative is deeply disabling

People expend so much effort playing the part of the positive and productive employee, they have little cognitive and emotional energy left to do their actual work well.

Cognitive and collaborative overload: Work is increasingly complex. Change is ever present. New information comes so fast we get cognitively overloaded and cannot process it. This leaves us feeling overwhelmed. The behavioural outputs of overwhelm include stress, anxiety, irritation, frustration and anger. These eventually lead to burn out and break down.

And the connected collaborators who add so much value to a company? Everybody wants their input which means their overwhelm is amplified and they become the most disengaged people in the company.

Why?

Because, trying to stay engaged with that level of information processing and the demands on their time will most certainly result in breakdown or burnout. The only cognitively sensible solution is for them to become withdrawn, apathetic and cynical. And to look for another job.

Inescapable exhaustion and anxiety: This is the endgame of the above. Workers are so exhausted and anxious, they become incapable of curiosity, creativity, critical thought and cognitive flexibility. These are the skills highlighted by the World Economic Forum as being most necessary in high-performance knowledge work, and the most likely to ensure business success.

And, because of the system, hardly any of your employees are capable of any of them.

Hopefully, that has made you aware of the problem and got your attention. So now what?

Often nothing!

A Towers Watson study found that 48% of organizations reported that job-related stress, caused by long hours and lean staffing i.e. fewer people doing more work, negatively affected business performance. Only 5% said they were doing anything to address this.

And even if they do, it won't really help.

Mainstream wellness programs don't save much money. In Workplace Wellness Produces No Savings, Al Lewis, Vik Khanna, and Shana Montrose found that mainstream-style wellness programs produce a return-on-investment of less than 1-to-1 savings to cost. So if wellness programs aren't helping much, what is actually going on?

Escape Attempts and Coping Methods

Only about 25% of employees ever attend wellbeing programs with any regularity, anyway. Instead, they employ escape attempts, which range from the extreme to the mainstream.

These include:

- Death (suicide, 14,000 workplace homicides in the US between 1992 and 2010)
- Workplace violence (2M people per year in the USA suffer workplace assault)
- Bullying (90% of US workers report witnessing bullying)
- Addictions to comfort food, drugs, porn, social media to get dopamine hits to relieve the anxiety
- Total psychological disengagement withdrawal, apathy, cynicism

Obviously, suicide and murder are the most extreme escape attempts. Violence and bullying are slightly less extreme attempts to cope with ever-present, extreme stress. Fortunately, these are still reasonably rare actions. Most of us turn to addictive substances and technologies, and/or psychological disengagement to escape.

This is especially common in knowledge workers. Let's take lawyers as an example. The New York Times reported that 28 percent of US lawyers struggle with mild or more serious depression. Another 19 percent suffer anxiety. 21 percent qualify as problem drinkers. Many have serious drug addiction issues initiated by using stimulants to help them cope with their demanding schedules.

Yes. There's more than a one in five chance your lawyer is an addict. And an almost a one in two chance he/she is depressed or anxious.

It's not just alcohol or prescription drugs we get addicted to. For many, it's comfort food. For others it's social media or video games. For others it's porn.

Why does this happen?

Food: Richard Friedman, the professor of Clinical Psychiatry at Weill Cornell Medical College, writes:

No one will be shocked to learn that stress makes people more likely to search for solace in drugs or food (it's called "comfort food" for a reason). Now we have a body of research that makes the connection between stress and addiction definitive.

Robert Lustig, the author of *The Hacking of the American Mind*, and the Professor of Pediatrics in the Division of Endocrinology at the University of California specialising in childhood obesity, argues that many of today's corporations aren't just aware of these tendencies towards addiction, but are actually targeting them to sell more products.

Lustig argues that Big Food knows sugar is addictive, so saturates its products with it. As workplace stressors force cortisol through your bloodstream, even with the greatest of willpower, you succumb to that addiction and grab a candy bar, doughnut, soft drink or piece of cake. Eating it triggers your dopamine receptors, and you get a brief burst of pleasure to dull the anxiety, fear, frustration and irritation.

But, like all addictive substances, the more you take, the more you need. You begin to crave sugar. Overloading with sugar impacts your body's systems and starts to cause metabolic problems. This slowly kills you at the same time that it impairs your cognitive capacity.

Not only do you increase your chances of dying young, but you also become less able to do your job well. This becomes a vicious cycle as the fear and anxiety associated with struggling to do your job causes you to reach for another sugary snack.

If such trends continue, a significant future challenge will be an increasing impossibility of finding and hiring people who are well enough to perform complex knowledge work to a sophisticated level.

Tech: Big Tech does much the same, employing attention engineers who borrow methods from Las Vegas casinos to make tech products as addictive as possible. By fragmenting your attention, they permanently reduce your capacity for focus and meaningful conversation. Instead the desire for dopamine hits drag you back to their social media sites.

We have yet to accurately capture the cost to productivity and performance of this form of addiction. But it seems to be significant, at least in behavioural terms.

The forensic cyberpsychologist, Mary Aiken, is beginning to help us understand these potential costs. In The Cyber Effect, she outlines how regular use of internet technologies can result in the escalation of problem behaviours. Noticeable outputs of escalation are "everything from super-negative exchanges via flaming emails, aggressive texts, and offensive posts to comment threads that are meant to provoke." This results in enhanced levels of cortisol for those taking part in the exchanges.

I don't need to outline what the alcohol and prescription drug solutions do to your wellbeing. It's not pretty.

Disengagement: A final note on the impossibility of fixing problems with engagement at the level of engagement.

The above sections have outlined how contemporary work is impacted by chronic illnesses and diseases, distrust, distraction and disrespect, amplified by the drama of cyberspace and the drag of industrial expectations of productivity on the performance of digital knowledge workers.

Are engagement efforts really going to help?

Any employee trying to remain fully engaged with a workplace experiencing some or all of the above is greatly risking their personal wellbeing. Burn out and breakdown, accompanied by the various escape attempts detailed above, are highly likely if the employee tries to stay engaged.

The cognitively sensible solution is to choose apathy, cynicism and personal disengagement. These all protect the self, at least in the short term. In the long-term, they can result in depression, ennui, nihilism and misthanrophy - a complete loss of meaning. But they do protect, at least for a while. Perhaps long enough to find another job.

