



Re-Imagining Wellness

Redesigning your wellness
strategy for a post COVID
World.

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OF WORK**
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Executive Summary



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There is no doubt that COVID-19 has focused our minds on the wellness of our friends, family, community and colleagues. Long before this crisis however, as business leaders, we were awakening our minds to the critical importance of employee health and wellbeing in creating modern and sustainable organisations. It is fair to say that employee wellness is not just the right thing to do, but also a strategic imperative. One that can enhance productivity and therefore business performance.

As leaders this is our opportunity to be the initiators and driving force of this change. An opportunity to create destination workplaces that enhance and multiply our greatest ever asset- human beings. I urge every organisation to take a step back from what you are currently doing and re-imagine how an integrated wellness approach can truly transform your people and business. Only then can we take two steps forward into the future with confidence.



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About the Author

With over 15 years' experience in Human Resource Management and the Wellness Industry Elysia has combined her expertise to partner with businesses to help develop strategies to attract, engage and retain employees. Working within multiple sectors Elysia helps promote a healthy workforce that supports business needs and enhances productivity and engagement. She does this through a range of strategies including workshops, speaking engagements, workplace wellness strategies and diagnostic assessments. Elysia currently leads the strategic wellness service offering within Cpl's Future of Work Institute.

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A New Vision For Employee Well-Being

The question on many people's mind's now is whether in a post COVID world things will change?

Will how we do business, greet one another, hold meetings and events change? The answer is a resounding yes, to some degree it will all change. Even if we do not yet know the extent. The same goes for workplace wellness. In fact, in some ways it will need to change, be forced to change. For the better even. This change has been looming for some time now. Perhaps the global pandemic is forcing this to change along with other aspects of how we work and live.

Re-imagining wellness in a post COVID world will be challenging as we emerge from our homes and move slowly back to some form of working together in moderated proximity. The last number of months have allowed us to consider our existing approach and its impact. It has also brought health and well-being to the forefront of the mind of employers, employees and the government. With the issuing of Return to Work Safely Protocols managing mental health and avoiding burnout will be a priority for all.

In this document we will address some of the questions at the fore to support employers in understanding how to stay mentally safe at work, drive a culture of wellness and re-board potentially burned out employees into a re-emerged organisation. It will also propose a re-imagined approach to wellness for employers who are keen to move the employee well-being agenda forward.

The Workplace is Changing

Over the last 10 to 20 years we have seen new roles, technologies and working models emerge. We have adapted fast to all of these changes. To this day we still now don't know the extent that some of these roles, technologies and working models will have on our health and well-being. New technology has enabled us to work from home but equally enhanced (techno)stress. With the emergence of technology we have seen a drive in an always-on culture. Stress and burnout have been on the rise for the last number of years. Mental health challenges even before the pandemic were at an all time high.

Policies on Leavism were introduced in some countries to encourage employees to switch off when they should be taking much needed time away from work. With the future of work changing so too have work-related stressors. However, over the last number of years despite the workplace and workforce changing the approach to employee wellness has largely remained the same. From onsite fitness centres to discounted health benefits, onsite nutrition seminars and EAP (Employee Assistance Programmes) employers have offered a wide variety of wellness intervention to employees. However, stress and mental health issues have never been higher despite the increase in wellness offerings.



Has COVID been the Catalyst for Change?

It is hard to imagine what a post COVID-19 world will look like. Perhaps we will see even more new jobs, technologies and working models develop. We are already seeing heightened stress, burnout and mental health challenges as a result of the pandemic.

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Employee well-being has been catapulted forward moving from what some organisations see as a tick box exercise to a necessary part of every businesses function. Perhaps this is the wakeup call organisations have needed to move wellness to the next level. Leaders have realised that with lowered well-being comes reduced productivity and businesses suffer. But it is not this alone.

Many organisations want their employees to be happier and healthier despite the circumstances and have gone above and beyond to support their employees through the crisis. However, it shouldn't take a crisis for employers to step up the approach. Work-related stress has been around for decades and its only getting worse pandemic or no pandemic. If new roles, technologies and working models are evolving so too must the approach to employee wellness programmes.

