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Holistic Health

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Megatrend Holistic Health: A Diagnosis

BY OONA HORX STRATHERN

Like relationships, there are trends that are short lived and (thankfully) come and go. But more interesting and important are the ones that stay with us and evolve. These are the ones that adapt and inform the future of life and business. We call these Megatrends – big social demographic shifts that stay with us, accompany us over decades, and sometimes even centuries.

To get an idea of the scale of Megatrends and the changes that can happen in just a few generations, think back to what health meant to people one hundred or even fifty 50 years ago. Back then there were no such things as personal trainers, self-tracking Fitbits, mindfulness coaches, healthcare designers, or vegan gyms. During the industrial age health was defined primarily by the absence of illness. If you were not ill and if you were able to work, you were considered healthy. In the post-industrial era health became about more than not being sick – it evolved to describe the trend to being actively fit and learning to relax when not working. Today in the digitalised knowledge society, health is about so much more than the state of a body. It is about things like purpose, wellbeing, selfness, and vitality. We think of health as a holistic state – the health of the mind as well as the body, and how the two interact and affect each other.

Megatrend Health is, from a futurist's point of view, holistic in the other sense of the word. Health is one of those interesting and dynamic trends that today reaches beyond the personal to the political, from the body to business, and from ecology to the economy. It is part of an interconnected system that benefits and informs other trends. Health is therefore not only connected to and influenced by other Megatrends, but in turn has an impact on Megatrends such as New Work, Neo-Ecology, Gender Shift and

Silver Society. Today we are going beyond thinking about the need for a healthy mind and body, to healthy working environments, homes, companies, cities and even countries.

Let's take the example of the interconnectivity between Megatrend health and Megatrend Gender Shift. The rise of women in the workplace has, as we know, changed not just the landscape but thinking about opportunities in business. Thanks to this and the #metoo movement, a new perspective on women's health has opened up. As author and activist Caroline Criado-Perez points out in her book *Invisible Women*, "For millennia, medicine has functioned on the assumption that male bodies can represent humanity as a whole. As a result, we have a huge historical data gap when it comes to female bodies...the medical world...needs to wake up." It is not only a failure of imagination, but a missed business opportunity.

Megatrend Neo-Ecology is also increasingly focused around all scales of health issues – from the personal to the planet. When it comes to our homes we are seeing a growing interest in so-called "hero materials". These are "healthy options", and include things like vegan interiors, air cleaning carpets and curtains, or biophilic design. A healthy living environment today is considered to be not just about good design, but air quality, sound and light quality.

In the realm of Megatrend New Work, health also plays an increasingly important role. The concept of a healthy workplace today is not just about providing a vegetarian option in the canteen, but things like supporting good mental and physical health for your employees. Such things as flexible working environments, home office days, gyms, saunas, kitchens and even barista training – these are all signs as to how companies are trying to woo

Health is:

