



Whitepaper:

# Designing wellbeing into your workplace

# wellbeing

in British English

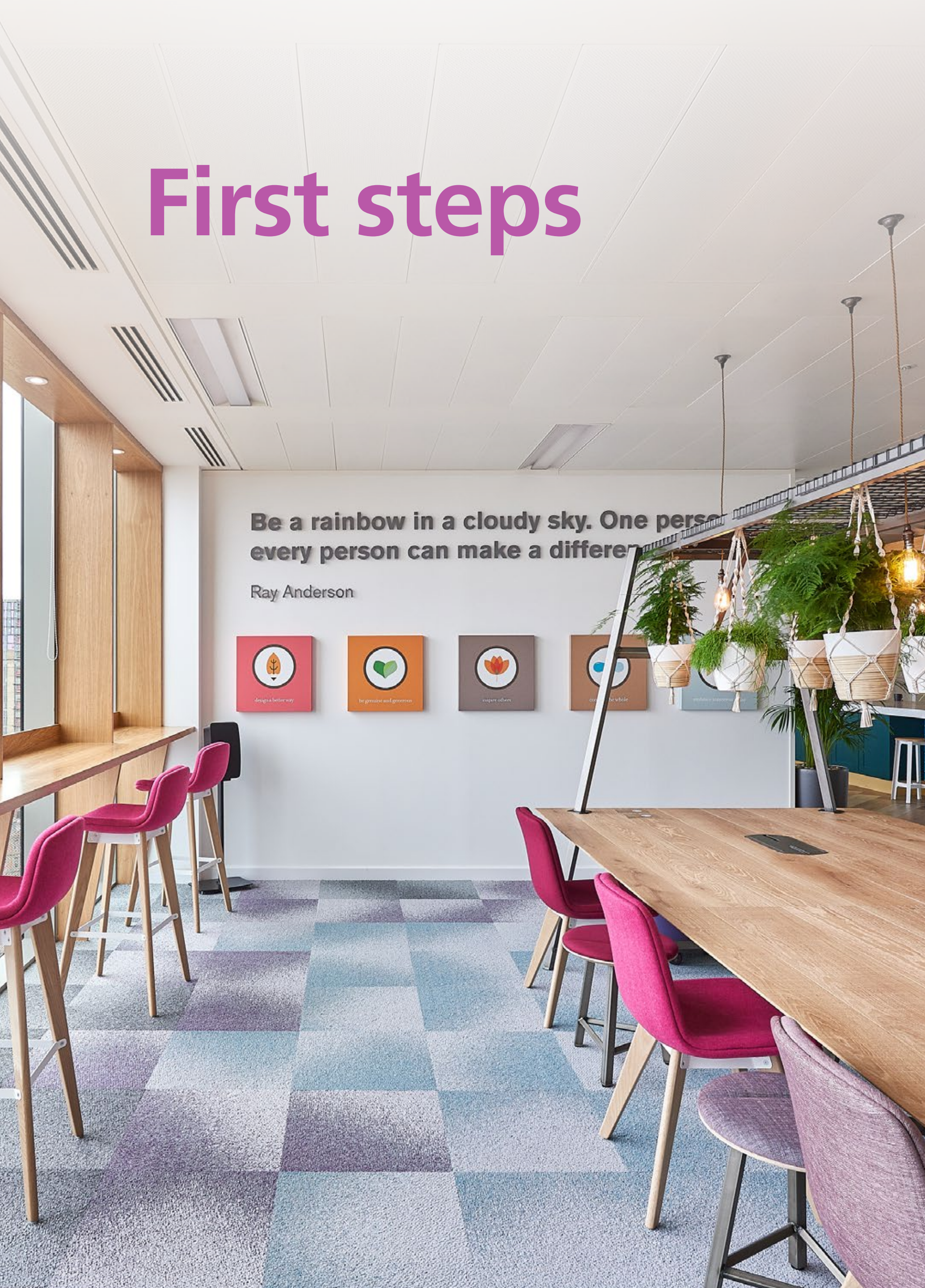
(ˈwɛlˈbiːɪŋ)

**NOUN**

**the condition of being contented,  
healthy, or successful; welfare**

Never before has there been a greater focus on the wellbeing of employees in the workplace. The reasons for this focus are numerous; from maximising staff productivity, to attracting the best talent, and the increasingly vocal demand from staff for an environment that benefits their wellbeing. Even more so, following a period of working from home for many people, employers are looking to ensure that the workplace is appealing for people to return to as well as being safe and healthy. Whatever the reasons behind your interest in workplace wellbeing, we hope that this short guide will give you a flavour for where to start, and what can be achieved: whether you are considering making incremental improvements or carrying out a full office fit out.