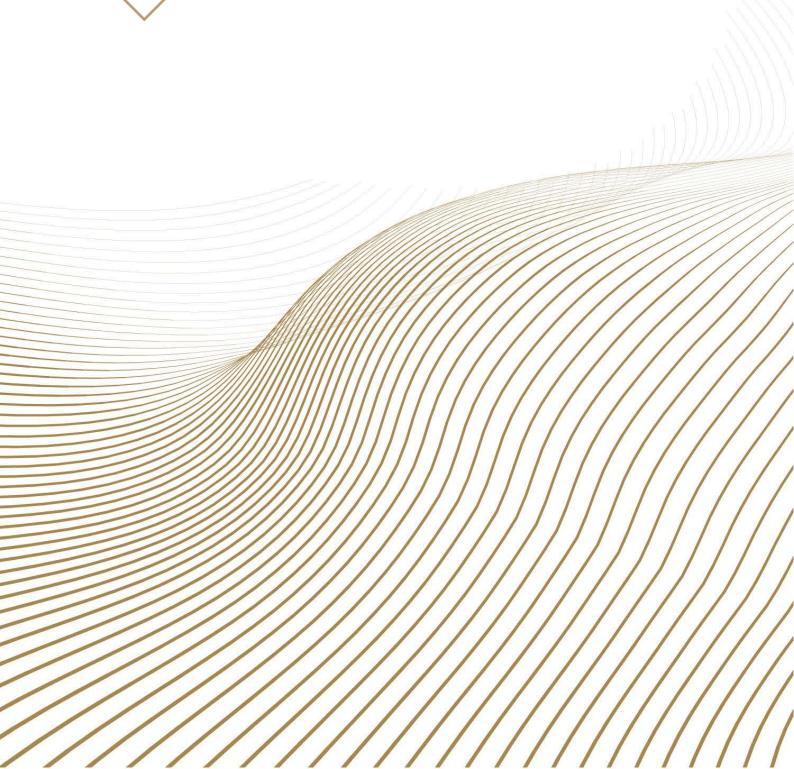
So, what to do?

Firstly, accept the awfulness of the current paradigm. Poor wellbeing is harming the bottom-line and employees, and, even if we are aware and actively care, nothing we currently do actually makes any meaningful difference. It is a waste of money.

So what should you be spending your money on?

It's time to turn to some science.

SCIENCE-INFORMED SOLUTIONS



Science-Informed Solutions

Salutogenesis

Apart from being a tricky word to pronounce, salutogenesis is an approach to health development that shifts focus away from the causes and precursors of disease, towards the causes and precursors of health.

Rather than asking 'what has made this person ill' in order to determine a treatment, salutogenesis asks 'how can this person be moved towards greater health?'.

The idea behind it is consistent with the World Health Organisation's characterisation of health as "a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity." While it doesn't suggest that we shouldn't treat disease and illness, it does say that treatment, including preventive approaches to disease, is inadequate to the goal of achieving and sustaining health.

The central notion in salutogenesis, the fundamental to moving people towards health, is the **Sense of Coherence**. This comprises three elements:

- 1. Comprehensibility
- 2. Manageability
- 3. Meaning

In simple terms: when people understand their circumstances and find what happens around them to be consistent with that understanding; they believe they have access to the resources (whether their own or from others) needed to achieve what is required; and they are able to see the demands upon them as worthwhile challenges to engage in, they are better able to cope with stressors from wherever they arise (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social, environmental) and sustain health and performance.

Salutogenesis already has many proponents in healthcare. In the wider organisational world, far less so because of a lack of attention. Nonetheless, it is a well-established concept. Its first proponent, a medical sociologist called Aaron Antonovsky, began examining it in a 1979 book, *Health, Stress and Coping*. Since then, it has continued to be researched, developed and applied to contexts beyond healthcare - including work.

It reaches further back still. Anyone familiar with Viktor Frankl's work from 'Man's Search For Meaning' may recognize the thesis. Much of Antonovsky's early work was influenced by Frankl. For those who've read Jim Collins's *Good to Great*, his story of the Stockdale Paradox has deep similarities.

Everyone else may recognize the connection between 'sustaining health and performance' as a fairly close approximation to what we describe as well-being, particularly in the workplace context.

What if we applied the salutogenic model to workplace well-being? Why might this be a good idea?

If we want our employees to have the cognitive ability, flexibility and agility needed to solve complex problems and collaborate effectively (whether face-to-face or remotely) as well as being able to develop and apply qualities such as critical thinking and creativity, we need to consider what we can do to enable those abilities to flourish and thrive.

As outlined earlier, the evidence suggests that we are currently moving in the wrong direction, and this is having a significant negative economic impact, not only in terms of the cost of fixing these problems but in the lost opportunities for enhanced performance, so it makes sense to create a Sense of Coherence in the workplace.

Can we do this, and if we do, will it improve the health and well-being of our employees?

Let us consider the issues:

The Burnout Spectrum: The obvious place to start is workplace stress. We are NOT trying to suggest its elimination. Plenty of evidence supports the notion that some level of stress, and even some 'spikes' of increased stress, are beneficial to performance for individuals, teams and organisations.

But if burnout, addiction, anxiety and major depressive disorders, self-harm and worse are at one end of the spectrum - let's call it the 'diseased' workplace - then surely it must be worth considering how salutogenic principles might improve things. Could they help move people towards the 'healthy' other end of the spectrum, where sustainable high performance (particularly cognitive performance), agility, adaptability, and the ability to cope with stressors is the potential reward?

Of course, since COVID-19 became such a dominant force in our global existence, there has been an extraordinary flourishing of activity directed towards tackling this challenge. We are inundated with advice on how to become more mindful, resilient, better able to cope; HR departments are bombarded with offers of workshops, mindfulness lunch-and-learn sessions, resilience offsites and executive coaching programs, online yoga and so forth.

Many of these are not in themselves bad. It is certainly preferable to have them than not. But rather than promoting health and wellbeing in the salutogenic sense these actions still exist in the realm of preventive actions.

Most of them will improve the resilience of individuals, enabling them to better cope with stressors, and an individual manager who is better able to cope with stressors is likely to have a more positive effect on their team's performance. It might even increase the Sense of Coherence among the team and improve other qualities such as psychological safety, learning, and collaboration. All good outcomes.

But as the data referenced above suggest, the return on investment is poor. These piecemeal interventions are not addressing the fundamental issues that cause work to produce such detrimental human effects.

Equally, large-scale initiatives to optimize the physical environment, while looking good and even producing positive spikes in engagement and net promoter scores, too often fall short of creating a sustainable improvement in employee wellbeing.

Let's try to apply a salutogenic framework to this discussion, to see what is already being done, and what more we might do to improve employee well-being.

Comprehensibility: What is the outcome we are trying to achieve? What would a salutogenic organisation look and feel like?

