Wellness Together

What really contributes to Wellbeing in the Workplace?
“Creating cultures and environments that are conducive to commercial success.”

Introduction:

Wellness at work is a dominant theme in any discussion about the workplace. But this is not just a discussion about happiness, it is about creating cultures and environments that are conducive to commercial success.

As a business that represents many elements of the supply chain it is very apparent that, in order to achieve true ‘wellness’, attention to every single component that can impact, mental and physical health needs to be considered. This means building structures and company cultures, through to the physical furniture and fittings, that employees require to work efficiently and effectively.

When we begin to look at how all these factors fit together we gain further insight into the ‘touch points’ that are important to the individual, as well as the business.

A major insight uncovered by this research is that measurements of creativity and innovation are just as vital to a company’s profitability, if not more so, as productivity, which has been the Holy Grail of the property industry for many years.

People and property are vital and need to co-exist for the optimum gains of business.

Anna King
Founder + Director
Informare PR: Content + Communication
1. Having mentally and physically fit employees is a prerequisite of profitable companies, and there is a direct link between the workplace and profitability.

2. The link between the workplace and productivity isn’t necessarily a direct one. Improvements in productivity that are attributable to workplace practices are likely to be achieved through direct improvements to creativity, innovation etc. which in turn leads to uplifts in productivity and consequently profitability.

3. The traditional measure of success is profitability, BUT there are only a few overlaps between the characteristics of a profitable and productive company.

4. There are more overlaps between productive and innovative companies.

5. While absenteeism has been a traditional business metric, this has now reached a historic low, but productivity levels continue to fall. Should we increasingly be looking at factors, such as wellness in the workplace, that can reduce levels of presenteeism?

6. Have we possibly failed to appreciate the importance of creativity and innovation enhancing elements in the workplace?

7. It could be that facilitating innovative thinking will engender improvements in productivity as well as being a key driver of businesses profitability.
## Contents:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Findings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Overview and Methodology</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellness Together</td>
<td>6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Storage</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise and Acoustics</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Quality</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Empowerment</td>
<td>13-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>17-21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While some characteristics were more dominant than others.

The responses are representative of a broad range of workplace environments.

46% have the opportunity to work from home

55% are male

29% are in project or service delivery roles

28% are in business support roles

83% work full time

81% work in built up urban areas

75% sit within 5 metres of a window

17% are in C-Level or higher managerial roles

All conclusions are based on significant differences. The chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3.1% for employees and 13.9% for FMs from the results shown if interviews are conducted again with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

Sapio Research is an ethically minded, creative and professional, full service market research agency, that helps brands and agencies produce high quality insight to inform businesses and drive content generation.

Research undertaken by: Sapio Research

Contact: Jane Hales
Email: jane.hales@sapioresearch.com
Website: www.sapioresearch.com
“The survey provides evidence of strong correlations between people feeling good about their workplace and a positive outcome for the business.”

Ashley Bateson
Partner: Hoare Lea
Survey respondents evaluated a range of components around them. According to the findings, the six macro trends impacting on employees are movement, lighting, personal storage, noise levels, air quality, and their own sense of empowerment. The potential impact of these elements on business shows that employers need to deliver the best to be successful.

“The survey provides evidence of strong correlations between people feeling good about their workplace and a positive outcome for the business,” Ashley Bateson, Partner at engineering consultancy, Hoare Lea, which co-sponsored the research.

Comparison of productivity performance. GDP per hour worked EU15 =100. Source: Eurostat.

to be identified but those that lead to problem solving and innovation as well, for example.
Musculoskeletal problems (including back pain, neck and upper limb problems) accounted for 30.8 million lost work days during 2016 in the UK (22.4% of the total days lost according to ONS figures). It was the second biggest reason for absenteeism after minor illnesses such as coughs and colds (which took approximately 34.0 million days).

Workstations which promote healthy postures and encourage movement is one of the factors that are found in productive, profitable and creative companies. “High performing companies are more likely to have facilities that allow people to adjust their work station to them. Empowering the user by giving them choices, such as being able to alternate between sitting and standing, is crucial” says Tamsin Grosvenor Senior Marketing Manager of EMEA at Humanscale, a co-sponsor of the report.