Maintaining Focus, Productivity and Engagement

In our recent whitepaper Workplace Wellness: Time to Get Strategic we discussed how a strategic approach to wellness can impact the bottom line, boosting productivity, engagement, retention and attraction strategies. However, in a post COVID world it has not simply been work-related stress that has impacted productivity and focus but the impact of the current global pandemic.

Many organisations have seen a decline in productivity, engagement and focus as a result of these unrepresented circumstances. As we learn to adjust to living with and beyond COVID employees are looking for support to mitigate the added stress of work and prevent burnout. To move forward there is a real need to approach wellness with a broad lens. One that supports the employee is one that is good for business. When organisations support the well-being of their employees, they see a rise in productivity, engagement and morale. Ultimately, wellness becomes good for business.

Wellness is a Two-Sided Approach

Existing wellness programmes are not designed to adapt with future ways of working. For the most part they are very one dimensional focusing most on educating the employee on how to stay mentally and physically fit and very little on how the organisation is contributing to work related stress. Taking this approach would put organisations in a prime position to mitigate such stressors. There is a strong need to adapt well-being needs to that of future ways of working, future technologies, future jobs and future stressors caused by these. And not to mention the residual impact of the current pandemic.



There is a strong need for wellness to take a two-sided approach;

1. To firstly **assess** areas within the organisation that are causing stress in the workplace and use this information to design interventions that mitigate it and;
2. To then **educate** employees about how to look after their health and well-being



The current approach is typically the later. Essentially, they are two sides of the same coin necessary to not only address stress but mitigate it also. Without this change in approach wellness programmes will go on to have little to no real impact on employees or organisations productivity, engagement or focus.

Because so many people do not always have the knowledge to practice healthy lifestyles, businesses can be an important and trusted source of education and advocacy of healthy living. Together with assessing the underlying cause of work-related stressors in the organisation employers can start to reap tangible business benefits to a changing approach to wellness.

A one-size fits all approach is no longer impactful in a changing society and workforce. What is for certain is that wellness is changing for the better despite the impact the crisis has had on individuals. Employers are taking notice. Governments are asking organisations to look under the hood and take responsibility for how they work and lead not just what wellness

services they offer. At the end of the day, employees are people. People who have been faced with tragedy, illness, worry, anxiety, grief and loss. People who have faced job loss and financial insecurity. People who need well-being support from their employer now more than ever. The type of wellness that doesn't solely come from an EAP service but a phone call from a colleague, a coffee with a manager, a day off from the pressures and the understanding that they, we, can and will be OK despite how hard it is sometimes.

"A one-size fits all approach is no longer impactful in a changing society and workforce."

1. Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (2020) "Return to Work Safely Protocol" found at gov.ie

Creating a Mentally Safe Work Environment

There exists assessments, protocols and tools to stay physically safe at work but little exists to help employees stay mentally safe at work.

Billions are pumped into Health and Safety in the workplace with very little going toward health. We can see a broken leg or a physical aberration that may impact us being able to do a particular job but just because we cannot see a mental illness it doesn't mean that the protocols should not exist also. New guidelines provided by the government provide recommendations for organisations to provide mental health and well-being supports for employees returning to the workplace post COVID-19. Are we slowly but surely moving closer to creating a mentally safe work environment?

An Emerging Mental Health Crisis

It is long known that work related stress is one of the leading causes of stress related illnesses and chronic disease such as obesity, heart disease, digestive issues and much more. Since the pandemic we have been almost forced into the biggest global remote working experiment. However, this is not remote working in its truest sense it's crisis management at home while working and parenting and everything else in between. COVID-19 itself is a stressor that has interfered with elements of everyone's life, and so is undoubtedly becoming a chronic global stressor. It is increasing demands on financial well-being, workload, parenting and caring while decreasing access to regular and necessary social support from activities enjoyed with family and friends.