Manfred Kets de Vries argues that workplaces could be 'authentizotic' - perhaps salutogenic was not hard enough to pronounce for his liking! - in that they could be "places where people find a sense of belonging (whatever their background), a sense of enjoyment (which promotes innovation and creative thinking) and a sense of meaning (where people can put their imagination and creativity to work on challenges that feel worthwhile to them)".

Google's Project Aristotle points to the (at the time) surprising role of psychological safety in contributing to sustainable high performance from teams. A group of salutogenesis researchers at the University of Zurich point to the importance of systemic interventions at the individual, group and organizational level, and the need to monitor, tune and optimize workplace practices in line with a salutogenic intent.

So a salutogenic organization is one where the experience of work creates and sustains high performance from individuals, groups and teams, restoring as well as depleting the cognitive, emotional and behavioural energy deployed in the service of organisational outcomes. A place where people - of whatever background - can do and be their best on a consistent basis, and are rewarded and recognized for doing so.

NB: Potential solutions will be covered in Section 3 on Contextually Appropriate Workplaces.

Manageability: How can organisational leaders tackle this?

There is a parallel here with the words of the sadly recently-departed Sir Ken Robinson, who, when asked how organisations and education systems could improve innovation, responded by saying "it's less a question of starting it, and more one of stop stopping it."

Three points can make this transformation of work manageable:

- 1. Create the intention to do it. There has been a great deal of noise in management and leadership practice about the importance of 'purpose' but this can be harnessed and 'repurposed' towards the creation of sustainable workplace wellbeing. At last year's Business Roundtable, Jamie Dimon pronounced that the time had come to reconstitute the way we think about organisational purpose. This is a place to start.
- 2. Explore what currently supports or obstructs organisational wellbeing. Individual resilience is one element, but sustaining it day to day while being managed and interacting in a toxic organisational culture requires enormous emotional energy. The physical environment of space, sound, light, air quality, etc. also has a role to play. But all these elements need to align with the full range of work that has to be done, rather than just optimize floor plate utility or reflect 'brand values'. Are facilities available for deep, reflective work? If these are not on site, how easy is it for people to work remotely? Will they be supported by the necessary technology, access and a positive cultural mindset? One side-comment that someone working from home is 'slacking off' or 'taking it easy' immediately raises a barrier to off-site and/or home-working being an option.
- **3.** Be wary of 'best practices'. Each organisation is, in some regards, similar to all other organisations. It is also similar to some other organisations while also being like no other organisation. Scaling what already works

in your own organisation, and involving and engaging your own people in the design of the future of work in their own organisation, is much more likely to produce a result that will be salutogenic.

Meaning: How can we frame salutogenesis as a challenge worth engaging in, rather than an insurmountable problem?

The challenge here is less one of 'how to make workplaces salutogenic', and more one of 'what kind of changes are needed in workplaces in order to create organisations that can win in the future of work?

The hypothesis that underpins the salutogenic model for work is that "high mental job demands in combination with a high degree of control and support will lead to increased learning, motivation and a feeling of mastery" and that these qualities are the essence of performance in a knowledge economy.

Job demands and stressors are a reality in all workplaces, just as bacteria, viruses, parasites, genetic and lifestyle-related disorders are a reality of all human existence. The argument of salutogenesis in health is not to make diseases go away, but rather to promote practices that will make it less likely that people succumb unnecessarily early to disease.

A salutogenic workplace would still have job demands and stressors but these would be reframed as challenges and sources of fulfilment and energy at work. The cognitive abilities of employees would be harnessed in the rewarding work of solving meaningful challenges, rather than in mitigating the debilitating effects of workplace toxicity, a weak sense of coherence and low psychological safety.

Now for the hard stuff. What about the bottom line?

The benefits lie in performance, in reduced hard costs on healthcare and lost work days, and in reduced 'soft' losses through presenteeism, sub-optimal performance and poor engagement. As we've already discussed, that is a significant amount of money - circa 16.6% of payroll on absenteeism, and, in the US, many trillions of dollars in healthcare costs and lost productivity.

Here are a few more potential costs (all figures relate to the US economy):

- Insomnia \$3,156 per employee HBR
- Stress \$200-300 billion per annum Encyclopedia of Business, 2nd Ed
- Bullying \$16 million in turnover, \$8 billion in productivity Workplace Bullying Institute
- Digital distractions and gossip \$650 billion per annum CFO Daily News
- Bad eating habits & obesity \$73.1 billion per annum ABC News
- Workplace injuries and illnesses \$48.6 billion American Society of Safety Engineers
- Workplace violence \$36 billion per annum Corporate Alliance to End Partner Violence
- Grief \$75 billion per annum Wall Street Journal
- Thievery and fraud \$600 billion per annum Profiles International
- Other addictive and extra-organisational behaviours, such as drinking, smoking, drugs and domestic
 violence (all of which can be intensified by workplace practices) can cost organisations tens of thousands per
 employee.

In a July 2020 report: *Prioritizing Health: A prescription for prosperity,* McKinsey suggests that health contributes as much to income growth as education - not in developing economies, in advanced economies. The impact of COVID-19 is forecast to produce a reduction in global GDP of between 3 and 8 percent.

Workplace salutogenesis will not of course be the universal panacea or even palliative for these impacts. But in creating and sustaining environments in which human cognition is most likely to thrive and be applied to its best, it does seem reasonable to suggest a causal relationship with the economic output of organisations competing in a knowledge-based economy.

A Human-Centric Framework

What a salutogenic lens brings to workplace wellbeing is a health-based framework in which to consider the evidence that work can at one extreme be an experience that kills us – literally as well as figuratively – and at the other it can be the source of energy and a sense of thriving and flourishing, benefiting individual and collective wellbeing as well as organisational performance, particularly as we shift more fully to knowledge work.

Evidence from the body of research that underpins the salutogenic framework and more recently, on the impact of enforced and prolonged remote working arising from COVID-19, points to the significant role human connection plays in this schema.

The stress caused by an absence of placemaking ability due to restricted access to working environments underpins the importance of both presence in and the understanding of roles within a workplace, the real human interactions that take place in those spaces, and the impact that both of these elements have in emotional development and resilience. Paul Zak's research on the neuroscience behind concepts such as trust identified eight management practices (including sharing of information, recognizing excellence, inducing 'challenge stress', intentionally building relationships among others) that can build or erode trust – and getting it right reliably produces hard financial positive outcomes.

As is described above, the day to day experienced of 'being managed': how direction is set and communicated, how information and ideas are selected and shared, how people are engaged and involved in decisions, has a material impact on workplace stress and wellbeing.

Inherent in these perspectives is the nature and quality of interpersonal connection – in essence, the mechanism by which work can support a shift in focus from 'I/me' to 'we/us' in the service of achieving and sustaining collective performance and wellbeing.

