

DESIGNING MEETINGS FOR A LONGER LIFE.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR LONGEVITY-CENTRED EVENTS

Exec Summary: Why longevity has entered the meeting room

The Longevity Movement isn't about living forever - it's about extending healthspan. As work intensifies and cognitive load increases, meetings and events are no longer neutral experiences; they either drain or restore human capacity.

- *Longevity = sustained energy, focus, resilience*
 - *Meetings are one of the most overlooked wellness levers*
 - *Planners are quietly becoming architects of human performance*
-

What is the 'longevity movement'?

The Longevity Movement: A Reframe

The term 'longevity' is dominating the cultural conversation in 2026. Where the term 'wellness' saw a mind-shift from the former physical-focused link between 'health' and 'beauty', to a more introspective definition bringing together 'mind and body', 'longevity' is the next shift towards healthspan over lifespan.

Dr Peter Attia, author of *Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity*, says "Longevity isn't just about living longer - it's about extending the time we remain healthy, active, and fulfilled."

Taking markers from The Blue Zones (regions where people live exceptionally long lives) for inspiration, it encompasses practical practices like fresh air, sunlight, social connection, sleep, nutrition and mobility right up to biological age reversal attempts through procedures and medicines.

Longevity has longevity

As the term itself carries a long-term lens, so too does this movement appear to be a cultural mainstay and not a passing fad.

Radel Sali speaks of his highly attended 'Wellspring of Youth' Summit of Australia's growing interest in longevity: "Twenty years ago, when I was CEO of Swisse, a conference like this wouldn't have had traction. Today, people's interest in health and their thirst for knowledge continue to expand." He speaks of the accessibility of these practices that are now firmly integrating into the mainstream of how people live: "Too often in this space, barriers are put up that limit who can benefit from the science of biohacking," adding that "What's different now is that longevity practices are gaining mainstream recognition."

'Longevity has longevity' was a topic of the 2024 Global Wellness Summit in Scotland where it was noted:

It's astounding the speed in which the quest for longevity has seized the health, biotech and wellness spaces. No mere "trend," it's the new industry pillar - the lens to reexamine everything we do.

Meaningful MICE

In fact, it was back in 2016 that Marriott partnered with the Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) to review

the implications on the future of meetings. Amongst their findings was 'Living 360: Move beyond wellness to wholeness' where Peter Scialla, Founder and COO of wellness real estate company Delos acknowledged the passive effects that buildings and spaces are having on the human body and longevity. Marriott have long transformed the meeting experience for planners, attendees and hotels by focusing on people and purpose instead of tables and chairs.

So, if longevity is about designing environments that support long-term human capacity, then meetings are one of the most powerful and underutilised environments we control.

David T. Stevens, PMED, a Wellness Architect, published a report titled 'Is your event "Medicine"?' in December 2025 where he proposed that meeting planners are either:

- *Designing experiences that strengthen protective social networks, support wellbeing, and extend healthy years, or*
- *Recreating the same fragmented, high stress, low trust environments that quietly feed the problem.*

From a human sustainability lens, this is social sustainability in its purest form. If our

industry burns people out, isolates them in crowded spaces, and ignores their health data, we are not just wasting F&B spend, we are eroding workforce capacity and long term talent retention.

