WORKING WELL

WELLBEING IN THE CREATIVE WORKPLACE

CREATIVE REVIEW

British Land

Introduction

Welcome to Creative Review and British Land's special report on wellbeing in the creative workplace. In this document we present the findings of our extensive survey on wellbeing and look at some of the latest thinking in this area.

Wellbeing is now an important part of contemporary business practice and – following our survey results – we hear from British Land's Mike Wiseman and Matt Webster about how creative companies have been leading the way in its development since the early 2000s.

We then feature highlights from the wellbeing roundtable we hosted earlier this year, with input from a range of companies from Framestore to DentsuAegis on how they ensure wellbeing is a part of their creative work day-to-day. One relatively new area which has shown significant impact on wellbeing is 'biophilic' design and we look at some of the work Oliver Heath has been doing to bring nature into the workplace; before examining the importance of establishing a good office culture – and how the workplace environment can act as a foundation for this.

As you'll see from the survey and our features, the design of our working environment can directly benefit both our levels of creativity and our happiness in the workplace. And if you would like to know more about about British Land's own approach to wellbeing, visit the Office Agenda website at officeagenda.britishland.com.

Mark Sinclair,
Deputy editor,
Creative Review

Facing page: Canal side at Paddington Central. Photo by Barry Willis

Foreword

Today, as consumers we have more choice than ever before – from what we buy and how we buy it, to where and how we work. It's therefore not surprising that, as the lines between work and life become increasingly blurred, people are looking for more from their workplaces. Wellbeing is rising up the agenda for the modern office worker.

Employees are prepared to move to find the right working environment, and one thing's for sure: the place they'll be spending time working in plays a significant role in their decision-making. The quality of the physical environment has become a key tool to attract and retain key talent.

Our vision at British Land is to create Places People Prefer. Places influence how their inhabitants feel, behave and interact, and we put wellbeing science and research into practice to create places that help people feel happier and healthier, places where they want to work and spend time, places where they're productive. Ultimately, the beauty of being in an environment where wellbeing measures are designed in – both inside and outside the office – is that people benefit simply by going to work.

We are delighted to support Creative Review in exploring wellbeing in the creative workplace – an environment with a very particular set of demands and needs. We hope you enjoy this report.

Tim Roberts,
Head of Offices,
British Land

Survey findings

Just over half of our respondents (53%) said they worked mainly in 'design', with 14% citing 'advertising' and 33% 'another creative area'. Half of those who took our survey (52%) were aged between 30 and 49, while those aged 18-29 represented 39% of participants, with the 50+ age group making up 9%.

The split was almost exactly 50/50 men and women, with a diverse spread of experience and seniority levels throughout. Those in 'assistant', 'executive' and 'junior manager' roles represented 46% of respondents; those in a 'senior executive' or 'manager' roles represented 30%; while 'senior managers' and 'directors' accounted for 24% of our survey's participants.

Geographically, around one third of those who took our survey were based outside of the UK – the rest were UK-based, with just under one third of participants saying they worked in London.

IN WHAT KIND OF WORKSPACE DO YOU DO YOUR BEST WORK? TOP TEN MOST COMMON ANSWERS

26%
Open

16%
Light

15%
Quiet

9%
Collaborative

9%
Relaxed

7%
Inspiring

6%
Clean

5%
Music on

4%
Private

3%
Colourful

THE CREATIVE WORKSPACE

In terms of the ways in which a workspace can aid creativity, the results from our survey suggest that there is room from improvement. While 44% of respondents said that their workspace was 'fairly conducive' and 13% 'very conducive', 43% said that where they worked was either 'not very' or 'not at all' conducive to creativity. However, our participants did reveal that they were aware of a correlation between improvements in workplace design and the quality of work produced – only 12% didn't see a link between the two, while a substantial 88% of participants did.

Overwhelmingly, the most commonly cited word used by participants when asked to describe the workplace conditions in which they did their best work was "open". While there were a few detractors to the open-plan office approach, the word came up frequently alongside other comparable descriptors, such as "spacious" or "airy".