The next section explores the evidence base for this relationship, the mechanisms by which it affects individual and collective performance, and why a human-centric approach is fundamental in developing effective and meaningful business strategies that simultaneously increase organisations' productivity *and* profitability, and foster more satisfied and balanced employees.

High Quality Connections

Do the people you work with leave you feeling energized? Or do you feel depleted after a day of work with others?

High-Quality Connections (HQC) are interactions that create energy. That energy is contagious.

When we observe energy in nature, we see a symbiotic relationship. We see a cycle of consumption, using, and then giving back. Energy is being exchanged rather than destroyed. HQCs build and accelerate this type of symbiotic relationship at work.

Energy is a critical but limited resource that enables excellence in individuals, teams, and organizations. While it is limited, it is also renewable. Every interaction we have has the capacity to create or deplete this vital energy.

- Interactions can be short-term and momentary, like an exchange walking through the hallway.
- They can be long-term and ongoing, like working on a project team where the collision of ideas generates excitement and engagement.

Research has shown that when HQCs are present, they broaden thinking, heighten learning, and build resilience.

On the other side of the 'energy' continuum are Low-Quality Connections (LQC). We might think of LQCs as black holes that absorb all the light in the system without returning anything!

You might remember a LQC experience and the toxicity it created. These experiences can leave us feeling as if an energy vampire has swooped in to drain us. An LQC instantly creates feelings of incompetence, worthlessness, and diminished psychological safety. Repeated experience of LQCs gradually destroys the ability to learn, show initiative, and take risks.

When our energy is depleted, we turn inward for protection and sensemaking. We take on a second job - what psychologists call "motive work" - trying to figure out why someone would treat us this way. LQCs create a wake of destruction, where a series of everyday acts that communicate mistrust or disrespect are just as damaging as a major emotional blow up.

When individuals are asked about their experience of HQC, they report three things:

- 1. Sense of Vitality: feeling energized in the connection
- 2. Positive Regard: feeling known and loved or being respected and cared for
- **3. Mutuality**: mutual vulnerability and responsiveness as individuals experience the full participation and engagement in the connection

There is an excitement and an energy when discussing these types of exchanges. The individual was willing to expend energy in the connection because they were also getting energy back.

Another lens is to look at the elements that are part of a HQC. Three things were found:

- 1. Connectivity: the level of openness to new ideas and influences
- 2. Tensility: the connection's ability to bend and withstand strain and to function in a variety of circumstances
- 3. Emotional Carrying Capacity: expression of more emotion, both positive and negative

Research participants all shared HQC stories that expressed being open to ideas and influence, identifying a variety of circumstances including moral or ethical dilemmas, and an ability to express positive and negative emotions.

Feeling good is wonderful of course. But are there any tangible benefits?

Yes, there are. The benefits of HQCs are found at the individual, team, and organizational level.

- Individuals tend to be more satisfied, committed, and attached to the organization.
- Teams experience greater learning and creativity, and are more flexible and adaptive.
- Organizations benefit from a greater capacity for cooperation and collaboration, and their customers/ suppliers tend to be more attached to the organization.

Furthermore, HQCs help minimize impression management, cognitive and collaborative overload, and disengagement.

- Impression Management: with HQCs individuals feel a sense of mutuality and positive regard. They build trust and psychological safety. When they can express themselves both positively and negatively, they feel cared for. While a great deal of impression management occurs in LCQs, in HQC, it is reduced or non-existent.
- Cognitive & Collaborative Overload: HQCs generate greater psychological safety and trust, which leads to increasing cooperation, personal growth and performance. When individuals are cooperating, it expands their thinking and creates conditions that increase their complexity of thinking as both parties are open to new ideas and influences. This has implications for leadership development and innovation. HCQs also increase the capacity to be adaptive and resilient.
- **Disengagement:** The research is pretty clear. When HQCs are a central part of work, everyone feels more connected and committed employees, suppliers, and customers.

This sounds great, but how do you actually do it?

Let's start with environment. What do HQC have to do with workplace design or workplace operations?

A lot, as a matter of fact. Because the way you design and run the workspace significantly impacts on how 'participants' view their role and routines.

- *Roles:* the function we play when we occupy a particular position in a social world. A set of expectations about how we should behave and what we are held accountable to.
- Routines: repeated, recognizable ways of doing activities. You might think of them as organizational habits or practices.

To illustrate this, let me share a story.

When I first became an entrepreneur I joined a co-working space. It was beautiful. Everything was open. There were cubicle stations, two long tables, couches to sit on, a few games to play, phone booths, etc. Basically, everything was in one big rectangular box.

My 'welcome' to the space involved someone walking me around, telling me where the things were and asking me to pick a cubicle station. I was not introduced to any other people.

I quickly picked up on the subtle cues that explained my 'role' and what the 'routines' were. I observed that everyone was really working in their own little 'spot'. If anyone happened to sit in 'their spot', a few long glances covertly informed them of their transgression.

I don't have special antenna that made me notice this. I just did what all humans do. As sense making animals we are all exquisitely tuned to responding to social cues.

The workplace had been designed to facilitate fluid movement from cubicle to couch to the long tables. However, fluid movement wasn't really the 'rules'. Owning a personal spot was. And because everything was open, everybody saw everything, silently enforcing the static reality.

It also became clear that my 'role' was to quietly do my work. Phone conversations had to be taken in a phone booth or spoken in a whisper. Silence was golden.

No one told me this. It was just the behavior I observed. I quickly learned that my role was to go about my work, not to chat with or disturb anyone, and only consume the few resources granted to me.

The introductory welcome was focused solely on the resources I was allowed to consume and those I was not allowed to consume. Interpersonal relationships were an irrelevance.

Now let's imagine what might be possible if we looked at using roles and routines to build HQC in this co-working space.

How could we redesign the role of co-workspace participants to foster more HQCs? We could start by building in help, respect, trust, and play.

• *Helping:* we would provide a list of who to contact if you have a problem; we would ask 'regulars' to put their name and branding on their cubicles; we would create spaces for deep thinking and for collaborative work in separate areas so the need for silence and energy wouldn't clash

- Respecting: we would let the 'regulars' know that a new person is joining and encourage them to join us for welcoming lunch on their first day; we would know why each participant had joined the co-workspace and make sure that appropriate facilitating resources are readily available
- Trusting: we would host a Monday Morning Mayhem where participants can talk about any challenges
 they are facing and offer each other support; we could create a thank you wall to acknowledge how fellow
 coworking members help one another find solutions to problems
- *Playing:* we would host a weekly lunch to not only provide a break from work but to promote discussion; we would design weekly contests of play (i.e. to actually use that pool table we put into the workspace); we would organize a volunteer effort

There are many ways that we can use our staff, physical space, and resources to design the role of co-workspace participants.

