How? Where? WELL!

APAC
GROWING AWARENESS AND ENHANCED TECHNOLOGIES HELP INTEGRATE WELLNESS INTO THE WORKPLACE AND HIGHLIGHT THE RESULTS
As awareness levels grow, wellness in the workplace is fast becoming a priority for landlords and tenants across Asia Pacific.

The discussion has evolved from ‘what’ wellness is and ‘why’ it is important to more practical concerns such as ‘how’ to effectively implement wellness designs, plan and launch wellness programmes, and quantify the benefits to employee and organisational performance.

Landlords and tenants should take a multi-stakeholder approach and combine technical factors with end-user feedback to build and enhance successful wellness programmes.

Technology and wellness have a conflicting relationship. On the one hand, there is a trend towards disconnection and a need to break free from technological distractions\(^1\) and, on the other, major advancements in technology are providing effective ways to bring elements of wellness into the workplace.
JOINING THE MAINSTREAM

Workplace wellness initiatives are gaining ground as proof of their benefits builds up.

Across Asia, wellness is now increasingly considered a key component of the employee experience. Millennials assign significant importance to wellness factors at work, and with this demographic projected to make up 75% of the global workforce by 2025 according to one study – this is something not to be ignored by leadership looking to recruit and retain top talent.

As the concept of wellness gains ground, companies are starting to measure and report on the links between wellness and financial performance, often through the reduction of employee absenteeism. In India, for example, estimates put savings from wellness initiatives alone at up to US$20 billion last year. In China, where healthcare costs could reach US$1 trillion by 2020, companies are moving aggressively to promote healthier workplaces.

It is no surprise then that the global wellness industry grew 12.8% from $3.7 trillion in 2015 to $4.2 trillion in 2017. As the discussion has moved on from what wellness is, or why it’s important, more practical considerations have arisen – such as where to start, how to succeed, and ways to quantify the benefits to employees and employers alike.
To maximise the efficacy of wellness initiatives, according to Victoria Gilbert, Associate Director, Wellness Consulting and Corporate Solutions, at Colliers International, an important initial step is to identify the baseline. Being able to understand the current performance of a working space, the organisation and the individuals within it provides essential data that can be used to create, manage or improve a wellness strategy.

“It’s crucial to create a wellness strategy that’s core to a business and its employees, and not just an add-on. This will help practitioners narrow the gap between the growing understanding of the field of wellness and effectively executing it,” Gilbert says.

Taking the time to acquire the buy-in of all stakeholders is also vital to the long-term success of wellness initiatives, according to Gilbert. It is critical that leadership is fully committed. As wellness is not confined to one area of a business, the creation of a cross-functional committee including facilities management, commercial real estate, human resources and information technology to oversee wellness efforts is often the best mechanism to secure broad-based support and extend the programme across an organisation.

For new buildings and fit-outs, both landlords and tenants should involve architects as well as office space designers in the conversation about wellness initiatives, and shift the focus of the discussion from costs to encouraging healthy behaviour, which can help produce positive long-term outcomes for all stakeholders. More frequent and effective communication between tenants and landlords also gives healthy building initiatives, such as indoor air quality improvements, a higher chance of success, points out Joelle Chen, Director, Global Partnerships & Marketing, OurAir at MANN+HUMMEL.

It is equally important that initiatives are communicated once implemented. One of the major benefits of creating healthy spaces is that they positively influence everyone who steps inside. Yet fundamentals such as clean air and appropriate lighting levels are not always readily visible to employees or tenants seeking new spaces. Using technology to help communicate wellness information, from ambient air quality to team activity levels can convey to the recipients that their best interests are being considered. For example, demonstrating low PM2.5 levels or indoor CO2 through air monitors and software platforms sends a powerful message to tenants and employees alike. Using mobile apps and display screens can provide such data in a continuous and readily accessible data way. Furthermore, pursuing wellness certifications such as WELL, Fitwel or RESET Air can demonstrate real commitment with the added benefit of third-party verification.
DEVELOPMENTS IN PRACTICE

With new technologies come new wellness possibilities.

Technological advancements have emerged as a key element of wellness infrastructure, straddling such areas as:

**SPACE**

The emergence of more accurate air quality solutions are enhancing adoption rates across Asia, especially in China and India where air quality is a major concern. Emphasising the importance of air filters to wellness initiatives, Chen notes: “We drink on average three liters of water a day, but we breathe up to 15,000 liters of air every day. People don’t actually realise it but the impact of air quality on health is big.”

**ORGANISATION**

As spaces are being designed with wellness in mind and leveraging new technologies, there is a need for wellness programmes to follow suit. Colliers research demonstrates that only 54% of companies in Hong Kong have a robust wellness programme in place to support employees, so there is certainly more to be done. However, some companies are seeing the advantages of expanding programmes that traditionally only focus on physical wellness to include other elements of wellness such as mental health. Mindfulness and lifestyle assessment specialist ByoBeat’s programme is one example, measuring employees’ heart rate variations over a 72-hour period to identify sources of stress.

