



[white paper]

WELLNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Solutions to Enhance Health in the Places We Live and Work

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The way we have been utilizing offices and workplace settings has been changing gradually, until now. The coronavirus has heralded a paradigm shift that will alter the workplace many years to come. Tweaks will have to continually be made – similar to a learning laboratory. Offices will immediately be retrofitted for a fast, common-sense approach to working safely. With time, they will be reconfigured as people define their needs and, eventually, a reinvented office will evolve based on research for a healthy and productive workplace.

The 2020 Stay Home – Work Safe phenomenon has catapulted workforce society ahead by at least five years. The social experiment of remote working has been largely successful. Employees feel more confident about working from home and employers are more trusting that milestones will be accomplished. The missing link is the personal one-on-one connection. Companies are understanding this more with each stay-home day and are preparing for the challenges that coming back together entail.

The post-coronavirus office will look significantly different from its predecessor. In time, many companies will shift toward a hybrid “Resimercial” approach that combines a residential feel with commercial flair. Technology and comfort will reign within a smaller office footprint as people shift to working partially from home. Spaces will be designed to provide teams a variety of experiences that help achieve company goals through collaboration and creativity. Teams will continue to gather physically and digitally to connect but will learn and relate in a modified, upgraded environment. Workplace tactics may evolve into alternating A and B team schedules to maintain appropriate employee separation.

Adaptability and fluidity will triumph over permanence. Traditional, fixed conference rooms may need to convert to workstations in an effort to social distance effectively. Virtual and physical spaces will help create a sense of belonging from both home and office. Conference rooms should be adequately supported with the appropriate technology to maintain communication. Standard collaboration zones should be outfitted with upgraded technology such as media equipment and dial-in conferencing.

The emergence of COVID-19 and future viruses will mandate significant changes in protocol and standard workplace behavior must radically shift. Understanding 6’ social distancing will be key in maintaining employees’ health and peace of mind. Circulation patterns will have to be implemented to keep minimal social distance requirements. Providing directional signposts and/or changes in floor finish can help control foot traffic along paths including corridors, stairs, and entries. Transparent boundaries at reception areas, security desks, and places of interaction can also be incorporated to help protect all involved parties.

Space planning in this dawn will shift to re-organize business and best utilize the office footprint, adapting teams to new distancing norms. Space may morph internally based on needs of each group. If possible, providing people their own space within a wider area is ideal. Offices should provide different zoning options which enable employees to socially distance adequately. Various layouts will need to be tested to find the best approach.

Open plans will continue to be the dominant form for flexibility. Rather than utilizing linear layouts, staggering or rotating the workstation footprint will reduce face-to-face orientation. Adding glass tiles to existing low partitions to create physical barriers can also help maintain visibility and a feeling of openness. Creating clear zones for meetings of more than five people should become more available to properly social distance. There may be certain areas where social distancing cannot be achieved as easily. In this case, higher space divisions and moveable furniture or whiteboards can create these boundaries and still be used to collaborate. In general, furniture arrangements throughout the office should be re-considered to guide distancing, especially in breakrooms, reception areas, lounge zones, and meeting rooms. Consider specifying furniture that allows for storage of paper, reference materials, and supplies to allow for easy cleaning of worktop surfaces.

Prior to the coronavirus, the trend was growing toward establishing various hospitality zones where employees could fluidly work throughout the day. Today, companies must think about providing comfortable accommodations for single users for longer periods of time. Sanitation stations located adjacent to doors near high traffic areas such as restrooms and conference rooms and that can be easily utilized by multiple people should be provided throughout the office. These areas will provide comfort to employees and allow them to easily practice proper cleaning procedures and office hygiene etiquette.

There are multiple wellness strategies that should be considered at shared entries and restrooms. Installing automatic door hardware with push assist buttons can help prevent the spread of viruses and bacteria. Doors can also be specified with anti-microbial handles. Materials and finishes with Microban® technology can be specified, including wall and floor tile, to further aid virus containment. Restrooms should steer away from automatic hand dryers, as these devices spread water droplets from hands into the air or onto adjacent surfaces. Automated plumbing, soap dispensers, and paper towel dispensers will provide a more hygienic offering.

Operationally, property management should expect to service restrooms and high use areas more frequently by cleaning, replenishing soap, restocking paper goods, and removing trash – which can be challenging in itself. For a safer, cleaner environment waste disposal should be contained through millwork design, utilizing built-in trash receptacles where trash is disposed through a grommet instead of using a handle.

No-touch technology should be used wherever possible. This includes automated lighting controls that utilize occupancy and daylight sensors, and technology devices that make use of voice control or a stylus rather than hands. Delivery processes should also be reviewed to reduce the number of face-to-face interactions between people.

There are a variety of ways to focus on long term health considerations, and implementing WELL strategies naturally increase our immunity to fighting viruses and staying healthy within the office. Huitt-Zollars is a thought leader in this movement. We welcome the opportunity to discuss how your company can implement WELL workplace principles in systematic ways. Staying healthy is the key objective for us all. Below are additional strategies and tactics for how your company can stay well during this highly sensitive time.

WELL Concepts & Relevancy to COVID-19

WELL is a tool that guides and fosters public health change initiatives within the built environment to create an inclusive and holistic approach so that every person can share the wellness experience. WELL initiatives involve multiple enhancements to design, maintenance practices, and organizational policies.

The International WELL Building Institute™ (IWBI™) launched in 2014 as the first rating system to focus exclusively on the impacts of buildings on human health and wellness through its WELL Building Standard™. Since then, WELL v2™ pilot has evolved to the next level of WELL Building Standard™ (WELL™).