Warning: If you don't architect it, something will emerge. But what emerges may not be very energizing!

How could we redesign routines in a co-working space to foster more HQCs?

Firstly, look at the routine of welcoming because first moments matter! The way we welcome someone is core to our values and what we privilege. It helps build connections, leaves new individuals feeling capable, and builds the potential for collaboration, cooperation and community. Rather than generate feelings of isolation and limited resources, as in the coworking space I experienced, a welcoming routine might generate feelings of community, respect, trust, and play. Like this one.

Welcome to Entrepreneur Rockstars is a fictitious example of what could be. The picture is a real example of how a company re-imagined the welcome routine.

Welcome to the Entrepreneur Rockstars. When someone joins they get a recycling bin filled with goodies.

- Community: a list of people that can help, a refillable water bottle and coffee mug with their name on it, a few dollars to use in the vending machine, and the KEY person you have to meet this first week (psst ask them about xxx)
- Respect: a fun picture either saying we are glad you are here OR sharing the amazing things the newbie is doing in the world; ask them to post in their crucible so that other rockstars can stop by to meet them



Example of a welcome kit

- **Trust:** Share 3 key improvements you have made the past month from member suggestions; tell them how to submit suggestions; share stories of how co-workers helped each other solve problems (you aren't going to believe how helpful your co-workers are, Kismat helped Carson find \$100,000 in savings!)
- *Play:* a set of cards with playful activities (i.e. ask Kevin about how to avoid getting drenched in the kitchen, ask Mary about the latest tech gadgets, ask Pedro the story behind xxx you'll thank us for the laugh) and date/time of the next game of PIG pool.

We spend a good percentage of our waking hours at work, where we are either energized or depleted through the connections we experience with others. In the short-term, these effects show up in individual performance and organizational outcomes - either good or bad. In the long-term, these effects leave lasting traces on our bodies and health - either good or bad.

HQCs create wellbeing in a number of ways:

- Individuals: broader thinking, reduced negative arousal, heightened learning, builds resilience, enhanced self-image, increased cooperation, improved psychological / physiological health; job satisfaction, involvement, commitment; lower role conflict, ambiguity and overload; greater organizational citizenship
- Organisations: enhanced cooperation; greater attachment of employees, customers, suppliers; increased adaptability; repeat business and lower cost of goods sold
- Team: better learning, more adaptive, more creative

Do you want to be an Energizer? Or a Vampire?

Contextually Appropriate Workplaces

The Largest Work From Home Experiment of All Time

Although many have voiced a desire to work more flexibly, working from home (WFH) was often believed by organisations to lead to decreased productivity. Prior to COVID-19, less than 10% of workers in the U.S could perform essential job functions while WFH and even fewer had the means of achieving their usual office-based performance levels. (Wall Street Journal, As Businesses Shut, How Many U.S Workers Can Work From Home?).

Now, however, things have changed.

Although the data is not fully in, initial feedback from those suddenly WFH was that they were more productive and the WFH experience more engaging than being in the workplace. Many people were reporting increased levels of focus, freedom and flexibility.

Such findings have forced organisations to rethink their workplace strategy. They have had to re-evaluate their biases about the impact management and workplace culture had on the workforce. Were these actually reducing productivity?

Many organisations also realised that they were not prepared nor did they have the infrastructure to enable employees to work effectively remotely. This is not surprising. Beyond Scandinavia, only recently have organisations really started to examine the important role that flexibility plays in a workplace strategy.

It seems that the Great WFH Experiment was generating something unexpectedly engaging and productive. Some people were enjoying their newfound focus, flexibility and freedom, and, paradoxically, flourishing in a pandemic!

However, this is a partial reading.

There are also worrying reports of other people experiencing overwhelm, social isolation and feelings of a loss of purpose and gratification, all of which could have a significant impact on their wellbeing.

Further increases to overwhelm, which was covered in detail in the opening section, will be seriously detrimental to wellbeing and organisational performance. Likewise, the loss of purpose and gratification could result in the onset of apathy and depression.

The feelings of social isolation are even more serious. Feeling socially isolated and lonely is more predictive of poor wellbeing than obesity or heavy smoking. If care is not taken, there is a mental health epidemic waiting in the wings of the COVID-19 pandemic

Those working in large companies indicted three core reasons for these feelings.

- 1: Home/Office Setup: a lack of dedicated office space, non-ergonomic furniture and inadequate technologies combined with the struggle to achieve work life balance is leading to people feeling physically and psychologically uncomfortable as they struggle to adapt their homes to organisational demands.
- 2: Organisational Cluelessness: leaders, managers and teammates seem to lack a deep understanding of the socio-technological dimensions of other people's jobs, meaning their behaviours and usage of digital technologies negatively impact how good work gets done.
- 3: Communication Protocols: the loss of any sense as to what is actually going on in an organisation due to no longer being able to have a relaxed informal conversation, chat or banter with colleagues, and how attempts to replace it seem forced, superficial and valueless. It also encroaches into personal time without providing any meaningful context in exchange, which, at its worst, makes leadership communication appear dictatorial and/or condescending

There is no easy fix. Some technology companies are already suggesting they can solve these problems in a way that will ensure that productivity and engagement remain significantly above the levels that can be achieved in the workplace. Shopify, Atlassian and Slack, which all make online productivity and collaboration tools, have openly stated that WFH will become a permanent aspect of employment. GitLab, which makes digital DevOps tools, has stated that hybrid models don't make sense, and all employees should WFH permanently.

These statements appear to be strategic movements to eat into the CRE market while it is weak.

If tech companies manage to persuade executives that they can solve the above challenges for them at a fraction of the cost of rented office space, and with increased engagement and productivity, then commercial real estate has a major problem on its hands.

And if executives are so persuaded and a widespread take-up leads to significant levels of social isolation, then society has a problem on its hands. The already frightening figures on poor wellbeing from the opening section will amplify dramatically.

Towards a 21st Century Workplace Design Ethic

Workplace design is not a black and white spectrum anymore.

When the office was first introduced during the 19th century, the stereotypical image was one of multiple cubicles in a row with management suites and a boardroom. This continued throughout much of the 1900s. Then Frederick Taylor coined the concept of scientific management and the idea of using space management to drive maximum productivity from employees gained popularity. This management system triggered the open plan office design - a floorplate that maximised the number of employees and minimised the number of supervisors.