**INDIVIDUAL**

Improved hardware such as wearable devices motivate employees to enhance their fitness as well as enable tailored solutions to regularly monitor their health. New AI-powered virtual wallets provided by companies such as CXA Group can come loaded with access to services aimed at preventing workplace health issues in the first place, rather than treating them when they arise.

“There are so many technology tools that help people be more aware,” says Chelsea Perino, managing director of global marketing and communications at The Executive Centre, a premium flexible workspace provider with locations across Asia Pacific, India, Sri Lanka and the Middle East. She highlights wearable devices that remind employees to get out of their seats more frequently, take a moment of mindfulness, or simply drink enough water to avoid dehydration.
BUILDING BLOCKS

Embedding wellness features such as double-height windows and green spaces into workspace design enhances commercial outcomes, as well as the health of occupants.

Landlords are adopting new building technologies and design features such as double-height windows and exterior glazing that allow in natural light, incorporating green spaces, which research shows helps enhance employee health while lowering energy bills.

Features such as stairways in the middle of the office can also help attract larger tenants who prefer the flexibility of expanding into multiple levels in a building, and want to encourage people to move more throughout the day – a key principle of achieving wellness. Colliers research demonstrates that these features are at the forefront of workplace conversations, as air quality, natural light and recreational space are all key drivers of relocation decisions in markets such as Hong Kong.

One such landlord is The Executive Centre, which offers features such as ergonomic chairs and standing desks, a result of research into occupier needs that put employee health foremost.

“We create a space and an experience for our members that makes them feel comfortable and allows them to be more productive,” Perino says. “This creates a positive relationship, both between our team and our members and between the members themselves, which in turn better facilitates business collaborations and growth, and that’s our main goal. The market is saturated right now so creating an environment that entices people to stay longer is really important, and of course longer retention positively impacts our bottom line.”
Wellness impacts should be assessed through a balanced mix of tech-enabled indicators and employee feedback.

Once wellness infrastructure or initiatives are in place, companies are keen to measure them. While the push for wellness is growing thanks to positive linkages to profitability, employee satisfaction and productivity, the direct benefits to businesses have often been difficult to quantify.

The good news is that there are a growing number of tools – such as real-time indoor air quality monitors, mobile platforms, and scientifically designed guidelines, checklists and scorecards – that enable the more effective assessment of programmes and their impact on corporate bottom lines over time. Furthermore, the Global Real Estate Sustainability Benchmark (GRESB), which introduced a Health and Wellbeing module, is in the third year of evaluating “how property companies and funds are promoting health and well-being in their internal operations and through the real estate products and services they offer to customers.”

ByoBeat is working on another model to help companies measure RoI by correlating lower health scores with higher employee-associated costs. ByoBeat founder Rachael Lau also points to technological developments in neuropsychology, which are helping develop devices to monitor behaviour in ways that was not possible until recently. One example is a cutting-edge approach to picking up signals from the brain and heart in tandem to examine the impact of workplace stress on employees’ mental and physical health.

However, while technology is a big help in gauging outcomes, according to Lau, employee feedback should be considered an even more crucial indicator in developing meaningful wellness initiatives. “It’s great we can use technology to measure everything,” she says. “But we shouldn’t lose the human element, and the element of trust in our bodies’ ability to communicate to us what is working and what isn’t.”

Indeed, metrics based on human feedback can be especially valuable for landlords, as they might provide insight on the likely duration of a company’s tenancy. As Perino puts it: “The retention rate is the biggest long-term indicator of whether or not the initiatives that we are putting into place are having an impact. If you don’t like the space, you’re going to leave. There are other places you can go.” Therefore seeking a baseline understanding becomes even more important for employers and landlords alike.

There is no question wellness will only become more integral to the workplace as technological advancements continue to extend the possibilities and ease the implementation of fresh initiatives, as well as better measure their efficacy in terms of improved health, productivity and financial performance.

Those landlords and tenants that act early to prioritise effective assessment of programmes while considering the human element at their core – including management buy-in and employee participation – will be cultivating a clear source of competitive advantage in the highly competitive markets for property and talent.
A SIX-STEP PATH TO WELLNESS SUCCESS

1. Define a baseline
2. Set targets, define a budget and acquire management buy-in
3. Create a cross-functional wellness committee
4. Identify key technologies that can support the strategy across space, organisation and individual
5. Communicate – use technology to promote and measure benefits
6. Evaluate performance by analysing metrics and continuously soliciting feedback
12. https://fitwel.org/resources
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