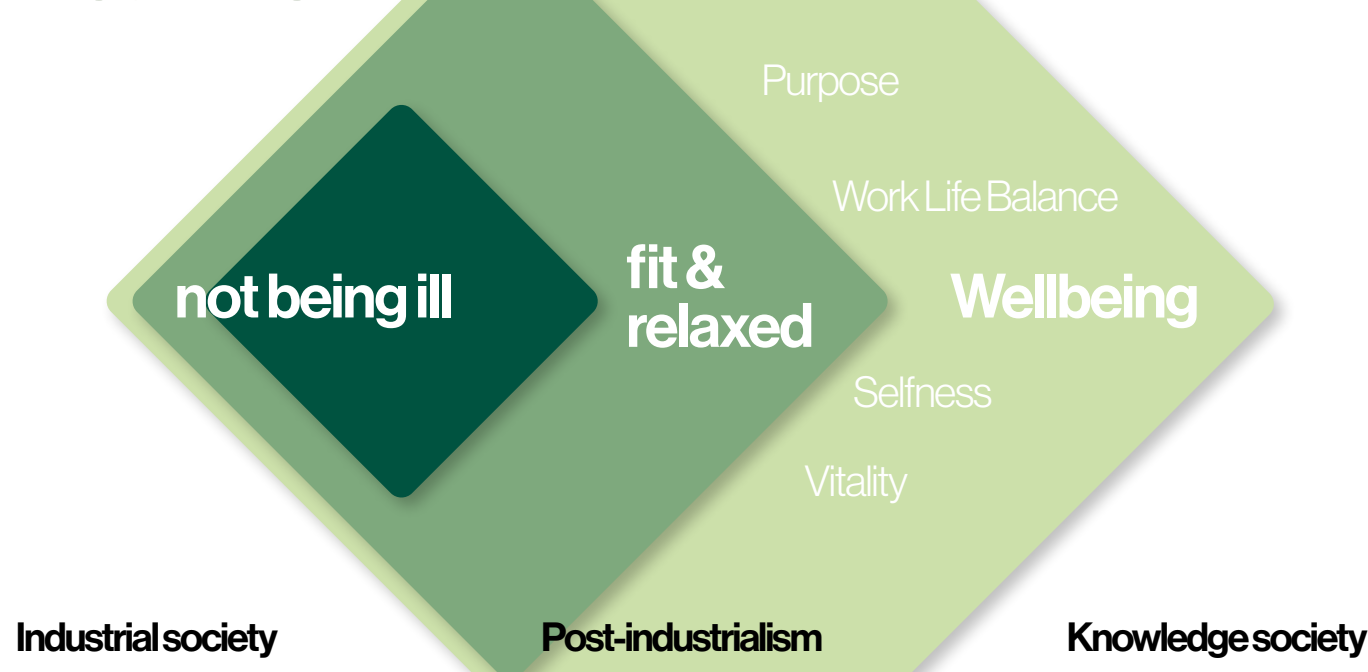


ILLUSTRATION: ZUKUNFTSINSTITUT HORX

workers back to the workplace. In the age of the "great resignation" and "quiet quitting", employers need to rethink their priorities and their approach. From a holistic health design point of view we can sum up the requirements for the workplace of the future as providing the four "Cs": comfort, communication, care and connectivity.

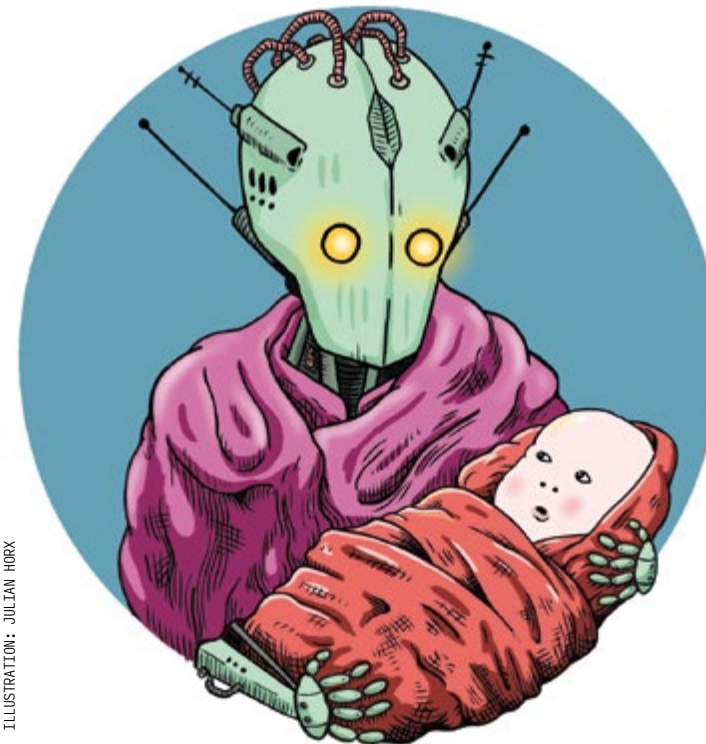


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Connectivity is one of those trends that is often confused with digitalisation. Digitalisation is simply an evolving tool and not a Megatrend. And while there are many positive developments and advances when it comes to health and digitalisation, we need to be reminded of the importance of human connectivity, the soft skills, and not just using technology for technology's sake. There is a danger that if we think in a purely "linear" fashion we end up in a technological dead end (think of the failure of the intelligent fridge or robot carers).

Megatrend Urbanisation also benefits from the influence and scope of what is evolving in the world of health care and design. In the light of continuing urbanisation and increasing global warming, the aim of many architects and planners is to build cleaner, healthier and hence happier cities. While some city planners are focusing on investing in planting more trees or creating more bike lanes, others are looking at the psychological effects of materials, building shape, and public space. Quality of life in the city today is not only measured by square metre prices, but forms and levels of mobility, access to green spaces or public spaces, heat management, stress levels, and even measures to improve gender equality. Athens has a newly installed Urban Heat Officer to work on measures to cool the city in the summer, and in Fredericksberg near Copenhagen, the mayor promises every inhabitant should be able to see a tree from their window.

I believe that one of the most interesting big trends in the future that will affect our idea of what health business is, will be the so-called "kindness economy". This is the trend that turns traditional business priorities on their head. Instead of chasing profit first in a bullish linear fashion, the idea is to prioritise people (your workers/customers etc), then the planet, and then profit. If you aim for healthy happy workers, you can more easily work towards a healthy planet. And then you will get healthy profits.

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