There is an argument that this was an effective system at a time when people had one job and one task. However, it has come under more and more scrutiny since the 1980s when the diversification of the workforce meant people needed multiple resources in order to do their job effectively.

Fast forward to the 21st century and the birth of coworking. The concept of collaboration gained traction and gave rise to the fully flexible working model. Suddenly organisations were moving from one side of the spectrum to the other - from rows of cubicles and monochromatic offices to fully open concepts without permanent seating for any employee, regardless of their job title or function.

The initial thought was that open spaces would be better for fostering valuable interactions, but it didn't happen. To use a 'Field of Dreams' analogy, if you build it, they don't necessarily come. According to the Harvard Business Review, when firms switched to open offices, face-to-face interactions fell by 70%, even though it was those exact interactions that it was supposed to encourage. So where is the disconnect?

It turns out that spatial design only plays one part in the productivity and satisfaction equation. People are that other major factor, and people are different.

This is where things get really interesting.

For decades, most American organisations had followed a lean office policy of off-white cubicles containing desk, chair and screen, and no "distractions" such as windows, or paintings to look at or out of. Power and status played a significant role, with elegantly decorated, view-tastic corner offices becoming the signifiers of the executive class, while dull rectangular boxes signalled how little the occupants and their work mattered.

Corporate real estate, at executives' bidding, built splendid corner offices and cubicle swamps without offering much useful advice as to what type of physical space enabled good work.

There are two reasons why this needs to change.

1. Enriched and Empowered Productivity: Research suggests that enriching an office environment improves productivity by circa 17%. An employee doing a reasonably repetitive and routine task, will do it faster and with fewer mistakes in an enriched environment. In an era in which time-to-market can be make or break, workspace enrichment is important. The cost of sprucing up an office versus the value of +17% productivity across the workforce should be a no-brainer for most CFOs.

If you empower the workspace by asking your employees to contribute to decor choices and decorations, and pick furnishings that fit their ergonomic requirements, then productivity further improves by 15%.

Simply put, while all people seem to work better in enriched environments, if they are given the chance to impact the look and feel of their space, even higher levels of performance result.

2. The War for Talent: There is also the digital talent problem. Young, digitally savvy people are simply not going to work for an organisation that doesn't look cool. If you spend zero money or effort on the physical design of your workplace, then don't expect high-quality digital talent to join.

This frames the three core dimensions of future-ready workplace design.

- 1. Everybody needs enrichment.
- 2. Digital talent is ultra-picky, because digital natives read about and see all the cool Big Tech and start-up spaces.
- 3. Some kind of empowerment, either in the availability of flexibility or in the cocreation of office design, further boosts performance.

The trend that brought this into public consciousness was coworking, largely thanks to the media attention focused on WeWork. Unfortunately, due to the huge fall from grace that WeWork has suffered since filing for IPO in September 2019, there is a risk that people will stop taking this seriously.

That would be a mistake.

Case Study Analysis of WeWork

WeWork's error was not in the initial design of the space. WeWork's regular claims that productivity and engagement were higher than the norm in its enriched workspaces is backed up by independent research. It can be trusted.

WeWork's error was in its scaling methodology. It scaled vertically in the manner of a tech company, replicating its product in all markets at the lowest cost and fastest pace possible. The idea was that the experience of a WeWork in Asia would match the experience of a WeWork in the US or Europe, attracting people everywhere to the brand, and that by scaling rapidly, it could achieve market dominance in coworking to the same extent that Google has for Search or Facebook has for social media.

This created two challenges.

- 1. WeWork's initial design aesthetic was New York chic. While perfect for New York, would it translate into other locales and cultures? Would the same enrichment effect be felt?
- 2. To make the spaces exciting to investors wanting to achieve the network advantages of scale, WeWork had to start packing more and more people into its spaces. Its pitch deck compares its square footage per member (60) with Regus's 130. In 2018, it was reported that WeWork was "targeting a density rate of 35-45 sq ft per desk for their new coworking spaces" in Central London. While enriched spaces are causal of greater productivity, small desks in noisy, cramped spaces are highly correlated with poor productivity. Inevitably, the latter was going to overpower any productivity benefits of the former.

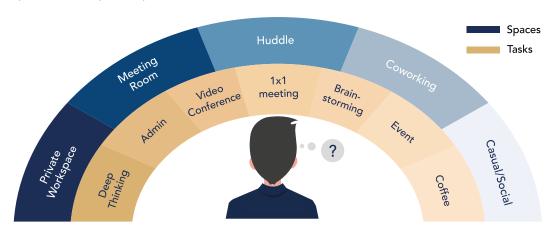
At the time of writing, it seems WeWork's strategy has failed.

But that doesn't mean it was fundamentally wrong. Or that higher-end workplace design isn't a great idea. It just means you can't blitzscale real estate.

Contextual Appropriate Rather Than Vertical Scaling

The problem with vertical scaling is a lack of awareness of cultural dissimilarities. If everybody is treated as a homogeneous mass, it doesn't match reality. Not only do national cultures differ hugely, but regions within nations also do. Even within companies, it is not unusual to experience different cultural behaviours within different functions. Salesmen tend to thrive in noisy, high-energy environments. Coders and copywriters, not so much.

At one level, workplace designers have already started recognising that a one-size fits all approach does not improve performance. The current solution is to design Activities-Based Working neighbourhoods, in which people can move into environments that suit the type of work they are currently doing. This provides contextually-appropriate work settings without compromising the idea that people regularly interacting with members of other teams and departments improves performance.



As work goes from physical to conceptual, the physical space will become less defined and even more crucial.

The Executive Centre, COVID-19: Temporary Response, Lasting Impacts

That begins to address the professional and functional challenges. But what of the cultural ones? How can you make people feel they are both part of a company and the local heritage?

Enrichment is only going to be impactful if it possesses a cultural sensitivity that can enhance a person's experience of the space. Make the workspace as equally respectful of the community it is located in as the corporate culture. Blend the two into something unique to the space that merges local and organizational sensitivities. In doing so, empower people to select their own decorations and furnishings as well, at least within a range, to enable further performative boosts. This raises a few questions about workplace branding.

- 1. If the design focus is to make the company's brand identity very obvious, what is that doing to the enrichment and empowerment effects?
- 2. Does branding the entire workplace in the company livery recreate the productivity-sapping experience of the lean workplace, just in a different colour scheme?
- 3. How might you imaginatively inject the branding into a local heritage solution, so it compliments rather than overpowers the whole?

There aren't any answers to these questions yet. But note that heavily branded workplace environments may contribute to worse productivity and, as outlined in the next section, reduced learning.

Beyond creating spaces that boost productivity and engagement to the level that many WFH reports claim, spaces are going to have to enhance wellbeing. Part of that will relate to post-COVID-19 worries around cleanliness and physical health. That's base level.