"Light" and "quiet" were the next most cited words that described the ideal work setting. "Relaxed" was also frequent in the list, as was "inspiring", with some participants citing a need for "colourful" décor and artwork on the walls, books and other resources on hand for visual inspiration. "Music" was also seen as important to several respondents, used within both quiet or more lively contexts.

ARE YOU FULL-TIME, PART-TIME OR FREELANCE?

1. *Full-time (83%)*
2. *Part-time (5%)*
3. *Freelance (12%)*

IN WHAT TYPE OF OFFICE DO YOU SPEND THE MAJORITY OF YOUR TIME?

1. *Employer's office (77%)*
2. *Co-working space (11%)*
3. *Work from home (12%)*

Survey findings

IF THE DESIGN OF YOUR WORKPLACE IMPROVED, WOULD IT IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF YOUR WORK?

1. *Definitely (42%)*
2. *Probably (46%)*
3. *Probably not (11%)*
4. *Definitely not (1%)*

HOW CONDUCIVE TO CREATIVITY WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT WORKSPACE?

1. *Very (13%)*
2. *Fairly (44%)*
3. *Not very (35%)*
4. *Not at all (8%)*

FLEXIBILITY IS KEY

Overall, many people cited access to a mixture of spaces as being important for enabling different kinds of working – from individual, focused work, to more collaborative group work. A flexible workspace was seen as desirable. "For initial ideas, planning etc; a lively, shared workspace that allows for collaboration," wrote one participant. "For execution; quiet and solitude."

Many respondents saw the advantages in a structure summed up in this comment: "Open plan with break out areas, quiet rooms, meeting rooms. Variety is key." A handful of respondents suggested that they prefered to move around the space itself, according to what stage of a particular project they were working on: "I also like to be able to move around, [sit] at different desk/settings as my roles change i.e. research/admin/design creation/finishing artwork," said one. "A mixture of [lively] and quiet spaces. Being able to take myself between the two is very important," said another of their ideal.

Some respondents were very specific in relation to the kind of lighting that provided the best working environment for them, from "good natural light but not glaring sun" to "natural light (north facing windows) not lit from above".

WELLBEING FACTORS, RATED AS EITHER 'VERY' OR 'FAIRLY' IMPORTANT

97%
How treated by manager or employer

96%
The physical environment within place of work

95%
Ease of travel to workplace

92%
Ability to flex time

90%
Contractual benefits and renumeration

89%
Geographical location of workplace

87%
Ability to flex where working/tasks performed

84%
Ability to stay fit and do exercise

THE PROVISION OF WELLBEING

Of those surveyed, 51% felt that their workplace supported their overall feeling of wellbeing – 34% did not feel their workplace did this. Furthermore, while 39% of participants felt that their employer encouraged them to look after their health, when asked if their employer actively provided a wellbeing programme, just 31% said theirs did with 45% claiming this was not encouraged at their place of work.

OFFICE AMBIENCE & NOISE

Another series of statements aimed to examine the ambient conditions people experienced in their workplace and how this affects wellbeing. 41% agreed with the statement that their workplace was 'normally around the right temperature' while 50% felt that their place of work felt 'stuffy a lot of the time'. Only 39% of those surveyed said they were able to adjust the temperature of their working environment.

In terms of noise levels, 53% said they felt it was hard to concentrate because of the noise in their workplace, while 50% also stated that their place of work did not have places set aside for 'quiet, focused work' (41% did say that their workplace enabled this). Daylight was also in abundance, with 70% of those surveyed reporting that there was 'plenty' of it where they worked.

HOT DESK OR NOT DESK?

Focusing on desk culture and the space in which people did the majority of their work, 85% said that they spent most of their working day at an assigned desk. Conversely, only 10% of participants said that they 'hot desk' (73% said they didn't at all). While many reported that they would ideally like a more 'open' space (see responses on the previous spread), in fact only 39% of respondents felt that they felt 'crammed into' their workplace. 47% said that 'breakout spaces' were available where they worked, while 41% said there were not.