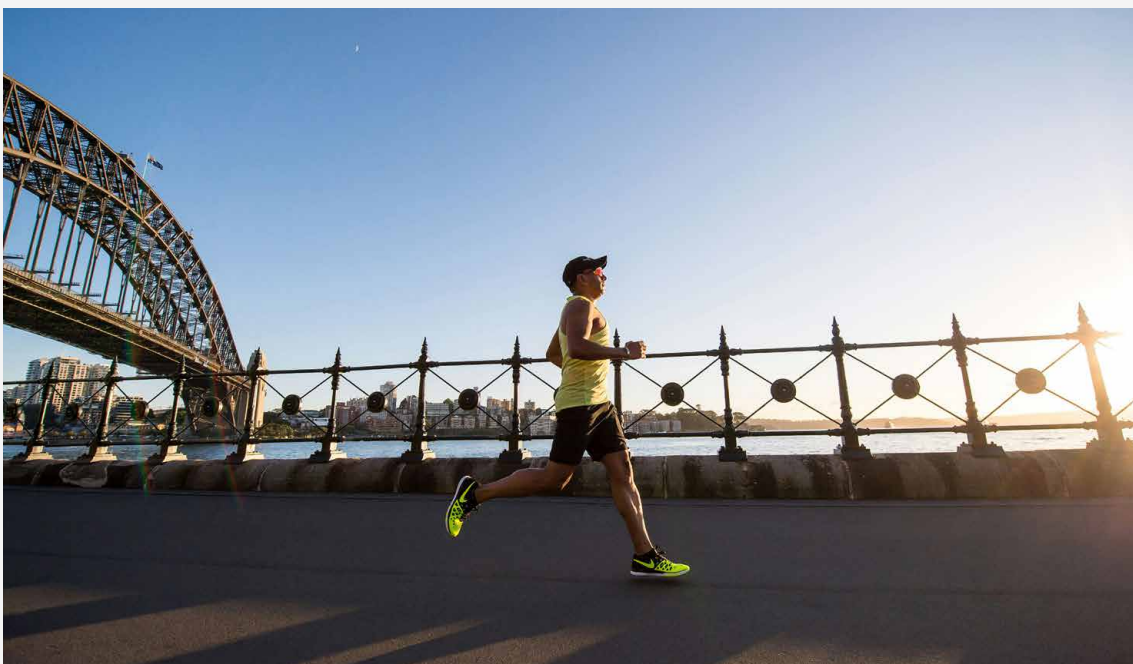
Most meetings are designed for efficiency of content, not sustainability of people. For too long, factors like physiological stressors (sitting, screens, glucose spikes), social and emotional load and cognitive endurance have taken a back-seat.

What great planners understand, however, is that teams remember how a meeting made them feel more than what was said. Increasingly, the role of meeting planner is quietly becoming architects of human performance:

- *Experience designers, not logisticians*
- *Translators of organisational values*
- *Enablers of focus, energy, and connection*

Optimising the healthspan of your event

When done right, incorporating longevity practices into MICE activity has the power to optimise time. Not only can longevity principles make for more attentive delegates who creatively engage in quality decision-





making and retain information better; but the movement has financial benefits that outlast the event:

Ibis World's 2025 Review of Corporate Wellness Services in Australia: 'Investing in employees' health and wellbeing can reduce costs associated with absenteeism and injury and boost workplace productivity'

TELUS Health survey: 36% of employees would prefer improved wellbeing support over a 10% salary increase

Dr Gautam Gulati, a longevity-focused interior designer, cites simple changes like access to outdoor air as a major fatigue-fighter in his 7 levers of bio-harmony:

- *safety*
- *connection*
- *purpose*
- *sleep*
- *movement*
- *food*
- *mindfulness*

We will use these levers as consideration topics for insights and opportunities within MICE.

Safety:

This foundational level of our hierarchy of needs has too often been reduced to the physical. In the context of meetings, however, it must also encompass psychological safety - the creation of an environment where people feel mentally at ease. Only by

designing a safe space can we shift delegates from stress-driven states, where creativity and higher-order thinking are limited, into conditions that support cognitive productivity, insight, and innovation.



Some unexpected safety measures to consider for MICE:

- **Voluntary solitude:**

A study from the UK and US found that alone-time that people choose for constructive reasons, is linked with better mental wellbeing. For both introverts and extroverts, scheduled alone time (short walks, a coffee or tea break) can 'reset' cognitive and emotional resources.

- **Blue space exposure:**

Studies summarizing the effects of water environments show that being near natural water is associated with improved mental health and psychological restoration, even more so than looking at green spaces.

- **Paws more than a perk:**

A 2024 study on 'Pets at Work' found that pet-friendly practices were associated with higher work engagement and wellbeing. These benefits were explained by pets helping satisfy psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness - core drivers of motivation.