The findings suggest that the importance of physical movement and of changing environments to help counter dips in concentration, could be underestimated. “Getting some fresh air, changing task or location, or having a healthy snack are popular ways of avoiding dips in concentration levels,” says Bateson at Hoare Lea.
Harsh or overly bright light is considered a far greater distraction for employees than low level or soft lighting. Yet lighting systems that have the ability to change their colour tone as the day progresses are the least common feature in an office.

Glare control and variable lighting is found to be a top characteristic of more profitable organisations, which gives credence to the argument that human-centric lighting is a major benefit to the most successful organisations.

Lighting systems that adapt their colour tone as the day progresses feature in some of the most productive companies, and those that consider themselves to be highly innovative or creative. David Clements, Managing Director of FUTURE Designs highlights the significance of this: “Lighting that is responsive to circadian rhythms is the next major innovation in lighting technology, and we will begin to see its wider adoption across all sectors where people work, socialise and meet over the coming years.”

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David Clements
Managing Director: FUTURE designs
When asked what one thing they’d change about their workplace storage, more than a quarter of survey respondents said they’d like more personal storage within reach.

“Employees are taking more and more expensive items to work with them, such as gym kit, cycling gear and tech, so it’s unsurprising that people want to keep them close by throughout the day. Local banks of lockers can help organisations achieve this,” says Richard Blackwell, CEO at Bisley, a co-sponsor.

Colleagues encroaching on personal space was placed at number two in the list of major office distractions. Untidy desks and shared spaces, and hunting for stationery were other common bothersome disruptions, and one in four employees are distracted by the smell of colleagues’ sports kit. Additionally, the most reserved among us tend to be the most easily distracted.

“There’s a clear link between personal space and storage,” Blackwell adds. “53% of employees still desire their own desk, but these days this is far from guaranteed. Giving all employees – whether permanent, mobile or nomadic – individual stowage, as well as providing plenty of functional office storage, will help them to maintain a sense of control and belonging while at work, and therefore contribute to positive mental wellbeing.”

Personal Storage:

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Shrieks of laughter, conversations of variable volume and traffic are all distracting. And being listened to while on the phone is an annoyance.

The availability of quiet working spaces is one of the most important characteristics of companies that consider themselves to be highly innovative or creative. Quiet spaces are also important for highly productive companies. The availability of quiet spaces is found to be one of the biggest differentiators between high and low performing companies.

However, having a space where staff can openly talk and discuss ideas is also important and not as counter-intuitive as it may seem, says Michael Tyerman, Head of International Sales at Woven Image, “Companies which have noisier areas where staff can choose to work together and collaborate have considerably more profit than those who don’t encourage it”. This emphasises how important choice is for employees.
Air Quality:

Not only is fresh air the single most successful way for mitigating dips in concentration but the survey showed it to be one of the biggest differentiating factors of the most productive and innovative or creative companies. Good quality ventilation and air movement is therefore a vital characteristic of a healthy office.

“A workplace ventilation strategy also needs to be well managed so that air quality is not inadvertently compromised, which could have a detrimental impact on wellness and productivity.”

Ashley Bateson
Partner: Hoare Lea
There is a host of ways that companies can make their staff feel empowered and this can have significant outcomes for the business. The act of consulting staff is a major differentiator between high and low performing companies. “This suggests that consulting employees will lead to greater profitability,” says Andy Swann, Change Maker at architects and designers, BDG. However, he cautions that employees wouldn’t necessarily choose the aspects that are used by the most profitable companies without guidance and awareness of impacts. “We could argue that letting staff feel more empowered will bring with it the associated benefits, as the ‘Pygmalion effect’ of greater expectations driving greater performance comes into play. So the role of an expert guiding staff choice is essential.” And yet, only just over half the respondents feel they have adequate control over their comfort conditions. The temperature being too high is one of the topmost distractions. “The importance of workers being able to influence their environment can be underestimated by senior staff,” says Bateson at Hoare Lea.

Flexible/Agile Working

The findings make clear that there is no single style of working that suits everyone or applies all the time. Working flexibly should be defined as giving staff variety in how and where they work – whether it’s the ability to work from home or outside the workplace sometimes, or having an office layout that offers a variety of spaces and configurations.
The workplace drivers of productivity

There is a strong correlation between a positive culture and practices and a successful business (page 20). The survey showed that two elements are found in all profitable, productive and innovative businesses: the flexibility for employees to reconfigure their space and workstations which promote healthy postures.