In terms of personal health and fitness, 69% of people reported that they had the opportunity to take the stairs in their place of work (only 13% said this wasn't an option); while 48% of people said that they looked for opportunities to exercise during the day.

NATURE & LOCATION

When it comes to access to the natural world within the workplace, it seems that many of the people surveyed have little to no contact with plants. While 52% said that they could see 'trees/nature' from their office window, in the building itself the proximity to nature changed dramatically – only 30% of respondents said that there were 'lots of plants' in their workspace.

72% of people said they had an 'easy commute' to their office. While nearby events (concerts and street food pop-ups etc) were enjoyed by 44% of respondents, 66% of people felt they had access to a wide variety of shops, restaurants, bars and cafes, with an impressive 69% of those asked saying that there was 'green space/outdoor space' to relax in near to their office.

More general environmental questions resulted in just 36% of people saying that their workspace had been designed as a space that was comfortable to be in; 45% of people believed that the workplace reflected their employer's overall brand; while just 43% felt proud to show off their office to visitors (39% were not).

CONCLUSIONS

It's clear from our survey that the influence the workplace has on wellbeing and concomitant levels of creativity is significant. One commenter summed up their ideal environment by saying they worked best in "an open office, with creativity flowing through it." Another concluded that "any environment you enjoy being in will see you work better". There is a clear desire for flexible spaces, driven in part by the recognition that different kinds of creative work will require (and benefit from) spaces that are suited to the task in hand. Quiet spaces for concentration; open, more lively areas for collaboration.

More than three-quarters of the people we surveyed saw a link between the design of the space and how productive they were. And while the physical environment is key to wellbeing, also of importance to virtually all of our respondents was how they were treated by their employers – this was deemed to be one of the top factors relating to wellbeing in the workplace. Unsurprisingly, it's the people that can often make the place for many of us.

British Land's Mike Wiseman and Matt Webster discuss the impact that wellbeing can have on the creative workplace – and the various methods companies can use to ensure they create a positive, healthy environment for staff

How to be well at work

**"I LIKE TO THINK OF A WORKPLACE THAT'S DESIGNED FOR WELLBEING AS A PLATFORM AND A FOUNDATION FOR PEOPLE"
MATT WEBSTER**

CR: What do you understand wellbeing to mean in the workplace?
Mike Wiseman: Wellbeing in the workplace is all about creating an environment for staff to be happier and to be healthier – and therefore be more productive.
Matt Webster: I like to think of a workplace that's designed for wellbeing as a platform and a foundation for people, so you can provide the right environment to allow [them] to perform at their best.

CR: Are there any particular industries where thinking about wellbeing took hold first?
Mike: Without question the leaders in thinking about wellbeing in the workplace were the creative industries. The first memory I've got of a workplace where wellbeing was at the heart and got widely talked about was when Google moved to Belgrave House in 2004. They had beanbags and ping pong tables and food and drink in the workplace. I don't think at that time they framed it as being about wellbeing, but it was clearly about having a happy workforce and about recruitment and retention.
Matt: The creative industry is a knowledge economy. So [when] you continually need to be inspired, have good ideas and collaborate with colleagues, then workplace design can really help to facilitate that. You've got invisible elements – noise, air quality, light – and then

the visible elements, that's the workplace look and feel, the colour scheme. But then there's something else around social infrastructure – designing in opportunities for people to have incidental meetings as well as formal collaborations.