It has strained relationships, altered roles and continues to change our lives. All of which contribute to increased mental health challenges. In a recent study 73% of working professionals reported being burned out in April compared to 61% in February. The main reasons being no separation between work and life, unmanageable workload and job insecurity. In an article published in JAMA Internal Medicine on the mental health consequences of COVID-19, the authors warn of a pandemic of behavioural problems and mental illness. A direct result of the traumatic events that COVID-19 has brought to millions around the world. Another Workforce Burnout Survey conducted by Eagle Hill found that 50% feel less connected to colleagues, 36% feel less positive about their careers, and 45% feel less productive overall. 36% of organisations are not doing anything to help their employees with burnout and many don't even have the time to participate in the variety of wellness initiatives provided.

45%

of employees feel less productive

73%

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The Impact of Remote Working

Working from home used to be referred to as a policy that represented flexibility. Laws supporting the “Right to Disconnect” have been adapted in some countries to enhance well-being but now, being forced to work from home with little to no flexibility or work-life separation this is driving the stress and mental health problem. Since the pandemic anxiety, depression, overwhelm, isolation and loneliness have all been reported at an all time high. Parents have found it particularly straining to work, parent and home-school often being seen to log on to work late at night after children have gone to bed. As the world continues to live in fear and uncertainty of illness, livelihoods and economies resilience is vital for survival. Healthy minds and bodies, strong relationships and supports will all help our abilities to cope and remain hopeful. However it is difficult to maintain these necessities when working remotely. While many organisations have lead campaigns to stay connected the trouble remains with managing work and family life while too worrying about potential illness. The crisis has forced organisations not only into remote working but new leadership styles, expectations and ways of doing business. Without this change organisations will continue to intensify the work-related stress problem.

"For employers to ensure that their organisation is mentally safe there is a need to understand the areas that are contributing to stress in the workplace."

A Broad Perspective is Needed

To move forward, there is a real need to assess the pressures and stressors organisations are putting on employees during and after the pandemic. A multi-dimensional approach is necessary across the 8 Dimensions of Wellness (below). For employers to make sure that their organisation is mentally safe for employees there is a real need to understand the areas that are contributing to stress in the workplace. Assessing this evaluates areas that are contributing to increased stress in the workplace. This approach ensures a targeted, deliberate and holistic approach to wellness programme design. If employers simply focus on physical and emotional wellness they may miss out on vial areas that may also contribute to work-related stress. In our bespoke diagnostic tool we have seen many areas beyond these contribute to work-related stress such as conflict on the team (Intellectual Wellness), lack of opportunities (Occupational Wellness), personal finances (Financial Wellness) and isolation (Social Wellness) all contribute to work - related stress.



figure 2: 8 Dimensions of Wellness



When organisations are considering helping employees stay mentally safe at work they cannot do this without assessing and addressing the contributing factors to work related stress within their organisation. Employee Assistance Programmes, meditation apps and steps challenges are great for mental health, but they may not mitigate the mental health safety risk if

organisations are still contributing to the cause of stress in the first place. Organisations need to step back and ask themselves are they also contributing to the problem and put supports in place to create a solid foundation for wellness. With this we can continue to build resilience to overcome challenges now and into the future.

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1. BLIND (2020) "*The Evolution of Burnout - COVID-19 Edition*" found at [teamblind.com](https://www.teamblind.com)
 2. Galea S., MD et al (2020), "JAMA Internal Medicine "*The Mental Health Consequences of COVID-19*"; 180(6):817-818
 3. Eagle Hill (2020), "*COVID-19 and Employee Burnout*" found at [eaglehill.com](https://www.eaglehill.com)



Driving a Culture of Wellness

Organisational culture encompasses values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of a business.

Organisational culture encompasses values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of a business. Dr. Elliot Jaques' list of organisational values that employees gain full commitment from are fair and just treatment, leadership interaction, accountability and vision. Together these areas make up an organisational culture. It is the role then of leaders at all levels within the organisation to make these values very real. The actions they take, the development of teams, the values they live and work by need to visibly reinforce the culture of the organisation. Leaders shape the culture through the examples they set thus shaping how employees will operate. Culture doesn't just impact how employees are lead but an organisations approach to marketing, sales and how they are perceived in the market to both customers and future employees. To drive a real culture of wellness organisations need to value it. Be bought into it. Understand that having healthy happy employees is good for business, drives profit and impacts operating models. Wellness is no longer seen as a "nice to have" it's a valuable strategic priority that is underpinned by a culture of wellness. So how do you cultivate one?

