CLIENT WORKSHOP THEME: GENERATIONS
(September, 2019)

Around a decade ago, we created The Swellness Movement™, which is dedicated to reimagining what could be if "swell-being" were truly understood for the first time, without the baggage of all that has come before. The movement focuses on the living being and its relationship to all those things that keep it well but have been unknown, ignored, underestimated or not at all imagined until now. We have always focused our thinking around swellness™ on specific topics (e.g., brain, nature, sleep, art, music, play, sound, smell, humor, light and gamification) that are germane to the swellness of populations. And, in that context, it is important to examine the challenges and opportunities that will impact the future swell-being of those at the opposite ends of the age spectrum – both youth and aging populations.

Younger Generations: Technology's Impact on Sense of Self

The Younger global generations today – beginning with millennials, accelerated among cybrids (our term for Gen Z), and even further accelerated among the members of Generation "Alpha" – are the first to come of age at a time when rapidly-advancing digital technology permeates everything around them. And, while this has the potential to elevate them into higher-functioning humans, it also has the potential to challenge their very senses of "self." Who are they, and what is their role, in a world increasingly characterized by digital intelligences...as their peers, teachers and even bosses? These existential questions lie at the heart of the future swellness of these entire generations.

Members of Generation Alpha are the first kids to grow up with robot peers. Devices spawned by a booming ed-tech industry can speed learning, but they can also be confusing. Many kids think that robots are smarter than humans, or imbue them with almost magical powers. Kids need help drawing boundaries between themselves and the technology, gaining confidence in their own ability to control and master it. And, interfacing with certain technologies has the potential to change both the structure and function of kids' brains. For example, personal GPS-equipped devices affect perception and judgement. Neuroscientists now see that brain behavior changes when people rely on turn-by-turn directions. The hippocampus makes an internal map of the environment and this map becomes active only when you are actively engaged in navigation. Studies have long shown that the hippocampus is highly susceptible to experience.

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In School

Over 2,000 preschools in China are using Walklake, a health-checking robot, every morning to check the health status of students. Robot doctors for kids are on the rise in China, and other types of AI are entering China's preschools, as well. Chinese investment in AI-enabled teaching and learning has exploded. Tens of millions of students now use some form of AI to learn, whether through extracurricular tutoring programs like Squirrel AI, digital learning platforms like 17ZuoYe, or even in their main classrooms. Seventeen thousand students at 60 elementary schools in Guangzhou recently received "Safe Campus Smartwatches," which are wearables that send the kids' locations in real time to their respective parents' smartphones. And, wearables on children are also being used in underserved markets for various wellness monitoring applications. Some nations, however, are against the use of these sorts of technologies. Consequently, they are adopting harsher privacy laws.

At Home

Parents, alarmed by screen time studies, are trying to turn back to the era before smartphones. A new screen-free parenting coach economy has sprung up to serve the demand. But, in many ways, it may be too late to reverse, or even slow, the proliferation of these technologies in the home. Pretzel Labs, a voice-first gaming startup has released several games for Alexa, Google Home, and other voice-powered assistants – the most popular of which is Kids Court, in which players "settle a case" usually between siblings with the help of Alexa, seen as a neutral entity. Founder Adva Levin was inspired to create Pretzel Labs after noticing how kids interact with Alexa. An increasing body of research indicates that relationships between family members – especially kids – and virtual assistants, like Alexa, are becoming increasingly complex. And we have no clue what the long-term psychological effects might be.

In the Workplace

Not one nation included in a recent study was fully prepared to address the challenge of automation. Countries with strong education, worker training, and R&D sectors (e.g., South Korea, Germany and Singapore) were ahead, but still insufficient. And AI may not only replace workers in the future, it may also replace bosses. As a corollary to this, Humana Pharmacy has deployed an AI system in its call centers that gives human employees speaking on the phone nudges to be friendlier and more empathetic with customers. This is the workplace that younger generations will increasingly be entering. Cybrids, specifically, are now entering the workforce, and they are so intertwined with their personal technologies that they are trying to make their résumés stand out by adding Bitmojis (personal cartoon avatars).

As Consumers

- Teens prefer to keep up on current events through YouTube and other social media platforms instead of news agencies. Given how YouTube promotes conspiracy theories and other misinformation, this is potentially concerning for the future of media literacy. Of the teens who go to social media for news, about 60% rely on celebrities or other influencers.

- Lil Miquela is a computer-generated character who belongs to a growing group of social media marketers known as virtual influencers. Her success has prompted companies hoping to connect with consumers to rethink their marketing strategies and replace celebrities or social media influencers with their own ideal brand ambassador created from scratch.

- Asked what they would like to be when they grow up, about 3-in-10 American and British kids replied that they wanted to be YouTubers or Vloggers. Lesser preferences included becoming a teacher, professional athlete, or musician.