CR: What questions do creative businesses in particular ask around wellbeing when they're looking for new office space? How have these demands changed?
Mike: What we tend to hear are concerns about recruitment, retention and talent and those being right at the top of their agenda as drivers for the moves they're making. So the particular features that are of interest [are] things like terraces, outdoor space, access to communal space within the buildings, the quality of the environment within the building and outside the building, the sort of facilities that we can provide.
Cycling is huge – the sort of provision that people demand now for cycle facilities has changed the way we design buildings. We no longer have basement space for anything else other than cycle facilities.
I think part of this is to do with the changing perception of 'work/life balance'. It's sort of an outdated concept now and there's greater recognition that work and life are more intertwined; it's not so much about coming to work at nine, leaving at five, [but] different working hours and different practices and a much

closer relationship between work and life.
Matt: I always phrase it as 'why work somewhere when you can work anywhere?'. We now have the technology, you've got the rise in flexible working policies, working from home, you can be located in a cafe – so what is it about your central workplace that is going to attract your staff there, engage them and help them to perform at their best day in day out?
When companies need their people collaborating on projects together, then the workspace should be the venue to do that. It's almost that the workplace is acting as an extension of the culture of that organisation, so it reflects how they do things, how they want to operate and also their brand. It helps with retaining staff but also with attracting new staff to their organisation.

CR: How can outside spaces and a building's surroundings affect wellbeing?
Matt: The spaces between buildings are often the overlooked element of this. We've spent a great deal of time at British Land [looking at our] central London campuses. We get to curate and design the environment 'between' buildings. It has a real benefit to our customers: you get to enliven spaces through events and create a sense of community amongst building occupiers, give them a place of meaning and sense of belonging to their work location.

We've also thought about how we can improve mental health – with links to 'biophilia'. As humans we have an innate connection to nature and studies have shown that daily interaction, or passing by, greenery reduces stress, can help alleviate depression, it improves cognitive performance and promotes pro-social feelings so you feel more engaged and more likely to interact with your colleagues.

CR: People want a lively space with energy, but there's a worry about distraction and the ability to focus on a task. How do you deal with that tension when you have to design a workspace?
Matt: There's a better understanding now of the roles people perform and the tasks they need to complete – and it's about providing this variety of workspaces so people have a choice of where and how they work, whether they want to interact or not. We often use the phrase 'convene to collaborate and isolate to concentrate' – so you do need this mix of different task-based spaces.

CR: What do you think is the biggest challenge around wellbeing that employers are facing today?
Mike: This is on everyone's agenda now. It was just Google a few years ago, but organisations are all doing it now across all sectors. The bar's getting raised and so to differentiate yourself as an employer becomes harder.

Discussion

As creative workplaces respond to new thinking in wellbeing, what trends and challenges are they encountering? CR's recent roundtable invited several companies to share how they're making their workplace better – here are our highlights from the discussion

Wellbeing and creativity

FLEXIBILITY IS AT THE HEART OF MAINTAINING WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE. GIVING PEOPLE CHOICES SEEMS TO INCREASE BOTH THEIR HAPPINESS AND POTENTIAL

Below from left: Alexandra Maclean Marketing Content & Campaigns Director, British Land; Matthew Hook, Chief Strategy Officer, DentsuAegis; Oliver Heath, Oliver Heath Design; Lee Schuneman, Studio Head, Microsoft Lift London; Patrick Burgoyne, Editor, CR; Amy Hockley, Leasing Director, British Land; Matt Webster, Head of Wellbeing and Futureproofing, British Land; Araceli Camargo, Director, Lab, The Centric Lab; John McElgunn, Partner, Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners; Juliette Morgan, Head of Campus, Regent's Place, British Land; Sir William Sargent, Co-Founder, Framestore; Nicola Forristal, UK Group Chief People Officer, Havas UK

Early in the conversation, British Land Leasing Director Amy Hockley stressed the importance of recognising that people want more than just a building from their office space – British Land also owns and curates outdoor space across its three London campuses, such as its 'pocket parks' at Paddington Central. For Matt Webster, the company's Head of Wellbeing and Futureproofing, a new location is rarely a completely blank space, as there will always be an existing community to become a part of. British Land's Paddington Central redevelopment, for example, is the first site where the company has applied its wellbeing principles, he said. "Sociability" comes into play here, Webster added, as one of the biggest indicators of wellbeing is the absence of "social isolation". Daily contact with friends and family – and even incidental contact with strangers – can be a real boost.

