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# Moving the needle on well-being in the workplace: **A call to action for ergonomics practitioners**

by Lucy Hart

Well-being is consistently described as a multidimensional concept that takes into account the whole person and integrates mind and body. Among other benefits, those with a high level of well-being perform better and are more productive at work. COVID-19 drove home the fact that companies are nothing without the well-being of their employees. Employers around the world are now amplifying efforts to make employee well-being a priority and embracing holistic programs aimed at fostering a culture of well-being.

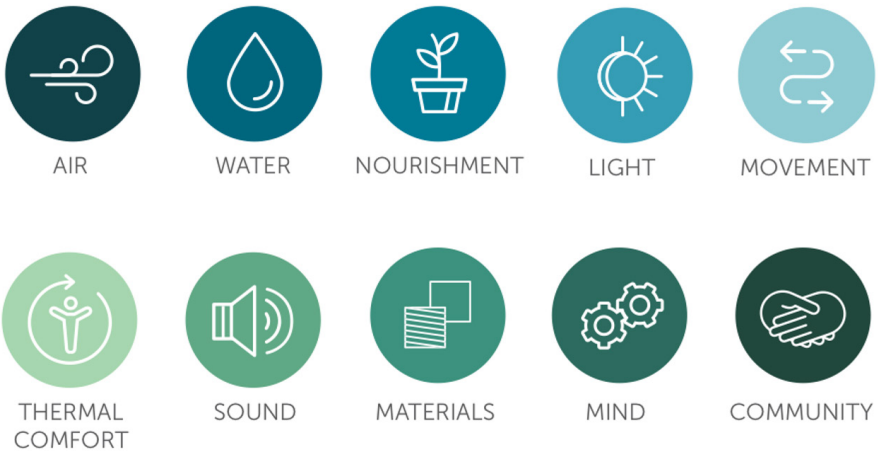
The goal of ergonomics is to optimize well-being and overall system performance. Many practitioners, however, find themselves focused on micro level problems and unable to effect necessary change at the system level to broadly impact employee well-being. One does not have to look farther than office ergonomics assessments for an example. Commonly the practitioner is brought in to validate and solve the individual workstation problem but not to support change that addresses the root cause(s), which may include addressing psychological job demands, workload management and the absence of a process for providing appropriate and safe workstation design for all. To move from reactive technical specialists at the workstation level to proactive facilitators of system wide change, we need to take ergonomics into the broader context.

The globally recognized WELL Building Standard is emerging as an opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders at a macro level to enhance employee well-being. Launched in 2014 by the International WELL Building Institute (IWBI), WELL was the first rating system that focused solely on human health and well-being in the built environment. Until this standard came along, strategies to enhance human sustainability have played a relatively small role in the evolution of building standards.

INTERNATIONAL WELL BUILDING INSTITUTE™

WELL is an evidence-based tool for measuring, certifying and monitoring the performance of building features that impact health and well-being. WELL takes a holistic approach founded on a framework of design interventions, operational protocols and policies. Just over one hundred building features are categorized into ten core Concepts: Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Movement, Thermal, Sound, Materials, Mind and Community. Each feature is designated a Precondition or Optimization. Preconditions are the fundamental components of a WELL certified space and are mandatory regardless of the type of project. All ten Concepts include Preconditions. Optimizations are optional strategies that can be pursued on the road to one of four levels of certification. Beta features are Optimizations that introduce new, emerging or yet-to-be-addressed strategies in the name of continuous improvement and refinement.

## The ten concepts in WELL v2




source: https://v2.wellcertified.com/wellv2/en/overview

Workstation level ergonomics is addressed in two features in the Movement Concept. Feature V02 Ergonomic Workstation Design is a Precondition that requires the provision of ergonomic workstation furnishings and education on what, why and how to make adjustments. Feature V07 Active Furnishings is an Optimization that requires the provision of active workstations to encourage movement.

A progressive development towards integrating macro level ergonomics into WELL was the addition of a beta feature for ergonomics programming to the Movement Concept. IWBI worked with the Movement Concept Advisory—several members of which are ergonomists—to develop this feature. Feature V11β Ergonomics Programming requires projects to work with a certified ergonomist to implement comprehensive programming, commit to on-going improvements to ergonomic design and provide ergonomic support for remote workers. This feature also calls for incorporation of ergonomics into the project's overall health-oriented mission statement documented in feature CO2 Integrative Design, a Precondition in the Community Concept. Improvements to V11β and evolution from beta to the larger WELL v2 feature library will depend on the feedback received from projects that implement comprehensive ergonomics programming on the path to certification. Awareness and use of this feature are critical to its growth and evolution as a macro level intervention to enhance well-being. If V11β is not pursued by projects, it could disappear.

## Call to action:

I see WELL as a catalyst for ergonomics practitioners to influence change at the macro level and help move the needle on well-being in the workplace. To engage in this process:

- Learn more about well-being and WELL and share your knowledge widely; many resources are available at https://www.wellcertified.com/
- Use WELL as a best practice resource in your work; this can be good first step if you and/or your clients are at the beginning of the well-being journey.
- Watch for updates as the Movement Concept Advisory continues discussions on further integration of macroergonomics in WELL.
- Increase your knowledge of macroergonomics and work system design; strengthen your skills in the areas of facilitation, negotiation and leadership to effectively engage in collaborative dialog with stakeholders.
- Increase your engagement with the WELL community by pursuing the WELL Accredited Professional credential and/or joining a WELL Concept Advisory.

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**About Lucy Hart**

Lucy Hart, MSc, CCPE, WELL AP is the Director, Workplace Ergonomics and Well-being at ergoCentric. She is a Canadian Certified Professional Ergonomist (CCPE) and a WELL Accredited Professional. Lucy chairs the BIFMA Ergonomics Sub-Committee (Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturer's Association) that developed and maintains the industry's ergonomics guideline. As Chair of the CSA Technical Committee on Office Ergonomics, she led the revision of CSA Z412 from a guideline to an office ergonomics application standard for the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Group. She is also the Co-Chair of the International Outreach Committee for the Applied Ergonomics Conference.

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