# First steps



## What are your **motives** for reviewing wellbeing in your workplace?

Examples include:

- Attracting staff
- Retaining staff
- Fostering creativity/innovation
- Increasing productivity
- Reduce absenteeism/presenteeism
- Lower costs
- CSR policy

## What **data** do you already have available, or what information could you collect to indicate current levels of wellbeing?

Examples include:

- Staff surveys
- Staff interviews
- Reviewing causes of workplace absence
- Stakeholder consultation groups

## Are there particular aspects of workplace wellbeing that you want to **focus** on?

This tends to be driven by your **motives** and the **data** available on the successes and failures of your current workplace in meeting the wellbeing needs of its staff.

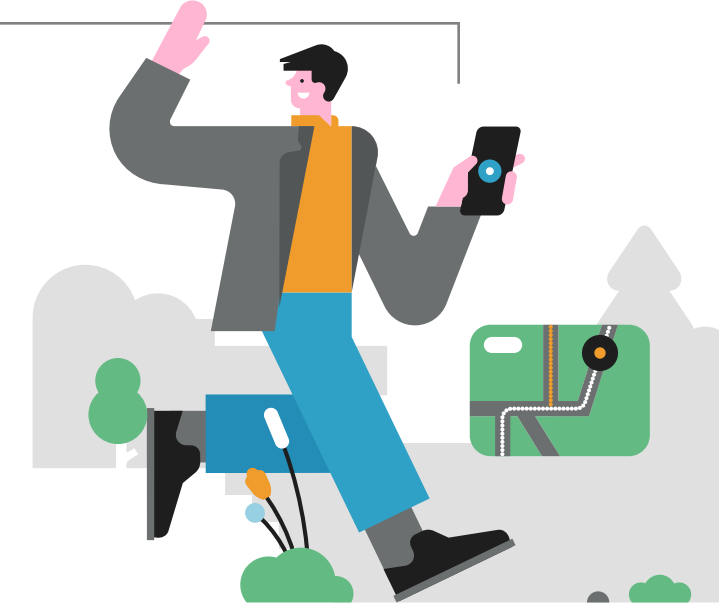
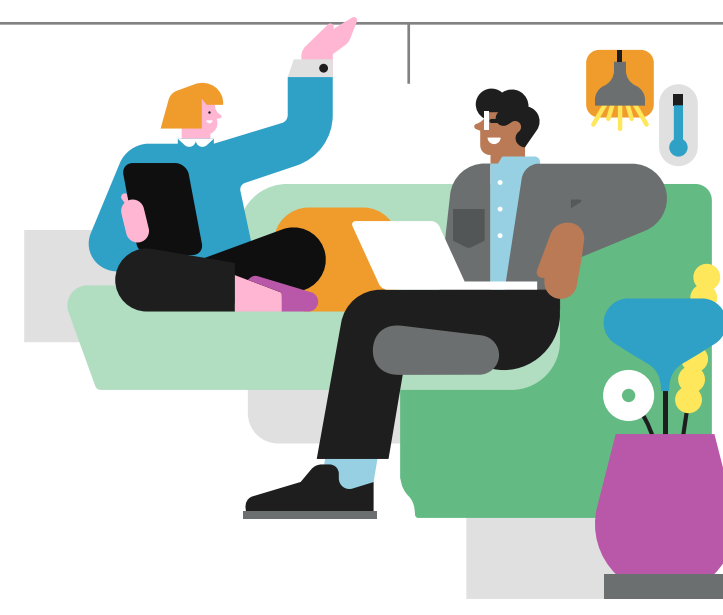
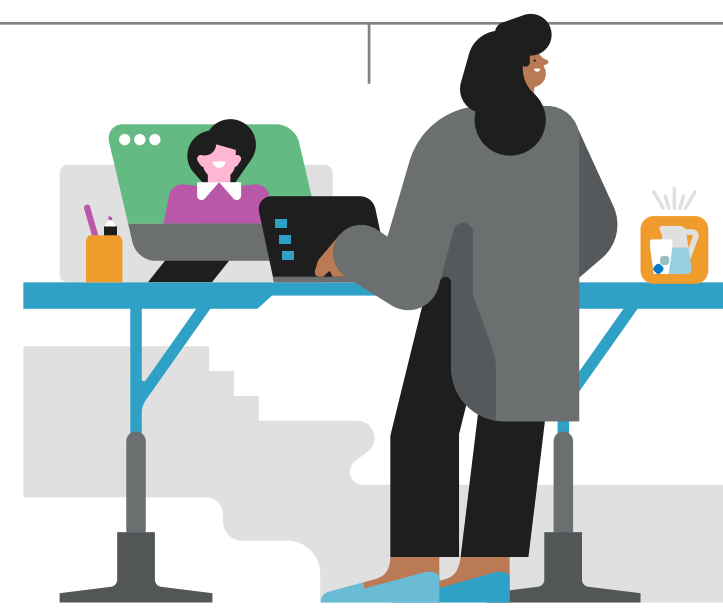
## How will you measure your results and continue to **review and improve**?

