

Future Workplace Wellness Study

The workplace wellness triple threat: air, light and temperature have the biggest influence on employee health, productivity and engagement



Future workplace wellness study

The workplace environment and its role in employer-employee relationships are in the spotlight. Companies are in a fierce competition for talent and now recognize that their offices are an untapped recruiting tool. Employees have high expectations for their workplace environment, driven by their consumer experience outside of work. Organizations must design workplaces that support comfort and wellness if they want to attract and keep valued talent.

Compelling employee experience and workplace wellness programs focusing on behaviors are already priorities for employers. Companies have made substantial investments in these areas, but is this spending making a difference where it matters most to employees? The data shows that the workplace environment is more important to a productive workforce than we thought.

Our recent survey of 1,601 professionals working in corporate office environments reveals that several factors most important to employee wellbeing are being overlooked. The result is that employee satisfaction, engagement and organizational productivity are suffering.

4x

Temperature and air quality matter 4x more to employees than having gym facilities

50%

of those surveyed said poor air quality makes them get sleepier throughout their workday.

1 in 3

Only say the temperature is ideal for doing their best work

33%

lose more than 60 minutes of work per day due to physical and environmental factors

Workplace wellness is good for business

Healthy workplaces help companies attract and keep talent

In the battle for top talent, the environment influences not only our personal wellness, but also a company's ability to recruit and retain employees. Research from Gartner¹ found, "employees who are satisfied with their workplace are 16% more productive, 18% more likely to stay, and 30% more attracted to the company over competitors."

In our survey, more than two-thirds of employees said that a workplace that supported and enhanced their health and wellbeing would encourage them to accept a job offer (67%) – or to stay at their current job (69%).

"People used to work for companies, but now they expect companies to work for them – to provide dynamic office settings that help them to be more productive and creative," reports the Gensler U.S. Workplace Survey.

The turnover costs associated with recruiting, training, lowered productivity, and lost expertise are significant. How sizable? [The Center for American Progress estimates](#) that replacing a single employee costs approximately 20% of that employee's annual salary.



A workplace that enhances employee health and wellbeing would...

- Encourage **7 out of 10** to stay at their current job
- Make **7 out of 10** more likely to accept a job offer

Unhealthy work environments diminish productivity

Ultimately, employee wellbeing in the workplace—or the lack of it—affects a company’s bottom line.

More than a third of our survey respondents reported that environmental discomfort and poor wellness factors had a significant negative impact on their work across these three factors of workplace wellness:

- **Physical Wellness:** includes healthy activity and behaviors in the workplace, such as access to movement and ergonomics.
- **Environmental Wellness:** includes providing for physical comfort from air, light, temperature and acoustics in the workplace.
- **Emotional Wellness:** includes the factors that create a stress-free workplace environment, including culture, a connection to the outdoors and more.

Lost work time due to employee discomfort is a major company cost that remains largely unmeasured and unaddressed today. Extrapolating from the survey findings, an organization with 10,000 knowledge workers could lose more than \$34 million a year in productivity from poor wellness in the physical workplace alone. Identifying the main issues and correcting them should be a top priority for businesses.

Employer health and wellness efforts fall short despite office gyms, healthy snacks and wellness incentives

In an effort to support a healthier and more productive workforce, employers across the country are expected to spend an average of \$3.6 million on wellness programs in 2019. ([Survey](#) from National Business Group on Health (NBGH) and Fidelity Investments). Yet, the positive impact of all this spending hasn’t materialized. The results of a [recent Harvard study](#) suggest that these interventions—offered by 80% of large U.S. employers—yield unimpressive results.

Supporting this alarming finding, the results from the [Illinois Workplace Wellness Study](#) tell a similar story. This large, multi-year trial of a comprehensive wellness program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has been examining the impact of wellness programs on employee behavior and healthcare cost across tens of thousands of employees. After one year, workplace wellness incentives didn’t change employees’ measured behaviors or annual healthcare costs.

Why aren’t there better results associated with investments in workplace wellness? Our study sought to investigate a broad array of wellness factors and to identify which ones have the greatest impact on workers so organizations can make more meaningful improvements to their employee’s work experience.

34%

lose 60 minutes or more of work per day due to poor to discomfort from
Physical Wellness factors

31%

lose 60 minutes or more from poor
Environmental Wellness factors

38%

lose 60 minutes or more from poor
Emotional Wellness factors

Employers need to get back to the basics

The basics of environmental wellness: air, light, temperature and noise

Companies have been making great strides environmentally, from reducing emissions and packaging to creating safer products for customers. At the same time, many are not addressing the negative environmental conditions that persist inside their own buildings that impact employees.

