

Mindmax: Building and Testing a Digital Wellbeing Application for Australian Football Players

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Abstract : MindMax is a digital community and learning platform built to maximise the wellbeing and resilience of AFL Players and Australian men. The MindMax application engages men, via their existing connection with sport and video games, in a range of wellbeing ideas, stories and actions, because we believe fit minds, kick goals. MindMax is an AFL Players Association led project, supported by a Movember Foundation grant, to improve the mental health of Australian males aged between 16-35 years. The key engagement and delivery strategy for the project was digital technology, sport (AFL) and video games, underpinned by evidenced based wellbeing science. The project commenced April 2015, and the expected completion date is March 2017. This paper describes the conceptual model underpinning product development, including progress, key learnings and challenges, as well as the research agenda. Evaluation of the MindMax project is a multi-pronged approach of qualitative and quantitative methods, including participatory design workshops, online reference groups, longitudinal survey methods, a naturalistic efficacy trial and evaluation of the social and economic return on investment. MindMax is focused on the wellness pathway and maximising our mind's capacity for fitness by sharing and promoting evidence-based actions that support this. A range of these ideas (from ACT, mindfulness and positive psychology) are already being implemented in AFL programs and services, mostly in face-to-face formats, with strong engagement by players. Player's experience features strongly as part of the product content. Wellbeing science is a discipline of psychology that explores what helps individuals and communities to flourish in life. Rather than ask questions about illness and poor functioning, wellbeing scientists and practitioners ask questions about wellness and optimal functioning. While illness and wellness are related, they operate as separate constructs and as such can be influenced through different pathways. The essential idea was to take the evidence-based wellbeing science around building psychological fitness to the places and spaces that men already frequent, namely sport and video games. There are 800 current senior AFL players, 5000+ past players, and 11 million boys and men that are interested in the lives of AFL Players; what they think and do to be their best both on and off field. AFL Players are also keen video gamers - using games as one way to de-stress, connect and build wellbeing. There are 9.5 million active gamers in Australia with 93% of households having a device for playing games. Video games in MindMax will be used as an engagement and learning tool. Gamers (including AFL players) can also share their personal experience of how games help build their mental fitness. Currently available games (i.e., we are not in the game creation business) will also be used to motivate and connect MindMax participants. The MindMax model is built with replication by other sport codes (e.g., Cricket) in mind. It is intended to not only support our current crop of athletes but also the community that surrounds them, so they can maximise their capacity for health and wellbeing.

Keywords : Australian football league, digital application, positive psychology, wellbeing

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