Based on the data you have available, agree to collect further comparable data once individual changes have been made or after a workplace fit out or refurbishment has been undertaken.

## How will you **communicate changes** to staff?

We are creatures of habit. So for many people, change is resisted; they may even prefer imperfect conditions because they are predictable and therefore feel safe. Changes, particularly significant ones such as a full office refurbishment or office move, need to be carefully managed so that staff are excited rather than anxious about their new space. Demonstrating how changes have been made to tackle existing issues, as well as drawing attention to aspects of the workplace which serve to enhance employee wellbeing will be valuable in ensuring changes are well received. Your designers should work with you to summarise how the workplace has been planned to benefit staff wellbeing and solve any existing issues.

# wellbeing



## Environment

- Temperature and humidity
- Light
  - Circadian rhythm
  - Glare
  - Reflectance
- Flexability of spaces
- Biophilic design
- Cleanability
- Air quality
- Sustainability
  - Responsible sourcing
- Colour and contrast
- Acoustic comfort

## Physical

- Exercise
  - Encouraging standing, walking and stair use
  - Active furniture
  - Gamification
  - Exercise facilities
  - Active commuting
- Illness
  - Workplace adaptations
  - Ergonomics
  - Recovery
  - Pain
- Lifestyle
  - Aligned
- Nutrition
- Accessibility
- Nursing mothers
- First aid
- Hydration

## Social

- Workplace culture
- Collaboration
- Privacy
- Community
  - Volunteering
  - Belonging
  - Connection
- Relationships
  - Friends
  - Colleagues
  - Family
  - Manager

## Psychological

- Stress
  - Strategies
  - Prevention
  - Support
- Rest
  - Breaks
  - Relaxation areas
  - Sleep
  - Holiday
- Purpose
  - Aligned
- Learning
  - Library and online resources
  - Continuous
- Autonomy

Wellbeing is multifaceted, and numerous aspects can be considered when designing a workplace to promote the wellbeing of your staff. While the scheme that suits your workplace will be dependent on your unique situation, we have described some of our favorite design solutions to promote wellbeing on the following pages. Such improvements can positively influence staff wellbeing as well as provide measurable benefits to an organisation's bottom line.

# Environment



**Air quality** is a complex topic, with a number of different solutions to air quality issues depending on the type and source of the pollution. Sources include polluted air from outside the building, the materials within the building and even people themselves. The impact on wellbeing will be dictated by the level and type of pollution, and could affect peoples physical health and even cognitive performance.