Cultivating Wellness

It's important understand where the responsibility lies when it comes to health and well-being. Of course, it is the responsibility of the employee, the individual to take steps to look after their own health and well-being. However, responsibility also lies with the employer to ensure that they are not contributing to the problem also. Employers have a responsibility to make sure that employees leave in the same physical and mental state that they came in that morning. Cultivating a culture of wellness goes far beyond having a wellness programme. It means leading with wellness at the front of mind. It's being able to lead in a way that puts enough pressure on people to get things done but that does not also cause further mental harm or distress. It's about creating open relationships where people can put their hand up if they are overwhelmed or need support and it's met with empathy and openness and of course, support. It's leading by example and showing employees that you care about your own health and well-being. If the boss expects everyone to be well and healthy but is still in the office after hours, working weekends and not taking holidays employees will not feel that a culture of wellness exists. Only when you look after yourself and lead from a place of well-being can you truly form a culture of wellness. This is outlined further in The S.L.O. Approach below.

Making Wellness Part of the Everyday

The S.L.O. Model is designed to help organisations move away from cookie-cutter one size fits all wellness programmes to embedding wellness as part of their everyday culture. It includes looking after yourself, ensuring leaders lead with wellness in mind and not in a way that diminishes others and that its driven from the top.



The S.L.O. Approach

Looking after yourself first and foremost and taking responsibility for your own health and well-being no matter your level is key. Many people know already that moving, eating well, getting sufficient sleep and relaxing is generally a step in the right direction. Actively indulging in steps to enhance and maintain health and well-being should firstly be the priority of the individual.

As you move up the ladder taking on responsibility for the health and welfare of others become part of the job. It is just as important as achieving the deadline or getting the project over the line. From our research we found that many of the main contributors to work-related stress were things like time pressure, emotional demands, long hours and work overload. Many of these areas leaders have control over. Research from the Mayo Clinic states that “The person you report to at work is more important for your health than your family doctor.” Leaders can have either a powerful motivating impact on the well-being of their teams or a diminishing effect that can lead to stress and burnout.

SELF - This means looking after yourself first and foremost and taking responsibility for your own health and well-being no matter your level.

LEADER - Leading in a way that enhances well-being of others and does not diminish.

ORGANISATION - The actions employees take and the values they live and work by visibly reinforce an organisations culture.

A culture of wellness does not happen overnight. It takes a strategic purpose lead decision that involves everyone in the organisation at every level. Right now, managers have never had more pressure to be considerate to employee well-being while continuing to move business and targets forward. If a culture of wellness does not exist organisations will start to feel the burden of stressed out, demotivated and idle employees. It's never too late to start leading with wellness in mind and your re-imagined wellness programme should consider this a priority.

"It is never too late to start leading with wellness in mind and your re-imagined wellness programme should consider this a priority."

1. FOWI (2019), "Workplace Wellness: Time to Get Strategic" found at cpl.com

Re-Boarding Burned Out Employees

The next number of months will be a challenge for organisations as they try to resume some form of normality while also bringing employees back into the workplace.

The next number of months will be a challenge for organisations as they try to resume some form of normality while also bringing employees back into the workplace. An on-boarding or “re-boarding” plan needs to be in place to ensure not only that measures are taken to prevent further spread of the virus but that also the added stress of going back into the workplace does not further impact individual’s mental health. If mental ill-health is on the rise as a result of the pandemic, then organisations have a responsibility to ensure they are not also contributing to it.

Assess the Work-Related Stress Risk in your Organisation

Clearly, organisations have no control over the personal stressors an individual has within their own life however they can control stressors caused by work. We have all been forced to work in circumstances beyond our control and as a result the way of working and expectations need to change also. In some organisations expectations, KPIs and deadlines did not change despite the pandemic further contributing to this problem. In order to understand areas within the organisation that may be contributing to stress leaders must firstly be open to taking responsibility and looking under the hood. This is an important first step to analysing where the stressors are in your organisation. When you take a root cause approach you are in a much pertinent position to prevent further mental health issues as a result of work. We recommend looking at this across the 8 Dimensions of Wellness including Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, Spiritual, Occupational, Social, Environmental and Financial all of which have been found to have a profound effect on employee well-being. This not only aids in

identifying the stressors but putting a more focused plan in place. One that is preventative than reactive.