In the comprehensive research report, [The Financial Case for High Performance Buildings](#), researchers found that a high quality workplace could reduce absenteeism by 4 days annually. “When connected to the environment through generous amounts of daylight and natural materials, and more comfortable due to improved ventilation, thermal systems, and ability to control their environments, employees can realize a reduction in absenteeism through improved health and wellness.”

Future Workplace Survey respondents reported that the quality of air, light, temperature and noise had the biggest impact on their comfort and productivity at work. Nearly half of employees surveyed want to see their companies improve these environmental wellness factors. In many instances, employees would rather see employers improve the workplace environment than improve organizational policies or perks.

“A quality workspace design leads to a less stressful and more productive atmosphere. It’s essential that employers take the physical work environment of their employees into consideration. Employees need to feel comfortable and calm in their physical work settings to produce their best work.”

— Alan Kohll, [Forbes Contributor](#), [Employee Well-being](#)

A broad set of factors affect workplace wellness

Physical Wellness

Physical workplace factors include access to movement, good ergonomics, and healthy activity and behaviors.

Examples:

- Ergonomic workstations
- Healthy food options
- Yoga classes or on-site gym

Emotional wellness

Factors that influence emotional wellness in the workplace include mood, stress, security, and connection to the outdoors.

Examples:

- Access to natural light
- Quiet meditation spaces
- Outdoor areas

Environmental wellness

Workplace environmental factors include physical comfort from air, light, temperature, and acoustics.

Examples:

- Comfortable temperature
- Healthy air
- Glare free views to the outdoors

Key workplace environmental survey findings

#1 Clean, quality air

- Only 1 in 4 employees say the air quality in their office is optimal for them to do their best work.
- 45% say their companies could improve their wellness by providing fresh and allergen-free quality air.
- Nearly half of employees say poor air quality makes them get sleepier throughout their workday.
- Almost third experience itchy, watery eyes or throat irritation at work.
- 85% say the air quality in their home or outdoors is better than at work.

#2 Natural light

- Nearly 40% think their companies should provide access to views of the outdoors. Often potential views are covered by shades and blinds.
- 1 in 3 call out access to comfortable light (intensity and color) as important for their daily health.

#3 Comfortable temperature

- Only 1 in 3 employees say their office temperature is ideal for doing their best work.
- 1 in 3 say it is continuously too hot or too cold in their offices.
- Nearly half want their companies to provide an office that's more comfortable—not too hot, not too cold.

#4 Acoustics and noise levels

- Nearly half are distracted by co-workers' conversations.
- More than a third say sounds like phones ringing, typing on keyboards, and heating and cooling systems hurt their concentration at work.
- 37% want their company to create an environment with low noise levels and sound privacy.

"It's clear that buildings accommodating essential human needs such as good quality air, access to natural light and comfortable temperatures lead to healthier and more productive employees," said Dr. Brandon Tinianov, chair of the U.S. Green Building Advisory Council and vice president of industry strategy at View. "These findings are a wake-up call to every executive who wants to maximize the wellness and productivity of their workforce."

Our survey results are in line with recent research. According to [a study by the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health and other leading institutions](#), the cognitive scores of workers studied were 101% higher in a "green plus" office environment (with lower concentrations of volatile organic compounds (VOCs), lower CO₂, and greater circulation of outdoor air) than in an office with "conventional" air quality. This correlated to an 8% improvement in employee productivity.

Research has shown an **11% increase** in employee productivity as a result of increased fresh air to the workstation and a reduction in pollutants.

[World Green Building Council](#)



Organizations have the power to make improvements in these areas, but environmental wellness in the workplace involves interconnected factors that cross multiple groups and functions. For example, to deliver the light and views that lower stress and improve productivity, companies should consider managing the heat and glare in a space designed with more windows with smart glass technology.

Understanding what matters most to employees can help companies prioritize and create a more comprehensive plan that encompasses a broad set of interconnected wellness influencers.

Prioritizing workplace wellness factors

Which workplace wellness perks matter most? You may be surprised

When asked which environmental aspects in the workspace most affect their performance, happiness, and workplace wellbeing, here's how many employees rated each aspect as their top three factors.

Air Quality was rated #1	58%	 <p>Air Quality was rated in the Top 3 for employees nearly 4x more than Fitness Facilities</p>  <p>Comfortable Light made the Top 3 2x more than Healthy Food Choices</p>
Comfortable Light	50%	
Water Quality	41%	
Comfortable Temperatures	34%	
Office Acoustics	30%	
Connection to Nature	30%	
Access to Healthy Food Choices	26%	
Fitness Facilities	16%	
Technology-based Health Tools	13%	

“The research shows that employer health and wellness efforts fall short despite company investments in on-site gyms, ergonomics and healthy food choices,” says Jeanne Meister, Founding Partner, Future Workplace. “It’s the invisible factors such as air quality and access to natural light that are often overlooked yet provide the greatest influence on workplace wellness, employee productivity and the overall quality of the employee experience.”