## Design solutions:

- Demand controlled ventilation which increases fresh air supply to control CO<sub>2</sub> levels
- Ultraviolet germicidal irradiation (UVGI) treatment of air to destroy microorganisms which could spread infectious diseases
- Selecting air filters appropriate to the external air pollution level in the building's location
- Careful selection of glues, paints, furniture and furnishings to ensure these do not negatively impact air quality
- Dedicated mechanical extracts for areas such as toilets, cleaning stores and printer areas
- Plants and living walls to naturally filter internal air



At CO<sub>2</sub> levels of 1,400 ppm **cognitive performance** (the ability to think) **drops by an average of 50%** compared to optimal indoor levels of 600ppm.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal College of Physicians has estimated that **air pollution is responsible for more than 20,000 hospital admissions a year** due to respiratory or cardiovascular diseases.<sup>2</sup>

1. Allen et al. Associations of Cognitive Function Scores with Carbon Dioxide, Ventilation, and Volatile Organic Compound Exposures in Office Workers (2016)

2. Royal College of Physicians Reducing air pollution in the UK: progress report, London (2018)

**Acoustic comfort** is another aspect of the workplace which needs to be carefully designed to ensure staff have optimal conditions for concentration, collaboration and privacy. It's a balancing act to ensure that spaces minimise noise distractions, while still allowing for clear conversations to be had between colleagues, while at the same time ensuring its also not too quiet.

**Design solutions:**

- Provide a variety of work environments for different activities
- Phone booths/private rooms
- Collaboration spaces
- Acoustic partitions suited to the use of the room and privacy level required
- Careful consideration of hard and soft finishes to suit the needs of the space, i.e. privacy/quiet focused work, or clarity of speech/collaboration
- Sound masking solutions to mask unwanted sounds which could otherwise cause distraction



Occupant surveys administered by CBRE typically find that **acoustics** is the **leading source of workplace dissatisfaction**.<sup>3</sup>

Distracting noise can result in up to **66% reduction in productivity**.<sup>4</sup>



3. CBRE Speech Privacy in Office Environments (2007)

4. Banbury SP. and Berry DC. Disruption of office-related tasks by speech and office noise (1998)

**Light** is typically used to create the right atmosphere in different areas of a workplace. Light conditions need to be appropriate for the type of work being carried out and can help staff feel awake and focused. In addition to these basic requirements, the significant benefits from natural light can also be capitalized on with a design that focuses on maximizing access to natural light for employees. Glare from sunlight or light fittings can also be a significant source of distraction for employees, so this must be considered during the design process.

#### Design solutions:

- Solar glare control in the form of blinds
- Selection of light fittings which minimise glare
- Orientating desks to avoid solar glare
- Maximising the use of natural daylight
- Carefully selecting lighting that is appropriate in its intensity and colour temperature
- Lighting that supports the body's circadian cycle, or 'sleep-wake cycle'



**Glare** from sunlight through windows can **decrease employee performance** by as much as 21%.<sup>5</sup>

Various studies have demonstrated a clear link between **increasing natural light and decreasing absenteeism**.<sup>6</sup>

Office workers with windows received **173% percent more white light** exposure during work hours, and **slept an average of 46 minutes more per night**.<sup>7</sup>

5. California Energy Commission Windows and Offices: A Study of Office Worker Performance and the Indoor Environment (2003)
6. L. Edwards and P. Torcellini A Literature Review of the Effect of Natural Light on Building Occupants (2002)
7. Chueng Impact of workplace daylight exposure on sleep, physical activity, and quality of life. (2013)





# Physical

**Nutrition & hydration** may not be areas you think you can influence as an employer if you don't provide a staff canteen. However, many workplaces can still influence these areas, through encouraging healthy eating and minimising over-consumption.

