

WHY HEALTHY BUSINESS RELIES ON HEALTHY MINDS

The role of facilities management in workplace wellbeing

By Jonathan Gawthrop,
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Wellness in the workplace has become an increasing area of focus for employers. This is no surprise when you consider that according to the UK government's Health and Safety Executive website, 15.4 million working days were lost in 2017/18 due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety¹.

In essence, the pressures of modern life and the workplace has led to many UK workers struggling to 'switch off' (leavism), which, according to The Guardian, can be seriously harmful to mental health². As highlighted by iNews, this has become a focus for employers as they seek to introduce new incentives, internal policies and initiatives designed to help address the impact of stress in the workplace³.

Workplace design supporting mental wellbeing

The design and layout of the office – and even the building itself – has a recognisable impact on employee mental health and wellbeing. According to research compiled by Mindspace in March 2018, 24% of surveyed employees who work at the same desk for five days per week felt tired, and 20% admitted to feeling stressed. Furthermore, the research also emphasised that an office plan that sustains mental health through inspiring employees was viewed with increasing importance to millennials. Indeed, 21% of surveyed millennials rejected a potential employer due to poor and ‘uninspiring’ office designs.

So what specific aspects of facilities do employees believe will inspire them and support their mental health? According to the Wellness Together research, using feedback from 1000 UK offices conducted by Sapio Research in June 2017, 27% of employees surveyed were keen for breakout and collaborative spaces, and 43% were in favour of having access to a quiet private space when needed.

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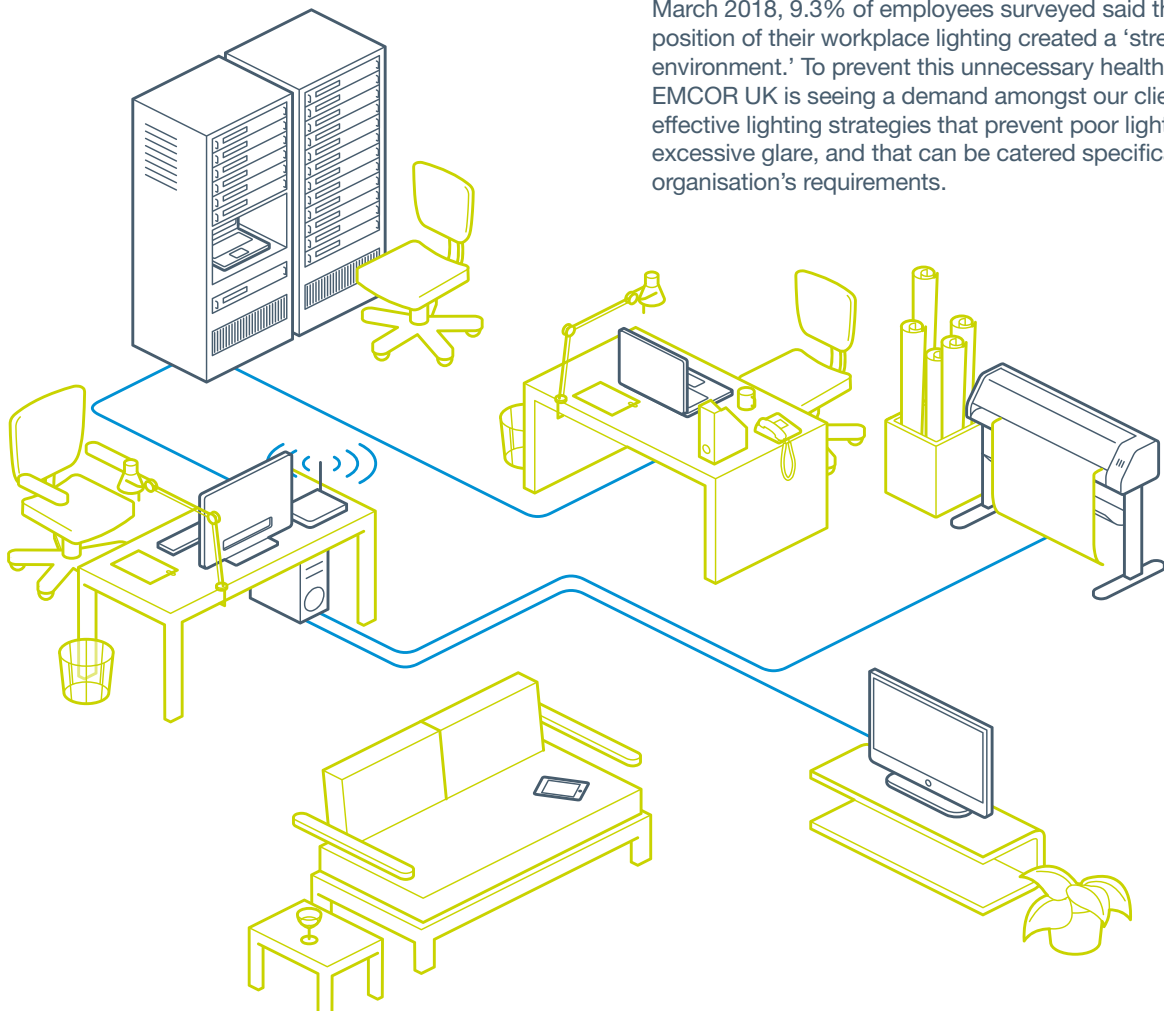
Mindspace, March 2018