So the question is how can this be encouraged in the workplace? If companies can introduce those kinds of encounters, if they can "slow people down", even encourage eye contact then the benefits can be numerous. A new staircase in British Land's own building was brought in to connect the office floors and literally get people moving around the space, Webster added. "It's the best memory jog you can have – better than a to-do list – when you start walking up and

Discussion

BUSINESSES NEED TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EMPLOYEE 'OWNERSHIP' OF ANY NEW SITE, WHICH WILL FOSTER COMMUNITY THINKING

down there and bump into someone," he said.

Lee Schuneman, Studio Head of Microsoft Lift talked us through moving the company out of London's Soho and into its new offices in the Paddington Central development. As his staff's commuting times were affected, Schuneman was keen to try to change the working practices within the company – with more flexibility so that people could work from home – but with a refocusing on the building as a "honeypot" for where the best interactions with colleagues and collaborators could take place. The space, he added, was optimised to encourage this interaction; it became less about promoting focused work and more about conversation.

At visual effects studio Framestore, a forthcoming office move has given co-founder and CEO Sir William Sargent the chance to rethink what the workplace can look like. Some 70% of his employees are millennials, he said, so any shift in office environment needs to take into account the way that the workforce is constructed. Interestingly, the move is set to take the company into a deliberately untrendy part of central London, Sargent said – an opportunity to start with a blank sheet of paper. To ensure this works, he added, you have to articulate that the move will give people the opportunity to do things they currently cannot (Sargent is a keen advocate

of surveying his staff regularly to get updates on their opinions).

Businesses need to ensure that there is still an opportunity for employee "ownership" of any new site, which will foster community thinking and can result in things such as events programmes, running clubs, yoga workshops, drawing classes etc. Yet rather than over-define a new place, Matthew Hook, Chief Strategy Officer, DensuAegis, cautioned, it can be more beneficial to introduce a space and ask staff how they would like to use it. People need to be able to fill in the gaps, he said, and this can leverage people's desire to customise and create. While definitions of millennials often reference entitlement, he added, the fact that they are often keen to contribute and give something back should be recognised also. It's not a simple picture, however, as the danger is that people working within new spaces can almost become commodities in the eyes of those experimenting with different methods and approaches.

Nicola Forristal, UK Group Chief People Officer, Havas UK, described the idea of the "village council" at the company, which features everyone from management to full time and part time staff. This gives people a voice and groups can form that look after or focus on certain areas – it's about "engaging with people on a village scale," she said. Fundamental to success is an under-

standing of what "cohabiting" in a space means – arguments over music will happen, but why not bring your favourites into the mix?
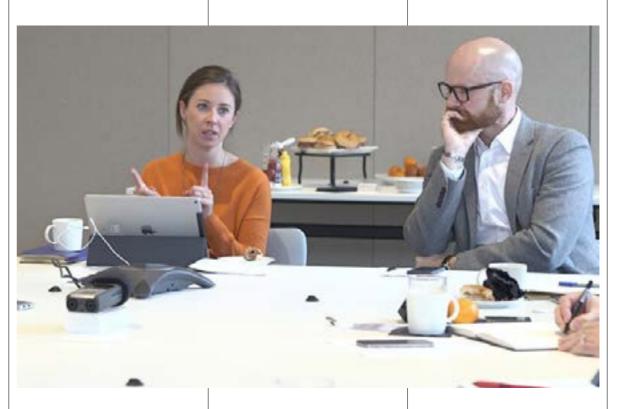
Araceli Camargo, Director of Lab, The Centric Lab, was on hand to explain the influence that neuroscience is playing in the design of the contemporary workplace. She said that in order to successfully collaborate we need "cognitive flexibility" – a mental space where we are comfortable (and calm) enough to take in what someone is saying – but this is, of course, dependent on one's individual profile. So can companies create an "enriched environment" whereby people can choose spaces to find their own sense of relaxation – this may be outside for a brainstorming session, or even in a darkened inside space for collaboration. Flexibility, therefore, is at the heart of maintaining well-being in the workplace – giving people choices seems to increase both their happiness and potential.