Connection:

Social connection is a fundamental human need and a critical pillar of longevity, fostering resilience, reducing stress, and improving mental wellbeing by lowering cortisol and triggering oxytocin, often referred to as the 'bonding hormone'.

Not only does social connection help us feel better, but evidence shows that it increases performance output in a greater dosage

than the sum of individual effort. Studies using rowers have proved that rowing in a crew leads to better efficiency than solo rowing, even when the mechanical workload is the same. It is the interpersonal coordination between rowers, which improves timing, reduces wasted effort, and increases output. Essentially making harder work feel easier.

COVID-19 and the shift to remote work has significantly reduced spontaneous social interactions, making conferences and work events vital for fostering collaboration, creativity, and professional growth, enabling attendees to build trust and exchange knowledge in ways that virtual settings often cannot replicate.



Benefits of socially connected conferences vs digital events:

- **Enhanced learning and creativity:**

In-person interactions trigger the release of neurotransmitters that boost creativity and allow for free-flowing, spontaneous brainstorming.

- **Increased trust and collaboration:**

Face-to-face interaction helps build rapport and break down hierarchical barriers, making attendees feel safer in sharing ideas.

- **Reduced 'conference burnout':**

By making the experience socially engaging and less about solely absorbing information, attendees leave feeling energized rather than drained.

- **Unexpected partnerships:**

Informal, spontaneous conversations during breaks often lead to valuable, unanticipated, and long-lasting career opportunities.

Purpose:

The National Institute on Aging found that people who could articulate their sense of purpose were living up to 7 years longer. Further to this, research from the world's 'Blue Zones' shows that a strong sense of purpose is a consistent factor in longer, healthier lives. Importantly, in these cultures, **purpose is not defined by grand ambition but by daily usefulness, contribution, and social belonging.**

In Okinawa, this concept is called *ikigai* - 'a reason for being.' It's not about grand achievement, but daily engagement in meaningful activity. In Costa Rica it's expressed as 'plan de vida' - a life plan or sense of life direction.

In contrast to lofty mission statements and meeting-room names for values, this kind of purpose is just about knowing how what you do helps someone else today, not someday.

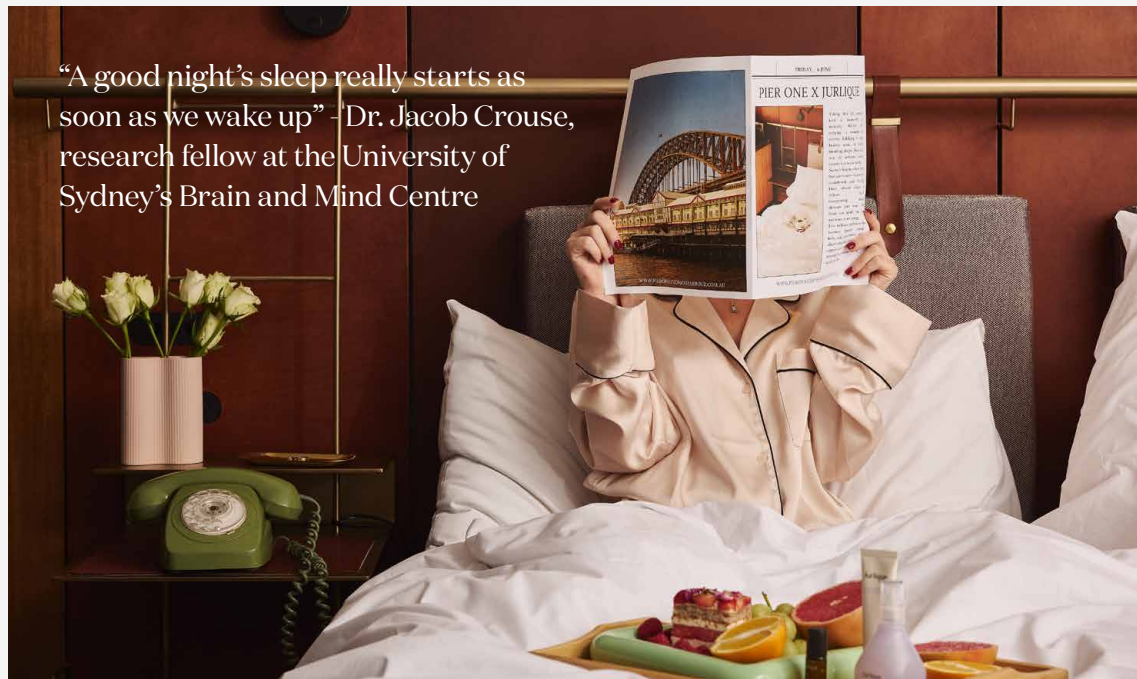
Company meets offer an opportunity to reinforce the value of delegates' daily routines, team relationships, and identity in their role - expressing how this contributes towards shared success. When purpose is framed as practical, collective, and socially reinforced, rather than abstract or aspirational, it supports resilience, reduces stress, and sustains engagement over time. In this way, conferences can move beyond motivation or inspiration, toward reinforcing the everyday conditions that support employee wellbeing and long-term organisational performance.