But the remainder has to be framed around social isolation, and the feelings of overwhelm and loss of purpose related to organisational cluelessness and the loss of informal communication.

- 1. Humans are social animals. Remove social interactions and poor wellbeing follows. We're not talking about socializing but about the many daily interactions with others, from the briefest greeting to cross-table discussions in long meetings. While some of these will boost energy and some will strip it away, removing the opportunity for any interactions will be disastrous for the wellbeing for many. Further, it will be impossible for a workforce to do complex cognitive work, or, indeed, any kind of work, well, if the mental wellbeing of its employees is poor.
- 2. Work-Life Integration. The degree to which corporate life is peering into private life is unsettling for many. Inundated with digital meetings which can stretch from early morning to late evening, many people struggle to switch between their home and work persona, leading to family stress and poor emotional well-being. People want and need a division between work and home life so they can better integrate the two. Without meeting rooms and personal working space, this cannot happen.
- 3. A Sense of Coherence. Very few video or conference calls allow for any informal communication other than the barest of social pleasantries. This is problematic because much of the meaningful communication about work happens through informal channels. Without such channels, the possibility of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness diminish. Not only that, but, as the previous and next sections illustrate, innovation, high-performance and organizational learning all require environments in which informal communication is able to flourish.

There are no easy solutions. But finding answers might be necessary in order to fight off the advances of tech companies selling permanent remote work solutions. CRE has to be armed with equally well-prepared behavioural data. It has to catch up fast.

Our last section overviews what a good CRE argument about future-ready work might look like.

The Dimensions of Good Knowledge Work

Cal Newport's Deep Work Rules divides knowledge work into two components

- Deep Work: in which you are deeply focused on a core aspect of your job
- Shallow Work: in which you distractedly jump between elements of work, including constantly checking and answering emails and texts, preparing for and going to status meetings, and getting your social media and internet fixes while also trying to focus on the value-creating parts of your job.

Most of us have to try and cope with huge amounts of shallow work in the form of email and message exchanges, and preparation for and attendance of business-as-usual meetings every week. For the average entry-level manager in the US, these activities add up to 48 hours per week. Not surprisingly, overwhelm and disengagement soon follow.

With all the distractions and interruptions in the contemporary workplace, most people struggle to craft out more than two hours of non-shallow work on any given day and much of it is done at home, or at the office before the masses arrive or after they have left.

Given the above, it is perhaps not surprising that the emergency Work From Home solutions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a surge of productivity. With all the office distractions eliminated, people suddenly had far more time to do uninterrupted deep work.

This surge is being slowly erased by the reimposition of business as usual reporting as well as the control methodologies by digital means being introduced as organisations adjust to the impact the pandemic had on their previously established routines. Sadly, the productivity burst might be little more than a brief promise, lost to the reinjection of distraction via a plethora of digital technologies. While there's a possibility that more deep work will be done in the hours that used to be eaten up by commuting, there is an equal, and arguably more likely possibility, that shallow work will expand to fill this time as well.

Newport entitled his book, *Deep Work Rules*! He is right. It does, and we need to work out how to do more of it before the ever-expanding shallow work sucks our energy dry.

For Newport, Deep Work is the uninterrupted and distraction-free time spent alone working on the core value-creating component of a job. There is zero doubt that this is enormously productive. It decreases the time spent to complete a task and reduces the number of errors made while doing it. We've over thirty years of data illustrating that.

But that only explains productivity. It doesn't talk to the other dimensions of knowledge work. To really understand how to do knowledge work well, Newport's concept of Deep Work needs to be split into four types of interactions focusing, collaborating, connecting and learning.

Focusing Interactions: Interactions between a knowledge worker and the resources required to do the productive element of the job well, such as reporting, coding, designing, building, writing etc. This needs to be done in an

uninterrupted and distraction free environment. As mentioned above, *Peopleware*, a 30-year longitudinal research project, found that those coding in good-sized, dedicated, distraction free spaces, tended to outperform those working in tiny, heavily interrupted spaces by up to a factor of 10x.

The human brain can do such focused tasks for circa five hours a day before tiredness begins to inhibit performance. As the cognitive effort is intense, four hours is a far more reasonable target. It is also possible that a worker achieving a state of flow will extend the five hours into many more but this, however, is a rare event that cannot be expected or planned for.

With four to five hours the maximum, how should the remainder of the knowledge working day be organised? Some of it will necessarily be taken up by shallow work. Admin, emails, reporting, status meeting, etc. While we might dislike them, they do have to be done. Fortunately, they rarely require much focus so can be performed when the brain is tired.

Nevertheless, in order to conserve their energy people should work to minimise shallow interactions and maximise their collaborating, connecting and learning interactions.

Collaborating Interactions: Interactions between team members aimed at breaking a complex situation down into component problems, determining how each problem might be solved, and deciding who is going to do what and by when.

These interactions might extend for days, especially for highly complex situational challenges. The longer and better they collaborate, the higher performing the team members are likely to be during their focused interactions.

Collaboration spaces work best when all the power furnishings and digital technologies are removed. If somebody sits at the head of a rectangular table and runs the meeting, collaborating interactions diminish. If there is a tricky to use technology, those skilled at using it will run the meeting, and again collaborating activities will diminish. And if everyone sits on a formal chair with laptops open, collaborating activities diminish.

Collaborating work is best done on vertical surfaces using 100% accessible technologies such as marker pens and sticky notes. And soundproof the room. High-quality collaborating interactions are full of energy and can be very noisy, so without soundproofing they will distract all those performing focused deep work.

Connecting Interactions: High quality interactions between employees aimed at building trust, collegiality and personal engagement, that are often infused with creativity, critical thought and curiosity. While many of the benefits have already been outlined in the section on High Quality Connections, here is some additional data.

Connecting interactions between team members during coffee breaks, lunches and after-work drinks play a huge role in individual productivity and team performance. In his research on the science of team building, Alex Pentland found 35% of the variation in a team's performance can be accounted for simply by the number of face-to-face exchanges among team members. By regularly interacting with each other in semi-formal to informal environments, individual productivity tends to rise between 10-15%. At a team level, results are even more impressive. Even poorly performing teams increased their productivity by 20%.

Connecting interactions between teams, with similar opportunities to break bread with members of different teams or units, also plays a huge role in innovation. Relaxed cross-functional get-togethers seem to be the birthplace of new ideas. It is much more likely that a new idea will be given breathing space in such environments than in traditional meetings. Indeed, the data seems to suggest this, with only 9% of new business ideas emerging from traditional meeting arrangements.

