“Optimising WELLness: A Roadmap to Healthy Workspaces”

Introduction

- Welcomes
- Overview of WELL certification and ten concepts as a framework for health and performance.



- Presentation focuses on three steps – working with nature, materials and people – to optimise the ten WELL principles through design strategies.

Step One: Designing Buildings That *Work With Nature*

- Aim – To augment building performance before relying on mechanical systems.
- Focus – Climate responsive massing / building orientation (considering the optimisation of natural light, natural ventilation potential, thermal comfort, and biophilia).
- Tools – Environmental modelling tools.

Step Two: Designing Buildings That *Work With Materials*

- Aim – To select materials and systems that enhance sustainability and wellbeing
- Focus – Circular material choices; non-toxic, low-VOC materials; acoustic planning; biophilic design.
- Tools – Materials Passports.

Step Three: Designing Buildings That *Work With People*

- Aim – To create health-promoting spaces which intuitively support how people feel, think and behave.
- Focus – Promoting natural movement; Lighting that supports circadian rhythms; Variation in space for mental and cognitive wellbeing; Zones for sensory and cognitive diversity; Spaces for digital detox and psychological recovery; Co-creation and local identity; ‘Nudging’ healthy behaviour.
- Tools – Behavioural insights.

Suggestions for Step Three’s focus:

Promoting natural movement

- WELL link – Movement, especially Active Buildings and Communities, and Circulation Network

- Behavioural science insight – People are more likely to take the 'default' or most visible path. Making the healthy choices the easiest and attractive choice promotes better long-term behaviour (BIT, 2014).
- Design strategies
    - Place stairs centrally and make visible and attractive through music, artwork, light levels, natural light / views, plants or gamification.
    - Place lifts out of direct sightline, with point-of-decision signage to motivate stair use.
    - Decentralise shared amenities (e.g printers, coffee and water stations) to promote short breaks and natural movement.

Lighting that supports circadian rhythms

- WELL link - Light, especially Circadian Lighting Design
- Behavioural science insight – Environmental cues (zeitgebers) like light regulate alertness, mood, and sleep. Subtle lighting shifts can help align internal clocks with work rhythms, which has substantial health and productivity benefits (Barnes, 2015; Quante et al., 2020).
- Design strategies
    - Use biodynamic lighting systems that adapt throughout the day.
    - Maximise access to natural light and outdoor views.
    - Automate screen colour-temperature shifts (e.g blue-light filters at sunset).

Variation in space for mental and cognitive wellbeing

- WELL link – Mind, especially Nature and Place and Restorative Spaces
- Behavioural science insight – Monotony reduces alertness and engagement, while subtle, natural changes in ambience stimulates cognition and prevents 'attention fatigue' (Kaplan, 1995).
- Design strategies
    - Introduce gradual shifts in lighting, temperature, background sound over time.
    - Use materials and patterns that change with light / shadow throughout the day.
    - Use modular design elements for flexibility.

Zones for sensory and cognitive diversity

- WELL link – Mental Health Promotion and Restorative Spaces (Mind), as well as Multisensory Design (community).
- Behavioural science insight – Different people and tasks require different sensory environments, and providing choice and control improves wellbeing, focus and performance. This is also an inclusive approach for neurodivergent individuals.
- Design strategies
    - Instead of zoning by function (e.g meeting, focus, collaboration), zone by ambience:
        - Calm zones with little sound, dimmed lighting and minimal stimulation.

        - Stimulating zones with brighter light, vibrant colours and sound.
        - Overflow zones with informal creative spaces, dynamic lighting and colour shifts, multi-sensory stimulation (e.g music, food & beverages, textiles), and access to tactile tools (e.g whiteboards, magnetic panels, chalk paint, foam blocks).
    - Provide individual control over lighting, temperature or acoustic conditions.

Spaces for digital detox and psychological recovery

- WELL links – Mind, especially Restorative Opportunities and Restorative Spaces.
- Behavioural science insight - Constant digital stimulation increases cognitive load and has a negative impact on mental health. Intentional 'off' spaces support attention restoration and stress recovery.
- Design strategies:
    - Create screen-free spaces with adjustable lighting, seating arrangements that accommodate a range of user preferences, and non-digital resources (such as books, newspapers / journals, whiteboards…)
    - Use visual cues such as soft lighting, natural materials and plants to signal psychological safety.
    - Clearly signpost these as a tech-free space to support boundary.

Co-creation and local identity

- WELL link – Community, especially Health and Well-being Promotion and Integrative Design.
- Behavioural science insight – People are more likely to value and care for spaces they helped shape. Also, local identity fosters connection, pride and belonging.
- Design strategies:
    - Engage users in participatory design through surveys, workshops and feedback loops.
    - Integrate local culture, art or history into design features.
    - Create opportunities for users to shape the space (e.g modular furniture layouts, writable walls, displays curated / shaped by staff).

'Nudging' healthy choices

- WELL link – Many possibilities, including Fruits and Vegetables (Nourishment), Movement, Mind.
- Behavioural science insight – People's decisions are strongly influenced by their environment and the "choice architecture" around them. By making healthy options more visible, accessible, and rewarding, we can shift behaviour without restricting choice (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).
- Strategies:
    - Position healthy food options (e.g. fruit, water, plant-based snacks) at eye level and near communal areas, with less healthy options placed further away.
    - Use environmental cues (e.g. directional floor patterns, lighting, or signage) to subtly guide movement or mindfulness routes.

- Create momentary prompts (e.g. digital reminders, wall graphics) encouraging stretch breaks, hydration, or outdoor time.
- Apply social nudges, such as displaying real-time metrics of collective wellbeing achievements (e.g. “Together, we’ve taken 20,000 steps today!”).