- Social media has transformed tourism. Uploading a picture or video from a photogenic spot is known in China as daka, meaning "punching the card." The beauty of various attractions becomes subordinate to simply showing that you have also been to places that are popular. A subculture has developed of young people who embrace daka as a lifestyle. Similarly, according to a recent survey, 70% of American brides post on social media throughout their honeymoon. Couples want validation from followers and friends (481-0619).

Older Populations: Accepted Definitions of "Aging" in Need of Reinvention

A growing number of scientists are questioning the basic concept of "aging." Geneticist David Sinclair argues that medicine should view aging not as a natural consequence of growing older, but as a condition in and of itself. Old age, in his view, is simply a pathology that can be successfully treated. If we labeled aging differently, it would give us a greater ability to tackle it, rather than just treating the diseases that accompany it.

And, the economic power of aging consumer populations is often underestimated – or, in many cases, ignored. Fewer than one-in-three Chinese people over 50 owned a smartphone in 2016 – half the share found in the U.S. Tech companies now want to lure more of the aging population online – and take a bigger slice of the 7trn yuan ($1trn) that Chinese seniors are expected to spend on consumer goods in 2020. Once tech-enabled, aging consumers often spend actively.

The Role of Design

Life expectancy in industrialized economies has gained more than 30 years since 1900, and for the first time in human history there are now more people over 65 than under 5. One key to a better, longer, and more sustainable old age may lie in better-designed products for this marketplace. With that in mind, Richard Caro began an experiment in 2014 called the Longevity Explorers to improve the way technology is developed for older adults. Engineer Ken Smith, director of the mobility division of the Stanford Center on Longevity, says that one of the biggest mistakes designers make is to assume that around the age of 60 people lose interest in aesthetics and design. This can have dire consequences for products meant to help people with their health.

Relationships

Older couples are reinventing their relationships. Rather than marry or live together, many have separate homes and see each other several times a week or month; they are highly committed to each other, but want personal space and independence. With the rise of "gray divorce," there is a larger pool of single adults who want stable partners without entangling finances or relationships with adult kids. A recent survey found that respondents over 50 – both single and in relationships – plan to have sex until they are, on average, 79. The survey found that 43% of Americans over 50 say their sex is just as or more adventurous than when they were younger. More than half said that they attribute their love for "adventure" to having fewer inhibitions.

The Future of Work

Minimal manning is the increasingly prevalent concept of replacing specialized workers with problem-solving generalists. According to Deloitte projections, ten years from now, 70 to 90% of workers will be in so-called hybrid jobs or super-jobs, combining tasks once performed by people in two or more traditional roles. The phenomenon, sped by automation, means devaluation of knowledge, with implications for the nature and utility of a college education, for the path of careers, for inequality and employability. Older workers who have spent decades building specialized knowledge risk being rendered obsolete by this shifting paradigm. But solutions are emerging. Senior Planet is a tech-themed community center in NYC with a door that reads "Aging with Attitude." For the past 15 years – in a curriculum now recognized by the biggest names in aging, spreading across the U.S. and abroad – Senior Planet has become a platform that empowers seniors to "uncork their lives." Larger percentages of older people than ever before are continuing to work.

Cognition

According to a recent study, frequent religious service attendance and private prayer were linked to stronger cognitive health among people over age 50. Attending religious services may promote social engagement with peers, which has been positively associated with cognitive outcomes. And religious attendance may be linked to better cognitive health through stimulating cognitive activities unique to religious services, such as discussing sermons or applying scriptural study. The potential cognitive demands of prayer may also explain its positive association with memory. This adds to the growing, and powerful, body of research which indicates that active intellectual and social engagement later in life can lead to greater cognitive functioning and neuroplasticity.

Implications

Some countries are actually now prioritizing happiness as a national goal – even putting it on par with more conventional economic metrics. And while happiness should not be conflated with swellness, there is certainly some overlap – symbolic of the fact that societal priorities are shifting. Growing evidence suggests that many different activities, products and disciplines can enhance swellness among people. These include: reforestation and nature therapy, sensory optimization – including color, light and sound, cannabis, spirituality and prayer, optimization of the human microbiome, and even artificial memory manipulation. In some cases, greater swellness will be achieved organically; in other cases it will be achieved through technological means. And the intersection will increasingly be a fun sandbox in which to play.

Proactive Strategies for Optimizing the Human/Machine Interface

Researchers are finding some success teaching AI to children as young as 4, helping them program robots to learn from patterns of data. Interacting with a robot that appears to show curiosity can spark a child's inquisitiveness and eagerness to learn. They also pick up conversational cues from robots. As we examine challenges to the sense of self question among today's youth, the future might lie in more creative strategies for optimizing what we refer to as the human/machine interface for children. And, these strategies may well permeate up into early adulthood, as employers manage the inextricably-linked relationships between their people and systems. This is one of the reasons why we have long stressed the need for HR and IT functions to be more closely aligned within organizations. Going beyond that, the communications function/s (both external and internal) will be critical to managing expectations – and conversations – between people and AIs.