There are some relatively simple steps that can be taken. FMs can facilitate the creation of open office plans that provide colleagues with the freedom and flexibility to easily speak with each other in person, instead of forcing workers to communicate electronically for even the most basic correspondences. This allows collaboration and breakout sessions to become an integral part of work; EMCOR UK sees designs like this in shared or co-working spaces in particular. For quiet spaces, FMs can design and construct separated rooms that have access to a window for fresh air circulation and light, but also with soundproof panelling to help ensure privacy.

Indoor environmental factors are often overlooked, in particular the negative impact on cognitive function and wellbeing of consistently high levels of CO₂ in the workplace.

Whilst noise pollution, VOC’s and humidity have an impact on wellbeing, another important element of office design that can impact mental health is lighting.

According to a survey released by Lamp Shop Online in March 2018, 9.3% of employees surveyed said that the position of their workplace lighting created a ‘stressful environment.’ To prevent this unnecessary health concern, EMCOR UK is seeing a demand amongst our clients for effective lighting strategies that prevent poor lighting or excessive glare, and that can be catered specifically for each organisation’s requirements.





59% of workers surveyed agreed that work is the most common cause of stress.

2018 UK Workplace Stress Report

But what happens if stress is created by company culture or work pressure itself, and isn't a direct result of a fault with the facility's structure or design? According to the 2018 UK Workplace Stress Report, 59% of workers surveyed agree that 'work' is the most common cause of stress. Yet 45% of British businesses offer nothing to help alleviate this. This is a worrying statistic because a growing awareness of the importance of wellbeing in the workplace has not yet translated to serious (enough) investment. This would also suggest that the dots are not yet joined by decision makers between healthier and happier workers and the performance and productivity improvements that would naturally follow.



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Wellbeing supported by technology

Smart building technology is playing a vital role by enabling digital connectivity to streamline processes, improve communication and improve building user experience.

Largely designed to automate, the 'smart building' of today and the future will know exactly what you want and when you want it. And yet, when designing the perfect workplace, smart buildings and spaces should be configured in a way to support people in what they are doing and improve their lives, health, and wellbeing wherever possible, not get in their way.

Traditional 'soft' facilities management services such as post room, catering, vending, waste and help desk services play their part in relieving employees from the worry (and stress) of doing certain tasks and enabling them to focus on the job in hand.

Modern facilities management, on the other hand, goes one big technology step further by using smart building technology to ensure that buildings, assets and people are fully optimised, perform at their best and are in the best shape to perform their work and go home as happy and healthy as they can be.

Intricate, real-time data is immediately available to facilities managers.

The information available today offers the opportunity to drill down to specific user demographics. With this information, the facilities manager is able to monitor and evaluate workplace elements that have the potential to positively influence employee health and wellbeing. In short, FMs are positioned to advise organisations on priority areas for change to create maximum positive impact and then lead those changes to effect major improvements in the overall wellbeing and performance of company employees.

EMCOR UK has decades of experience in delivering facilities management at the highest level and an enviable track record collaborating with customers to achieve high performing, productive and sustainable workplaces that support the health and wellbeing of those who occupy them.

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