The idea of being visible also came up in the discussion – both internally and externally. For architect John McElgunn, Partner at Roger Stirk Harbour + Partners, his work with the Special Exhibitions department at the British Museum brought home the significance of people being able to "see" what each department did – and the resulting benefits of being more aware of staff as individuals.

Visibility in terms of how a com-

pany is seen within a community was also an important issue. Should a large reception area have desks in it for people to work? Should clients be able to use the space? Biophilic designer Oliver Heath, who draws influence from humans' behaviour in the natural world, noted that there was a movement to encourage what were once entrance spaces to be used more fluidly – and cited the influence of coffee shops as a working space; while modern showrooms benefit from inviting people inside to use wifi, for example, which populates an otherwise empty, sterile

space. Forristal recalled that at agency BBH, long wooden desks would routinely be used by clients – which led to the establishment of a kind of club, a networking place that created a buzz around the space. Similarly, Heath noted, places like Second Home on Brick Lane in London are establishing themselves as desirable co-work spaces that are able to attract everyone from young freelancers to banks.

Literal visibility is also key to how a company can help to establish itself within a local community, Webster added. People walking by

should be able to see activity, that people are working in there and that the working space is integrated into the streetscape rather than just functioning above it. In fact, this notion of transparency threaded throughout the discussion. From internal to external understandings; from small office spaces to large multi-floor occupancies, it seems that to really comprehend what people want, companies need to have an honest conversation with their employees and also be willing to watch what happens – and listen hard – when trying out new ideas.

In focus

The natural world can provide a source of replenishment, calm and relaxation and its benefits are increasingly being incorporated into the workplace. 'Biophilic' design can reap great rewards for employees –and you can start with a humble pot plant

Bringing the outside in

"BIOPHILIC DESIGN CAN REDUCE STRESS, BLOOD PRESSURE LEVELS AND HEART RATES, WHILE INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY, CREATIVITY AND WELLBEING" HEATH DESIGN

Biophilic design may sound like a futuristic concept but it's a term that has in fact been in use since the mid-1980s. Relating to the word 'biophilia' (a 'love of nature') the design philosophy aims to reconnect us to the natural world and its processes, bringing nature into our everyday, indoor environments: the home, the school or the office.

Heath Design, the Brighton-based studio founded by designer Oliver Heath, has brought biophilic thinking to numerous companies and organisations with, they claim, considerable effect. Research has shown that incorporating elements of nature into the built environment can "reduce stress, blood pressure levels and heart rates, whilst increasing productivity, creativity and self-reported rates of wellbeing," the studio explain. When it comes to office design, in particular, Heath also state that "productivity can be increased by 8%" with "rates of wellbeing up by 13%, increases in creativity reduced absenteeism and presenteeism".

Heath Design initially works with clients to determine a brief and the client's needs. The study of any space involves looking at how it might be optimised with a "human focus" – alongside assessing the levels of thermal comfort, air quality and ventilation, employees' access to natural light, both internal and external views of nature, and how natural materials (textures, patterns and colours) might be applied to the environment.