The workplace characteristics of the most profitable

Focusing specifically on the characteristics that differentiate high and low profitability companies our study identified a positive link with wellness. These companies have mentally and physically fit staff, lights that change their tone during the day, and even have the kind of culture that embraces the noise, social interaction and movement that having a ping pong table brings for the 7% of those that have them. Looking at the characteristics of innovative companies we see many different things coming into play compared to profitable companies, such as being encouraged to take fresh air regularly. There is only one characteristic shared between profitable and innovative companies: the availability of sit/stand desks. Highly productive and innovative companies share many more characteristics however (page 21). The ability to: breathe fresh air, enjoy quieter areas and private spaces; supportive digital tools; drinks fridges and healthy snacks and perhaps most importantly employees are consulted in how they want the space used. It is only in the most innovative companies that employees are given the flexibility to go home and finish tasks though. In practical terms, it is about a physical workplace that promotes and supports wellbeing, combined with a consultative and permissive management attitude.

Workplace practices that don’t make a difference

Conversely, the survey threw up a number of aspects that are the least likely differentiators between high and low performing companies (page 20). The two practices which were shown to make the least difference are desk sharing and having a clear desk policy.

“Empowering the user by giving them choices, such as being able to alternate between sitting and standing, is crucial.”

Tamsin Grosvenor
Senior Marketing Manager of EMEA
Humanscale
Swann at BDG points out that those businesses utilising desk sharing need to offer many ways of overcoming the distractions that accompany it. The benefits both for the business and the individual tend to be overlooked or are unknown to employees. Other facilities which are the least likely differentiators between high and low performing companies are: employees having their own desk, cycle parking, showers, and break-out or collaboration spaces. The implication of these findings may be that these elements have become too commonplace to make a difference. For example, having a place to park a bike or have a shower may now be an everyday staff expectation, irrespective of the type of workplace. Those working at different sites most days find more things highly distracting than those who work out of a single office. As this method of working becomes even more commonplace employers need to bear in mind that such staff have more workplace experiences to compare and contrast, and are likely to become even more demanding. “The common thread that runs through both nomadic employees and those working from a single location is the desire to ‘feel at home’,” says Blackwell at Bisley. “This can be resolved with increased or better personal space, and by personal storage available.” Swann at BDG points out that there is no one-size-fits-all blueprint for creating an amazing workplace. Doing so is based on the unique requirements of each company and its people. “Just because someone else is doing something and it works for them, it doesn’t mean it will work for you. Everything you do must have a genuine reason for being done - to help people to work better - otherwise it’s ineffective tokenism.” And if workplace design is not well-considered, it can have a negative impact on staff retention. Nearly half the respondents believe that workplace design has a notable impact on their decision to stay with an employer or not. So, importantly, business success comes with successful work environments. Or as Swann at BDG puts it: “Good work is more than just achieving tasks, it’s about wellness, the experience and human

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“Good work is more than just achieving tasks, it’s about wellness, the experience and human contribution.”

Andy Swann  
Change Maker  
BDG architecture + design

contribution. Workplaces need to be a platform to support all of this.” This opinion is supported by recent work from Imperial College London and Atkins which suggests that if all offices in the UK were upgraded and workplace productivity enhanced by 5-8% it could impact UK GDP by £12 billion to £20 billion (0.9%) (2).

Each business is unique
The study suggests that company productivity can be significantly enhanced if organisations learn from their most innovative and creative peers. Increasingly these leading companies are focusing as much on a healthy workplace culture as they are on the physical workspace. As the eminent Stanford University Professor James March said in 1988 “Organisations face a large number of problems of about equal importance, but only a few solutions. The chance of finding a solution to a particular problem is small”. So stimulating employees to think productively, looking at a problem from many perspectives to come up with a breadth of ideas, some of which are quite unconventional and often unique will be essential to enhance profitability.

“The common thread that runs through both nomadic employees and those working from a single location is the desire to ‘feel at home’.”

Richard Blackwell  
CEO: Bisley
Appendices:

1. Professor Cary Cooper drawing upon research from the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management’s annual Absence Management Report 2015

2. Applying design thinking to boost workplace productivity by 5-8 per cent could contribute up to £20 billion to GDP. However, this figure only takes into account absenteeism and sick leave. It does not include the cost of recruiting new people or the effects of presenteeism, due to the difficulties of collecting and validating this data. Calculations based on ONS Business estimates, Regional GVA Estimates, HSE and Land Registry data 2015 and Atkins research 2016.
Characteristics that make the difference:

The data does not imply that changing one of these characteristics will have a direct impact on your bottom line, that would be a huge and inaccurate over-simplification. It does suggest that introducing cumulative improvements in lighting, air quality, facilities, control over the physical space and culture can lead to an increase in profitability.