Educate and Support Employees Re-Boarding

Once you have identified the areas contributing to stress in the organisation it is important to use this information to design your interventions and supports. There is much research around the benefits of offering Employee Assistance Programmes however campaigns to highlight the services and reduce stigma are necessary. Over the period of the pandemic EAP services have seen a declines in use highlighting the need for campaigns further. Virtual exercise challenges and bake-offs have been great for social connection and encouraging fitness as well as webinars to help create a working environment at home, eat healthily, support sleep and relaxation. We have seen a rise in engagement and participation rates in wellness programmes however as organisations prepare to re-board potentially burned out employees there is a real need to not only continue with educating employees and encouraging participation but creating the culture of well-being so that it continues post COVID. Whilst we hope that the virus may depart us stress will always be there and the workplace will continue to be a source of stress until organisations take responsibilities to alleviate it. Driving a culture of well-being is one sure way to do so.



Leading the Way to Drive a Culture of Well-Being

Driving a culture of well-being can be difficult but rewarding for both the organisation and employee. It is long known that healthy employees are happy employees and happy employees work hard and are productive. As a result business flourishes. Customer service is enhanced and client relationships deeper. Investing in wellness is a good business decision and not one that should be taken lightly. Cultivating a culture of well-being can start at any time but it needs to come from the top. As highlighted in our S.L.O. Approach (Self, Leader, Organisation) it's important for individuals to take responsibility for their own health and well-being and to make the decisions that promote good health. Research has shown that leaders have a profound effect on the mental health of individuals on their team. Good motivating, understanding and autonomous leadership is gold when it comes to mitigating stressors in your organisation. Likewise leading by example and showcasing leaders that prioritise their own wellness is key to driving a culture of wellness.

As we move forward as organisations, employers, leaders, employees and individuals into new unknown ways of working, learning and doing business we need to move forward with open minds.

Minds that are open to changes in how we do business and how we lead. Minds that are open to broader thinking when it comes to stress, mitigating it and supporting the wellness of others. In the middle of the pandemic with mental health issues on the rise, business profits impacted and economies in decline a change is coming.

The future of work in a post COVID world will certainly be different and we need to be prepared for it. COVID-19 has given organisations a prime opportunity to review their current approach to employee well-being and ensure it is fit for purpose. It is important to use this opportunity as it will continue to have an impact your employees, your brand and your profits.

"COVID-19 has given organisations a prime opportunity to review their current approach to employee well-being to ensure it is fit for purpose."



About Strategic Wellness

Strategic Wellness is a deliberate and holistic approach to designing and implementing health and well-being interventions for employees that fosters a culture of wellness, is measurable against key business performance indicators and can enhance productivity, engagement, retention, attraction, reduced health costs and absenteeism rates.

At the Future of Work Institute we have designed a wellness diagnostic tool that takes a root cause approach to designing strategic wellness programmes. 20 questions across the 8 dimensions of wellness help identify the areas of work that are a source of stress for employees. We use this information to create tailor made wellness interventions to get to the root of the issue as well as providing solutions to encourage personal accountability and campaigns that drive a culture of wellness.

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Environmental



Financial



Spiritual



Emotional



Social



Physical



Occupational



Intellectual

About the Future of Work Institute

Cpl are living the future of work daily with our clients. The Future of Work Institute, a Cpl Company, is a consultancy that explores, questions and helps design future work solutions with our clients, partners and collaborators.

Future of Work Institute part of Cpl Group is a consultancy business that explores, questions and designs future work solutions with our clients, partners and collaborators. We conduct research, workshops, events and projects across 7 core pillars such as Inclusion & Diversity, Talent Technology, Employer Proposition, New Workforce Models, Creative Leadership, Government & Regulatory and Future Skills.

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Diversity
& Inclusion



Talent
Technology



Employer
Proposition



New Workforce
Models



Creative
Leadership



Government
& Regulatory



Future
Skills