An understanding of Non-Rhythmic Sensory Stimuli (NRSS) – "created by objects or materials in consistent yet unpredictable motion" – has also become part of the process, as the studio reported in a recent blog post. "Evidence has begun to emerge that the inclusion of NRSS can also start to enhance our wellbeing particularly in the workplace," they write. "Such stimuli can be seen in many forms of natural motion, the reflections from water or the sway of grasses, for example – ever changing but ever the same."
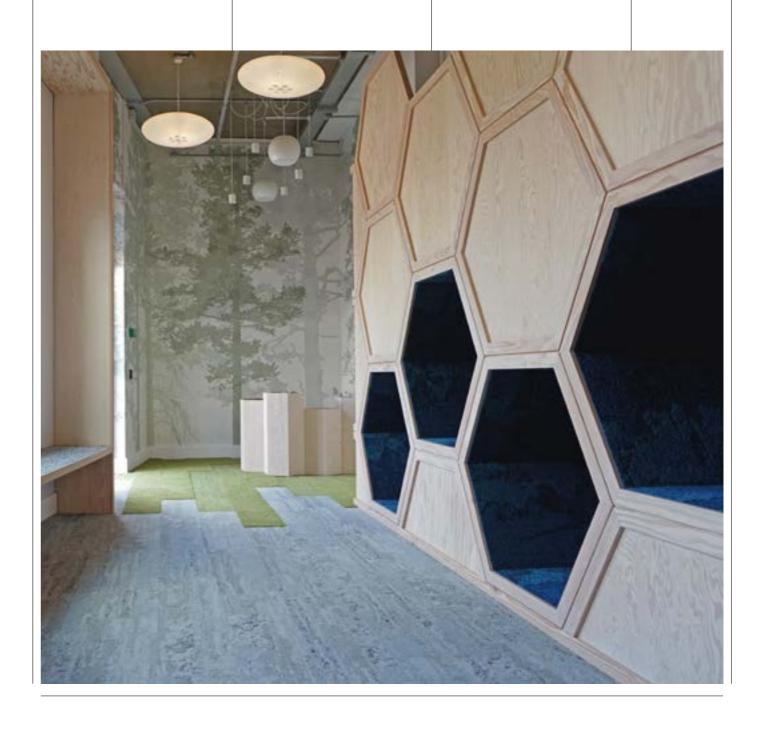
Short interactions with NRSS have been shown to "improve blood pressure and heart rate as well as having a positive effect on the sympathetic nervous system." Simply looking up from our computer screens "allows the muscles in our eyes to relax after a long period of shortened focal depth which can help to reduce tension headaches and eye strains, in turn increasing our productivity." Heath Design cite various small scale NRSS interventions that can easily be incorporated into a workplace, from pot plants to ceramic tiles which enable dynamic light reflections to occur as people walk by. The creative industries are prone to intense periods of concentrated screen-based work, so perhaps it's time they gained some influence from another profession?

"Why do you think doctors and dentists so often have fish tanks in their waiting rooms?" say Heath. "The gentle, repetitive natural motion both relaxes and distracts us from our other worries." Fields, trees, water, even fish – it seems we could all benefit from a little reconnection now and then.

Office culture can be difficult to change, but examining how a workplace functions can benefit wellbeing. While encouraging interaction is key, ensuring people have more time to think is vital, too – as both Microsoft Lift and Wieden+Kennedy are proving

Making change happen

Below: Microsoft Lift makes use of music at its offices at Paddington Central, from playing DJ sets through Sonos speakers to enabling staff to play a variety of instruments, in order to encourage interaction and engagement. Photo: Brighton Pictures

"THE GOAL WAS TO MAKE THE SPACE AS INTERACTIVE AS POSSIBLE WITH NOT JUST DIGITAL TOYS BUT ALSO ANALOGUE ONES"
LEE SCHUNEMAN

In a recent seminar hosted by specialist recruitment firm Robert Walters, Charles Fair of Great Place to Work outlined his company's latest report on the role of 'workplace culture' in recruiting top talent. GPTW defines workplace culture as an organisation's practices and behaviours – and while companies believe that recruiting for 'cultural fit' is important, says the report, it often doesn't happen. GPTW's research also scrutinises what drives wellbeing at work – a subject vital to understanding workplace culture – and the results make for some interesting reading.

According to GPTWs investigations, the top four most common drivers of wellbeing in UK organisations are "values-aligned and ethical behaviour – by leaders and the organisation"; "teamwork"; "work environment and processes"; and "recognition – being recognised and appreciated by line manager and the organisation". At what GPTW refer to as the 'Best Workplaces', it is things like 'purpose', 'transparency' and 'employee voice' – all 'underpinned by values' – that are key to both attracting and keeping talent.