Businesses with these characteristics have a higher gross profit than those without them, the extent of which (i.e. uplift) is shown by the figure in green. E.g. Businesses with lights that change their tone have, on average a gross profit that is 39% higher than those without them.

1. Lights that change their tone as the day progresses. 39% ▲ profit
2. Have sit/stand or high level desks. 37% ▲ profit
3. Employees are physically fit. 34% ▲ profit
4. Employees are mentally fit. 30% ▲ profit
5. Workstations that encourage movement. 28% ▲ profit
6. Employees given the choice to sit or stand at work. 25% ▲ profit
7. Employees allowed to swap from sitting to standing and vice versa. 24% ▲ profit
8. Physical workspace flexibility with ability to reconfigure for needs. 24% ▲ profit
9. Employees given the chance to move to a noisier area or turn music up. 22% ▲ profit

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Top 10 differentiators of high and low innovation/creative companies:

Ordered by percentage point difference between companies with high innovation vs. low innovation.

Innovation & creativity levels as perceived by the employees, with high innovation companies scoring 6 or 7 out of 7, and low performing companies scoring 5 or below.

For example the survey shows that 43% of companies with high levels of innovation/creativity offer quiet working spaces to employees.

1. Employees are consulted over the way space used.  
   **High 34% ▲ Low 13% ▼**

2. Quiet working spaces available to employees.  
   **High 43% ▲ Low 23% ▼**

3. Employees are allowed to go home to finish work.  
   **High 38% ▲ Low 18% ▼**

4. Physical workspace is flexible to the needs of employees.  
   **High 41% ▲ Low 22% ▼**

5. Access to digital collaborative working tools.  
   **High 38% ▲ Low 20% ▼**

6. Staff encouraged to take breath of fresh air during work time.  
   **High 59% ▲ Low 41% ▼**

7. Access to a free drinks fridge.  
   **High 37% ▲ Low 20% ▼**

8. Workstations that promote healthy posture are available.  
   **High 35% ▲ Low 18% ▼**

9. Employees have access to sit/stand or high level desks.  
   **High 26% ▲ Low 9%▼**

10. Private spaces to work from are available.  
    **High 35% ▲ Low 19% ▼**
Characteristics that make the difference:

This shows the extent to which the top 10 differentiators of the three metrics Productivity, Profitability and Innovation & Creativity overlap.

The differentiators are identified by the strongest factors influencing better performance.

The only characteristics shared by all three key metrics is a company’s ability to flexibly reconfigure space and have healthy posture promoting workstations.

Characteristics of Productive and Innovative companies are more likely to be shared than characteristics of Productive and Profitable companies.
Top 10 differentiators of high and low productivity companies:

Ordered by percentage point difference between companies with high productivity vs. low productivity who have them.

Productivity levels as perceived by employees, with high productivity companies scoring 7 or 6 out of 7, and low performing companies scoring 5 or below.

For example the survey shows that 33% of highly productive companies provide employees with workstations that promote healthy posture.

1. Employees have access to quiet working areas.  
   **High 41% ▲ Low 21% ▼**

2. Staff encouraged to take breath of fresh air during work time.  
   **High 58% ▲ Low 39% ▼**

3. Physical workspace is flexible to the needs of employees.  
   **High 39% ▲ Low 21% ▼**

4. Employees have access to a free drinks fridge.  
   **High 36% ▲ Low 18% ▼**

5. Employees are consulted over the way space used.  
   **High 29% ▲ Low 12% ▼**

6. Employees encouraged to have a healthy snack during work.  
   **High 52% ▲ Low 35% ▼**

7. Workstations that promote healthy posture.  
   **High 33% ▲ Low 17% ▼**

8. Employees are able to look out of the window.  
   **High 47% ▲ Low 31% ▼**

9. Private spaces to work from are available.  
   **High 33% ▲ Low 18% ▼**

10. Employees have access to digital collaborative tools.  
    **High 32% ▲ Low 20% ▼**