Enhancing Opportunities for People to Live With Dignity

Researchers have built a robotic tail which could help unsteady elderly people keep their balance. The device mimics the tails of animals used to keep their balance while running and climbing. As we consider the future swellness of aging populations, it becomes imperative to enhance opportunities – in the marketplace, at home, and at work – for people to live with dignity. In fact, dignity itself may be the most foundational component of swellness for aging populations.

TABLE EXERCISE
Given generations as the backdrop, we ask that each of you around the table take a few minutes to answer each of these questions:

1. **You have invented a happiness meter for people over 70. What 3 things does it measure?**
2. **You're creating a new course to help preschool kids grow up to be "swell." What is it called?**

Compiled Answers for Question #1

You have invented a happiness meter for people over 70. What three (3) things does it measure?

- 1. Ability to make decisions for one's day based on possibilities, not physical limitations
  2. Access to services and information in preferred mode or language/heritage
  3. Safety and security (via specific metrics)

- The "Keeping Young" Meter:
  1. Mind stimulations
  2. Health/Wellness
  3. Pleasure

- 1. How often does the individual engage with others in a meaningful way?
  2. How often and what kind of physical movement/exercise does the person partake in?
  3. What is the imperative that gets them out of bed in the morning? (e.g., hobbies, family obligations, pets, cleaning)

- 1. Smiling
  2. Laughing
  3. Movement

- 1. Exercise - Mind, body, soul
  2. Friends/Engagement
  3. Adventure travel beyond comfort zone (home/work)
  4. *Bonus: Hope*

- 1. Connection to community (How often do you have meaningful interactions with family or friends in person?)
  2. Exercise - the intersection of mind and body
  3. Sleep!

- The Automation Readiness Index:
  1. Finance
  2. Infrastructure
  3. Google Robotics and similar technologies

- 1. Involvement with family
  2. Health - How often do you seek/need medical attention
  3. Purpose/Meaning - Do you have a purpose or cause that you are involved in?

- 1. Heart rate/anxiety
  2. Body temperature (as influenced by "pressure points": pain points and the environment)
  3. Level of engagement and movement (e.g., how sedentary the user is)

- 1. Resiliency - Ability to bounce back after difficulties
  2. Continuous Learning (What have you learned this week?)
  3. Size of community

- 1. Health - Feeling and perception
  2. Enthusiasm for living longer
  3. Activity - Mental and physical

- 1. Health (Enough to do what matters to you)
  2. Growth - Mentally, spiritually, emotionally
  3. Gratitude

- 1. Physical health (including mobility and physical activity)
  2. Community connections (e.g., family, church, neighborhood)
  3. Financial comfort/stressor metrics (e.g., do they have stable finances?)

- 1. Independence (the ability to manage daily and long-term needs independently)
  2. Financial security
  3. Social connection on a consistent basis

- 1. Sense of community
  2. Sense of purpose
  3. Active intellects and curiosity

- 1. Quality of family relationships
  2. Health
  3. Independence: Financial and physical

- 1. Independence
  2. Connection
  3. Activity

- 1. Interactions - Family, friends
  2. Health
  3. Exposure to new experiences

- 1. Physical health
  2. Financial health
  3. Personal network - friends and family

Summary: Variables Mentioned Most Frequently

- Friends/Family/Community/Social Engagement – **12**
- Health (Physical/Mental) – **9**
- Finances/Financial Security – **8**
- Movement/Exercise/Activity – **7**
- Growth/Learning/New Experiences – **6**
- Happiness/Hope/Gratitude – **5**
- Purpose/Meaning – **3**
- Independence – **3**

Compiled Answers for Question #2

You are creating a new course to help pre-school children grow up to be "swell."
What is it called?

- Understanding Others – EQ (Emotional Quotient/Intelligence)
- Your Favorite Stories, With You as the Star
- Swell Hearts: Grateful Children; Great Achievers
- SwellUp – Gamified exercise and play that allows children to imagine who/what they want to do or be, and that allows children to have constantly changing personas
- Creative Interaction of Systems (With People, Nature, Living Matter and Cyborgs)
- "In Play" – Invention, Play, Inquire
- Swell Superheroes
- How to Ask Questions and Deal With Conflict
- What Makes You Feel Like You Are on a Cloud
- World of Wonder or It's a Wonderful World
- Figure it Out (No instructions to certain exercises)
- Living/Being – Unknown – Ignored – Underestimated (L-U-I-U)
- Whole Child Experience
- I Am Enough
- I Like Who I Am
- Fun + Future
- Hooked on Swellness
- Highway to Swell
- Swell With Pride
- Be Swell