Within Huitt-Zollars, we recognize that nature, health, and the built environment are innately connected and dependent on each other. Below we have outlined relevant WELL concepts that can be applied as people prepare to re-enter the workforce following the Coronavirus global pandemic:

AIR



*WELL seeks to implement holistic design strategies to promote clean air and minimize human exposure to harmful contaminants in order to maximize benefits to productivity, well-being and health.** We are continually discovering with each passing day that COVID-19 is much more likely to spread indoors than outdoors, thereby placing an emphasis on consistent indoor air quality. Consider installing high-efficiency air filters that are replaced regularly. This tactic can increase ventilation rates in the work environment. Implementing additional WELL strategies like construction pollution management, source separation, VOC control, and healthy entrance systems can also boost and maintain the overall indoor air quality for better respiratory health of occupants.

WATER



*WELL aims to increase the rate of adequate hydration in building users and reduce health risks due to contaminated water and excessive moisture within buildings through better awareness and maintenance of water quality and management.** Consider installing sensor operated bottle fillers in lieu of or in addition to traditional water fountains to reduce contact with shared surfaces and to promote occupant hydration. Staying hydrated, having access to hand washing areas, and reducing the chances of mold and mildew occurring within buildings all help to keep people healthier and better prepared to fight off illness.

NOURISHMENT



*WELL supports healthy eating patterns by increasing access to healthier food and beverage choices, limiting access to highly processed foods and ingredients and designing environments that nudge individuals toward healthier choices.** Science shows that a better and more balanced diet can increase overall immunity and resiliency. In buildings or offices that regularly serve food or have dining areas, buffets, and self-serve drink zones, consider redesigning certain elements and/or operating differently to reduce the spread of germs between individuals.

LIGHT



*WELL aims to provide a lighting environment that reduces circadian phase disruption, improves sleep quality and positively impacts mood and productivity.** Incorporating daylighting strategies not only helps boost efficiency and access to nature, but also helps with overall mental well-being. To help combat the spread of disease, consider automated shades that work with daylight and artificial lighting controls that are programmed through no-touch devices like occupancy and daylight sensors.

MOVEMENT



*WELL aims to promote movement, foster physical activity/active living and discourage sedentary behavior by creating and enhancing physical activity opportunities through the spaces where we live, learn, work and play.** Active furnishings such as sit-to-stand desks help sustain movement throughout the day. Selecting walkable sites, providing access to physical activity spaces, and encouraging the use of stairs also help reduce physical inactivity and promote well-being. Utilizing stairs over elevators also allows for a greater area to social distance. Long term sedentary behaviors are linked to outcomes such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease and can, unfortunately, increase complications and severity of illness when fighting viruses such as COVID-19.

THERMAL COMFORT



*WELL takes a holistic approach to thermal comfort and provides a combination of research-based interventions to help design buildings that address individual thermal discomfort and support human health, well-being and productivity.** Indoor thermal strategies should be evaluated closely as more information becomes available on the effects of temperature and humidity in relation to COVID-19. Exploring whether certain strategies or systems can be leveraged may help reduce the unintended harboring of viruses while maintaining occupancy comfort.

SOUND



*WELL aims to provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to addressing the concerns of acoustical comfort through research-based design considerations that buildings can accommodate for the purposes of improving occupant health and well-being.** Implementing strategies to address acoustical comfort and acuity within the indoor environment are key, especially as more people are working remotely and depend on video conferencing to communicate. Strategies like acoustical zoning, sound barriers, sound masking, and impact noise management help to mitigate noise disturbances and improve sound quality for those reliant on video and phone communication. A better equipped acoustical environment can help facilitate ease of communication and reduce distractions for better productivity and less stress.

MATERIALS



*The WELL Materials concept aims to reduce human exposure to hazardous building material ingredients through the restriction or elimination of compounds or products known to be toxic and the promotion of safer replacements.** Exposure to hazardous chemicals or fumes can cause respiratory distress or latent affects like certain types of cancer. Actively choosing safer materials with inherent or added antimicrobial properties, properly disposing of waste, and controlling emissions all create a healthier indoor environment. An increased emphasis on selecting materials that are highly durable and cleanable is key as finishes must endure more frequent and stringent cleaning to combat COVID-19 and the spread of future disease.

MIND



*WELL implements design, policy and programmatic strategies that support cognitive and emotional health through a variety of prevention and treatment efforts. In combination, these interventions have the potential to positively impact the short- and long-term mental health and well-being of individuals of diverse backgrounds throughout a community.** Consequences of COVID-19 on mental health and well-being may not be fully understood until sometime in the future. Strategies like access to nature and biophilic elements, restorative spaces, mental health access, and promotion policies help foster awareness and emphasize the importance of mental well-being. Creating an environment that promotes a safe and positive head space is one of the most powerful tools to navigate our ever-changing world.

COMMUNITY



*WELL implements strategies that address public health issues through a social determinants framework, focusing on the social components that drive and shape health to form built spaces that truly create a foundation for equitable, inclusive and healthy environments.** More than ever, society has become acutely aware of social shortcomings and inequalities that have been highlighted during this time of pandemic. Policies such as health promotion and access, new parent support, civic engagement, universal design, organizational transparency, and emergency preparedness all help bolster our confidence and involvement in the communities where we live and work. Creating a foundation of trust and transparency is key for people to come together, tackle problems, and thrive.

*Source: <https://v2.wellcertified.com/v/en/overview>

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