This method of working is cultural in many Nordic countries. The Swedes call it *fika* - a coffee break that fosters a sense of togetherness. In Sweden, it happens twice a day in the majority of workplaces, once in the morning and once in the afternoon (*förmiddagsfika* and eftermiddagsfika). While other Nordic countries haven't developed a specific term for the activity, and perhaps don't do it on such company-wide scale, shared coffee breaks are sacrament. Margareta Troein Töllborn, of Lund University, argues that the short, consistent 'recovery' periods of such breaks decreases the risk of staff burning out, increases their wellbeing and happiness, and reduces sick leave.

With Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Iceland all ranking in the top six most productive countries in the world and similarly placed on the World Happiness Index, and with all Nordic countries being top twenty in the Global Innovation Index, such techniques are worthy of investigation and experimentation.

Learning Interactions: Interactions with any person or technology that increases a person's knowledge levels or problem solving capabilities.

Good learning requires visual, verbal, aural, written, and kinetic interactions with the subject matter. Each interaction helps build and strengthen the neural pathways that lock the information into the brain. Some of these interactions can be with one's inner dialogue, i.e. thinking. Some can be informal chats with colleagues. Others simply involve reading a book, watching a video, listening to a podcast, or going to a training class.

Good recall requires the various learning technologies to be accessed in a multitude of environments - in the office, at home, outside, on public transport - and with many diverse people - friends, colleagues, strangers.

The more learning interactions one has, the greater the likelihood of making a significant contribution to focusing, connecting and collaborating interactions, and the increased possibility of high performance outcomes.

Many organisations have the tendency to measure productivity via adherence to shallow work. Are you logged onto the system, answering emails and texts, attending status meetings, and sitting in front of your computer in the office for long hours? If you are then you are seen as being productive. Unfortunately you might not be adding a jot of real value. Instead you might be quietly seething with frustration, or anxious that you aren't really doing anything for much of the day and might be found out.

In themselves, focusing, collaborating, connecting and learning interactions make work engaging, people more productive, teams higher performing, and innovative ideas increasingly likely. However, deliberately attending to them is exceedingly difficult as is clear from the challenges laid out in the earlier section of this document.

Designing organisations that resolve all of these problems while enabling employees to achieve good work and high productivity, however, is the future.

References / Additional Resources

The Complex Situation

Organizational Practices

Mini lecture: <u>Jeffrey Pfeffer: Is Your Workplace Killing You?</u>

Podcast interview with Jeffrey Pfeffer: Ep. 229: Why Are So Many Americans Dying For A Paycheck?

Blog overviewing stress: <u>Workplace stress is eroding our productivity</u>
Workplace bullying fact sheet: <u>Bullying in the Workplace : OSH Answers</u>

BBC Blog: Can you work yourself to death?

Organizational Products

Lecture: <u>Dr. Robert Lustig The Hacking of the American Mind at the San Francisco Public Library</u>
BBC Documentary: <u>The Truth About Sugar Addiction - MIND-BLOWING BBC Documentary</u>

Academic Analysis: Comfort Food and Stress

Documentary on Social Media Addiction: You Will Wish You Watched This Before You Started Using Social Media |

The Twisted Truth

Is Stress Contagious? Social Media and Stress

The Cyber Effect: Mary Aiken

Opioid Addiction: Opioids: Last Week Tonight with John Oliver (HBO) + Opioids II: Last Week Tonight with John

Oliver (HBO)

Failing Solutions

Critique of the "Happiness Industry": <u>Corporate America's Forced "Happiness" Industry (w/ William Davies)</u>
Why Wellness Programs Fail: <u>Jeffrey Pfeffer: Why Employers Should Care About The Health Of Their Employees</u>

Some Science-Informed Solutions

Salutogenesis

Salutogenesis: What causes wellness | Sir Harry Burns | TEDxGlasgow

Salutogenic Design: The Brain, Environments and Wellness | Carolyn Rickard-Brideau | TEDxArlington

Blog: Is salutogenic design the next big issue for the workplace?

Overview of Salutogenesis: https://www.physio-pedia.com/Salutogenic_Approach_to_Wellness

Man's Search for Meaning: Man's Search For Meaning by Viktor Frankl

Jim Collins Mini-Lecture: Stockdale Paradox: A Message for Uncertain Times

High Quality Connections

Lecture: <u>Putting High Quality Connections into Practice - Positive Links Speaker Series</u>

Mini-lecture: <u>Mary Ceccanese talks about high quality connections in the workplace</u>

Article: Fostering High-Quality Connections

Academic paper: (PDF) High-quality Connections

Websites/Blogs: High Quality Connections

Marcia Ryan Channel: Marcia Ryan

Contextually Appropriate Workplace Design

HBR: The Truth About Open Offices

Mini-Documentary: Open offices are overrated

Mini-Documentary: Open Plan Office

Lecture: Open Plan Is Dead. Long Live The New World Of Work

Blog: The Blitzscaling Basics

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions: Hofstede's 6D Model of National Culture - Simplest Explanation Ever

Deck: Voice of the Crowd 2

Dimensions of Knowledge Work

Interview with Cal Newport: Is Deep Work the Solution?

Interview with Cal Newport: Deep vs. Shallow Work with Cal Newport

Blog: Deep Work vs Shallow Work: How To Be More Focused

Blog: 4 essential principles for collaboration — EQ Lab

Low-Tech Collaboration: Peter Brady - Collaboration - beyond motherhood on Vimeo

Pentland's MIT Lab Studies: The Three 'E's to High Performance Teams: Energy, Engagement and Exploration

Pentland Lecture: Social Physics: How Good Ideas Spread | Sandy Pentland | Talks at Google

Pentland TEDx Talk: Success through social physics

Woolley's Findings on Collective Intelligence: The Dynamics of Collective Intelligence in Teams | Anita Woolley |

Design@Large

Mini-Lecture: PNTV: How We Learn by Benedict Carey

Animation: How to Learn/Study effectively - Benedict Carey - Book Recommendations

Misbehaviour: Behaviour And Misbehaviour At Work

Books to Buy

- Health, Stress and Coping, Aaron Antonovsky
- Unravelling the Mystery of Health, Aaron Antonovksy
- Developing Resilience, Michael Neenan
- Preventive Stress Management in Organisations, James Campbell Quick et al
- Organizational Stress, Cary Cooper et al
- Dying for a Paycheck, Jeffrey Pfeffer
- The Hacking of the American Mind, Robert Lustig
- The Cyber Effect, Mary Aiken
- Deep Work Rules, Cal Newport
- Social Physics, Alex Pentland
- How We Learn, Benedict Carey

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