What's also found in the UK's 100 'Best Workplaces' is that employees feel higher levels of trust between their employers; they feel that they are able to take time off when necessary; and that the workplace is a psychologically and emotionally healthy place to be. They are also encouraged to balance their work life and their personal life, say GPTW.

Elements of this thinking can be found in Microsoft Lift's new office space at Paddington Central. Interaction is encouraged – and not just through digital tech, but analogue techniques, too. Music, in particular, also plays a key role. "If you are in a quiet space, it's normal for the majority of people to respect the social norms of talking quietly and not bother others around you," says Studio Head Lee Schuneman. "If you are in a noisier space, you will adjust to that environment and talk accordingly. We discovered that by adding low music it encouraged people to speak more normally and engage with each other in a more natural way."

Within Lift's offices there is also a piano, a drum kit and electric guitar set up with an amp. It may sound superfluous but Schuneman attains there are definite benefits to having the instruments around. "The goal was to make the space as interactive as possible with not just digital toys but also analogue ones," he says. "We have a lot of people who are musicians and having these instruments there just allows people to express themselves, play around or relax. We have seen different music groups setup and a weekly jam session can take place. And it's always a nice moment when one afternoon someone will sit and play piano

Cultural change

for 30 mins."

For Schuneman the focus of the office space is the people in it. It is a place for interaction and collaboration with other people – "to solve problems together," he says. "Working alone on tasks can be achieved anywhere but the office space is the environment where you can focus on people's interaction with each other. Many offices though are designed with process in mind rather than focus on pure interaction. As an example, meeting rooms can be booked via an online tool; you show up that time and don't interact with who was in there before you. We instead opted to have fewer meeting rooms, but more large tables within our open environment so meetings can be more ad-hoc and happen when they need to. But if you do need a meeting room, you have to go knock on the door and talk to whoever is in there and ask when you can use the room. Just the simple act of interacting with someone in that helps achieve a more social space."

At the London offices of advertising agency Wieden+Kennedy, Managing Director Helen Andrews has brought in a variety of changes that aim to "give the team more time for deep, creative work while helping protect a better work/life balance," she says. "Last year, we gave some thought to the way we were working and how some of the norms of the industry – late nights and long hours – coupled with always-on technol-

ogy and days filled with meetings might not necessarily always be helping us get to great work." From this starting point, the following guidelines were introduced: No email between 7pm and 8am, at weekends and during holidays; A 40 hour week was to be encouraged, with 4.30pm finishes on Fridays to make this possible; Internal meetings to be held between 10am and 4pm to help facilitate flexible working; while a formal day in lieu policy was also established.

"The guidelines weren't about working less, they were about protecting our ability to work better," says Andrews. "To give ourselves more time to think. To give everyone a chance to have an email free evening. To give greater flexibility to night owls or early risers as to when they needed to be in the office and to recognise that when we do all need to come in on a weekend, it's OK to take that time back."

A year on from the start of the initiative and Andrews says it is already making a difference: a survey of employees revealed that 91% of respondents felt that they had a better work/life balance since the new working guidelines were implemented, while 84% said that they had worked less overtime. "This led to people feeling they had an opportunity to think more deeply, manage their own time better and work during the times that suited them best," adds Andrews. Interestingly,

some 86% of W+K respondents felt there had been a perception change overall to how the agency worked.

"We also asked clients how the internal changes affected them," adds Andrews. "One client asked us to speak to their HR leaders about the initiatives we'd introduced as they were keen to replicate our approach. Another said that availability of the team had actually gone up since we'd introduced the guidelines."

Andrews admits that some of the changes have been easier to adopt than others. Adhering to the email guidelines has proved successful, while adapting to the restricted meeting times has been the most challenging, she says. But the effects have now been recognised beyond the industry, too: Wieden+Kennedy London are currently the only ad agency included in this year's Sunday Times' Top 100 Best Small Companies to Work For.

This page: Biscuit cupboard meeting room at Wieden + Kennedy's offices in London.

Facing page: Canal side at Paddington Central. Photo by Barry Willis