Sleep:

Sleep plays a critical role in memory, learning, attention, decision-making, and information processing. Even one night of poor sleep or less than 6 hours, can impair these mental

functions the next day. During sleep, the brain consolidates memories and reorganizes neural connections, strengthening learning and future reasoning.



“A good night’s sleep really starts as soon as we wake up” - Dr. Jacob Crouse, research fellow at the University of Sydney’s Brain and Mind Centre

When considering overnight stays, prioritise:

1. Temperature:

A cooler sleeping environment is widely recommended for deeper, more restorative sleep (around 18–20 °C according to sleep experts).

2. Light exposure:

Bright light or screens late at night disrupts natural circadian rhythms, delaying sleep onset and impairing sleep quality. Black-out blinds and natural light at first waking are ideal.

3. Noise:

Noise pollution can cause micro-arousals in sleep that aren’t always remembered but undermine sleep quality and cognitive restoration.

4. Quality beds:

Back problems are estimated to cost Australia’s GDP approximately \$638 billion from 2024 to 2033 through lost productivity. A good bed can maintain neutral spinal alignment, evenly distribute body weight and reduce pressure points and muscle guarding. This is the body’s chance to undo the spinal stress of sitting through the day.

5. Journaling:

Stream of consciousness writing at the end of the day closes the open loops in your brain for better sleep and memory retention.

Movement:

The Sedentary Challenge in Peak Career Years

Australians report their lowest levels of 'feeling well' during peak career years (25–49), according to Roy Morgan. This coincides with highly sedentary work patterns, with over 76% of working

hours spent seated. Prolonged sitting increases the risk of cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders and diabetes, while also reducing energy, productivity and overall wellbeing.



Why movement matters

Regular movement improves cognitive function, mood and stress levels, with benefits lasting up to three hours after activity. Research from Swinburne University of Technology and the Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute identifies an optimal 'Goldilocks Zone' which includes limited sitting (6 hours), increased standing (5.1 hours), sufficient sleep (8.3 hours) and regular light-to-moderate physical activity (4 hours).

Small breaks, meaningful gains

For desk-based workers, a 30:15 sitting-to-standing ratio has been shown to improve focus, reduce stress and encourage healthier movement patterns throughout the day.

Taking 15-minute movement breaks every two hours has been shown to increase mental wellbeing by 22.5%, productivity by 33.2% and focus by 28.6%.

Light, frequent movement is more effective than isolated high-intensity exercise in offsetting the negative effects of prolonged sitting (WHO).

The power of timing and environment

Exercise at any time is beneficial, but morning movement is associated with higher productivity, lower stress and better mental health, with morning exercisers 129% more likely to feel productive.

Visual rest also plays a critical role. The 20-20-20 rule (looking 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes) reduces cognitive fatigue, while brief exposure to natural scenery like water or greenery has been shown to lower stress and improve attention and focus.

Tips for meetings and events:

- Design agendas that encourage movement every 30 minutes
- Shorten sessions to 25 or 45 minutes to allow for breaks
- Integrate standing, walking or flexible seating options
- Provide ergonomic furniture and visually restorative environments
- Offer pre-conference morning movement options such as walks or light exercise

By embedding movement and visual restoration into meetings and events, hotels can support guest wellbeing, cognitive performance and long-term health outcomes.