## Design solutions:

- Adequate provision of seating away from work areas for breaks and meals
- Adequate refrigeration and cupboard space for staff to bring in or freshly prepare food
- Provision of filtered tap water



A reduction in dehydration levels of as little as **2%** of body weight can influence mood, lead to greater feelings of **fatigue and reduced levels of alertness**.<sup>8</sup>

Eating at your desk or 'dining al desko' could be affecting your weight. **Lack of focus can lead to overconsumption and lack of satisfaction** at the end of your meal.<sup>9</sup>

8. Benton D & Young HA Do small differences in hydration status affect mood and mental performance? (2015)

9. Forza supplements Eating al desko makes you fat (2013)



**Exercise** facilities are a fantastic staff benefit if you have the space to provide them. However there are other ways to increase levels of activity in your workplace without having to invest in a fully fitted-out gym. Look for small ways to increase every-day activity for staff and how spaces and furniture can be used flexibly to allow them to be used for exercise before or after work.

**Design solutions:**

- Refurbishing existing staircases and promoting their use
- Installing a new central staircase for multi-floor offices
- Sit-stand desks
- Games areas
- Shower, locker and changing facilities for staff who run or cycle to work
- Multi-use rooms with storage for exercise equipment such as yoga mats



Employees who spent **2.5 hours a week** being physically active were more satisfied with the **quantity and quality of their work**, and took less sick time than employees who did not engage in physical activity.<sup>10</sup>

**Sit-down meetings** are, on average, **34% longer** than stand-up ones.<sup>11</sup>

Standing desks appear to increase productivity. A study in **a call centre** found those at **standing desks** were **23% more successful in handling calls initially**, and 53% more successful after 6 months.<sup>12</sup>

10. Schwartz et al. Employee Self-rated Productivity and Objective Organizational Production Levels (2011)

11. Bluedorn et al. Effects of Sitting and Standing Meeting Formats on Meeting Outcomes (2009)

12. Garrett et al. Call Center Productivity Over 6 Months Following a Standing Desk Intervention (2015)



# Social

Being part of a **community** is a fundamental human need, and can help us feel supported, connected to others and ultimately, happier. However, a sense of community both within a workplace and the wider local area is perhaps more under threat than ever with the recent increase in working from home. While workplace design cannot create this on its own, it can help support organisational strategies to increase this feeling amongst staff.



## Design solutions:

- Consider integrating local history and architecture in your office design
- Create flexible spaces to allow regular townhall-style meetings
- Consider how the local community might be able to benefit from the office e.g. allowing evening use of a meeting room for a community group
- Use of colour, pattern and texture to give spaces an identity that reflects the company brand
- Create areas to encourage chance interactions between colleagues
- Install artwork or other objects of interest to encourage discussion amongst staff



Those who have a **best friend at work** are **seven times as likely to be engaged in their jobs**, are better at engaging customers, produce higher quality work, have higher wellbeing, and are less likely to get injured on the job.<sup>13</sup>

58% of staff report that their workplace contributes to a sense of community. In high performing Leesman+ certified workplaces, that figure jumps to 72% agreement. This suggests that **high performance positively correlates with sense of community**.<sup>14</sup>

13. Rath, T. Vital friends: The people you can't afford to live without. New York: Gallup Press (2006)

14. Leesman Study Community Spirited Infrastructure (2016)



# Psychological

**Regular rest** and breaks from the desk should be encouraged. This not only reduces the risk of eye strain and muskularseletal problems, but also gives staff the opportunity to reduce mental fatigue, boost brain function and prevent stress.

## Design solutions:

- Rest and relaxation areas/breakout spaces
- Sleep pods
- Library areas
- Layout and wayfinding to encourage people to get up and move around to use facilities such as toilets and tea points
- Providing access to external terraces/balconies
- Biophilic design/increasing staff interaction with nature and natural elements



A **nap of just 26 minutes** can boost **productivity** by as much as **34%** and increase **alertness** by **54%**.<sup>15</sup>

There is significant, **positive correlation** between **nature contact and stress** and nature contact and general health complaints.<sup>16</sup>

Providing employees with **napping pods or offering extended breaks** can improve their productivity by **counteracting impulsive behaviour and boosting tolerance for frustration**.<sup>17</sup>

15. Rosekind et al. Alertness management: strategic naps in operational setting (1995)

16. Lan et al. Effects of thermal discomfort in an office on perceived air quality, SBS symptoms, physiological responses, and human performance. (2011)

17. Goldschmied et al. Napping to modulate frustration and impulsivity: A pilot study (2015)



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