Top 5 wellness factors employees want organizations to improve

1.	Provide an environment that’s not too hot or too cold	45%
2.	Provide good quality and allergen free air	45%
3.	Paid time off	43%
4.	Offering the option to adjust workspace environmental conditions	42%
5.	Provide access to view of the outdoors and create a connection to nature	39%

Employees would rather see employers improve these 5 factors than create policies for unlimited vacation or a pet-friendly workplace.

Employees expect a personalized work environment

Employees expect their workplace environment and experience to be as good as their consumer experience. From thermostats controlled by apps to integrated home entertainment controls to virtual assistants like Alexa and Google, people experience an increasing level of technology and personalization in their home every day.

U.S. smart speaker ownership rose 40% in 2018 to 66.4 Million.

[voicebot.ai](https://www.voicebot.ai)

Unfortunately, few companies offer this level of personalization in the office.

When it comes to actions employees want to see from their companies around wellness, workspace personalization is a high priority.

More employees want the option to adjust their personal workspace conditions (42%) than wish for a pet-friendly (29%) or unlimited vacation (28%) policy.

48% of those surveyed **want to be able to personalize the temperature** in their workspace with an app.

33% would like to **personalize** their overhead lighting, desk lighting, and the levels of natural light coming in.

33% want the option to **control** masking noise or soundscaping from an app for greater focus at work.

Office personalization is the highest rated workplace wellness factor (including lighting, acoustics and air quality). It is far more desirable to employees than current productivity tools aimed at everyday tasks like booking conference rooms or starting conference calls.

What employees want to personalize

What aspects of your office would you like to be able to personalize from an app?



Workspace temperature



Overhead and desk lighting



Masking noise & soundscaping



Air quality control
(allergen or pollutant alerts and action)



Conference room booking



Help desk resolutions



Natural light levels from windows



Personal activity levels and prompts to move more



Starting conference calls



Frequently asked questions of new hires

Protecting personal data

Privacy is a major concern when talking about apps that collect personal health information and behaviors. Our research results show that this is still a concern. Employees want more personalization, but the data they need to share to allow customization makes many uneasy. Eight in 10 have some concerns about the health and wellness data their employer can collect about them, and nearly a third are highly concerned.

Organizations should be transparent and clear about what data they are collecting, why it's needed and how it will be protected, analyzed and used. With careful management, personalization can help enhance the employee experience while being respectful of privacy concerns.

5 guidelines to take action on workplace wellness

- 1. Adapt an employee-centric view of workplace wellness.** Survey your workforce to understand the factors most important to them when it comes to workplace wellness.
- 2. Build a holistic workplace wellness plan.** Real Estate and HR need to work together to create a shared vision and strategy for workplace wellness.
- 3. Re-examine your workplace wellness investments.** Focus less on opt-in perks like an on-site-gyms and more on areas that affect every employee, like the workstation.
- 4. Build personalization into your workplace wellness strategy.** Employees expect the ability to personalize their workplace environment to best suit their physical and emotional needs at work.
- 5. Monitor the connection between workplace wellness and employee satisfaction.** Adapt a continuous improvement mindset as it relates to creating a workplace environment that mirrors an employee's best consumer experience.

About the Survey

Research findings are based on a global survey conducted by Savanta across the United States and Canada between April 23 - 29, 2019. For this survey, 1601 respondents were asked general questions to explore thoughts on workplace environment, personalization of the work environment, and privacy and security at work. The study targeted 18 to 74 year olds that work in a corporate office environment at least 3 days per week.

About Future Workplace

Future Workplace is an executive development firm dedicated to rethinking and re-imagining the workplace. Future Workplace works with heads of talent management, human resources, corporate learning, and diversity to prepare for the changes impacting recruitment, employee development, and engagement. Future Workplace is host to the Future Workplace Network, an Executive Council that includes 40 heads of Corporate Learning, Talent, and Human Resources who come together to discuss debate and share "next" practices impacting the workplace and workforce of the future. For more information, please visit: www.futureworkplace.com.

About View

View is a technology company creating smart and connected buildings to improve people's health and wellness, while simultaneously reducing energy consumption. View is also the market leader in smart windows that let in natural light and views and enhance mental and physical wellbeing by significantly reducing headaches, eyestrain and drowsiness. Every View installation includes a smart building platform that consists of power, network and communication infrastructure. The recently released SmartProtect is the first of several IoT applications on this platform designed to make building spaces healthier, smarter, and more productive. For more information, please visit: www.view.com.

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