Food:

Nutrition plays a critical role in longevity through its impact on the gut-brain axis - the bidirectional communication network linking the gastrointestinal system and the brain.

“There’s such a big connection between the gut and the brain. The gut is connected to the whole longevity picture and if we work on making sure our gut health is optimal, we’re also reducing the risk of any cognitive decline issues”, says nutritionist Georgia Betts.

Research from the University of Sydney shows that high-fat, high-sugar diets negatively affect cognitive function, particularly memory and learning linked to the hippocampus. In contrast, fibre-rich, plant-diverse diets support beneficial gut bacteria that reduce inflammation and support brain health. Stabilising blood sugar, especially through adequate protein in the morning, further supports sustained energy, focus and mental performance.

Interest in gut health has moved into the mainstream. One in three Australians now use dietary supplements. Prebiotics are the fastest-growing category (ABS data), and are breaking into the mainstream with

functional drinks, snacks and beverages. Australia leads the world in online searches for ‘gut microbiome’ reflecting increased awareness of the microbiome’s role in cognition, immunity and energy.

Tips for meetings and events:

- Seek plant-forward, fibre-diverse menus with balanced protein over carb and meat heavy for greater attention spans
- Low-lactose and gluten-reduced options aligned to changing dietary preferences (Even 10 years ago, over 10% of Australians reported following a gluten free diet)
- Offer small snacks (every 3-4 hours) over heavy meals to decrease hormone and glucose spikes (which cause slower, less accurate, and less efficient neural processing)
- Pair sweet snacks with a protein for slower glucose release
- Offer low- and no-alcohol beverages that enable connection without overconsumption
- Incorporate prebiotic food and supplements which promote gut health as morning options

Mindfulness:

According to Safe Work Australia data, mental health conditions accounted for 9% of all serious workers' compensation claims in 2021-22, a 36.9% increase since 2017-18. These rising claims have highlighted the direct costs of poor mental health to employers, from extended sick leave to lost productivity, driving demand for corporate wellness services.

During events and conferences, mindfulness practices can form the start of ongoing longevity practices as well as ensuring information is retained and events have a long-term ripple after the big splash.

Mindfulness ideas for MICE:

Get the pens out:

Writing by hand naturally reduces multitasking, which, alongside the physical sensation (pen pressure, movement, texture) creates sensory feedback, anchoring attention in the present. Since blank pages are not linear, handwriting activates divergent thinking. Arrows, doodles and mind maps support insight and messiness can spark new ideas. Typists often record more words, but remember less meaning.

Kick-start meditation:

Meditation (including moving meditation, yoga, breathwork, sauna, float tanks etc) increases longevity by slowing the aging process at a cellular level and mitigating risk factors for age-related chronic diseases. Workplace research from the University of Melbourne found that meditation is a "potent antidote" for work stress, leading to greater improvements in psychological health and increased productivity.

While even one session of meditation has proven benefits, kick-starting an ongoing practice reaps far greater rewards for healthspan.

Research of 1.33 million participants showed the greatest barrier to ongoing meditation was the idea that meditation must be done in special conditions (quiet, alone, 'perfect').

Reducing barriers about where, how, and when people meditate, by normalizing 5-minute practices using an app between sessions or the trial of new forms of moving-meditation, is the best way to encourage an ongoing practice.



Closing Perspective: Designing for the Long Game

What Longevity Looks Like (Without Turning into a Retreat)

Keep it pragmatic:

- Agenda design that respects cognitive rhythms
- Movement without 'mandatory yoga'
- Food that supports energy, not crashes
- Spaces for decompression and informal connection
- Micro-interventions over grand gestures

The longevity lens reframes meetings as investments in sustained human performance. When designed well, meetings don't just deliver outcomes - they leave people better than they arrived.

The most effective meetings of the future won't be louder, longer, or more packed. They'll be smarter, more human, and designed for the long game.