



CoreNet Global Report

Designing for WELL in the Workplace: Creating Comfort, Harmony, and Healthy Spaces

BY KARA MCGUANE AND JENNIFER TARANTO

The WELL Building Standard is a natural evolution of the LEED rating system as the architectural industry shifts its focus from exteriors to healthy interiors. This is where the International Well Building Institute naturally evolved to establish the world's first building standard that exclusively focuses on building occupants' health and well-being. WELL combines environmental and policy-driven elements that focus on the following concepts: air, water, nourishment, light, movement, thermal comfort, sound, materials, mind, and community. Each of the ten concepts has been scientifically researched and supported by evidence-based research to help create comfort, harmony, and a healthier built environment for all users to thrive.

WELL has given us a proven set of tools to add to our toolbox, and interior designers are responsible for implementing a forward-thinking design. As an industry, we have sustainable knowledge and available technology used as a guide for future design projects. More than ever, it is time to adapt and work with the real estate sector to impact human health through responsible design. As a starting point, we should ask ourselves how our design allows people to thrive in the built environment. Then work on layering on what we can do to reduce our global footprint by minimizing water, energy, waste, materials, and toxins in our built environment. By honing in on these critical elements, we can identify ways to create a healthier setting for occupants inside a building.



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We spend 90 percent of our lives inside, but naturally, we have innate physiological responses to nature as humans. One of WELL's features, Nature and Place, can be awarded to projects by creating a biophilic design framework. Scientific studies have shown that the ability to be surrounded by nature has aided in reducing stress and positively impacts the mood and comfort level of occupants in a building. This feature can be easily incorporated into interior design universally through environmental elements, lighting, and space layout. Similarly, another feature describes human's yearning for views of the outdoors and natural light. Humans have a natural 24-hour cycle following circadian rhythms. By providing more natural daylight, we can ultimately improve the quality of life. This feature is achievable by integrating more windows, atriums, skylights, and a reduced building depth. When we design to occupants' physiological needs, we address both the biological effect on human's well-being and can enhance productivity simultaneously.

Another feature within the Mind concept includes providing Restorative Spaces for occupants to have a place within the workplace that is not meant for work, but instead to provide relief for mental fatigue and stress. This means spaces, inside or outside, over 2,000 SF or larger should consider the following features: adjustable lighting, sound, thermal comfort, multiple seating arrangements, the incorporation of nature, calming colors, textures, and forms, along with visual privacy. Communication is a critical component of ensuring occupants are aware of their wellness opportunities within a space, so signage, education, and other resources would need to be included to ensure that people understand the space's intended use. Similarly, owners can implement the Comfort precondition, Ergonomic Workstation Design, by designing spaces that allow occupants control over their workspace and relief from physical strain. This means providing adjustable computer screens, sit-stand desks, desktop height adjustments, seat flexibility, and communication through orientation on ways to make adjustments themselves. Ultimately all WELL designs should cater to the needs of all individuals' comfort by designing universally sound spaces and following the guidelines of ADA regulations and ISO standards alongside the integration of universal design.



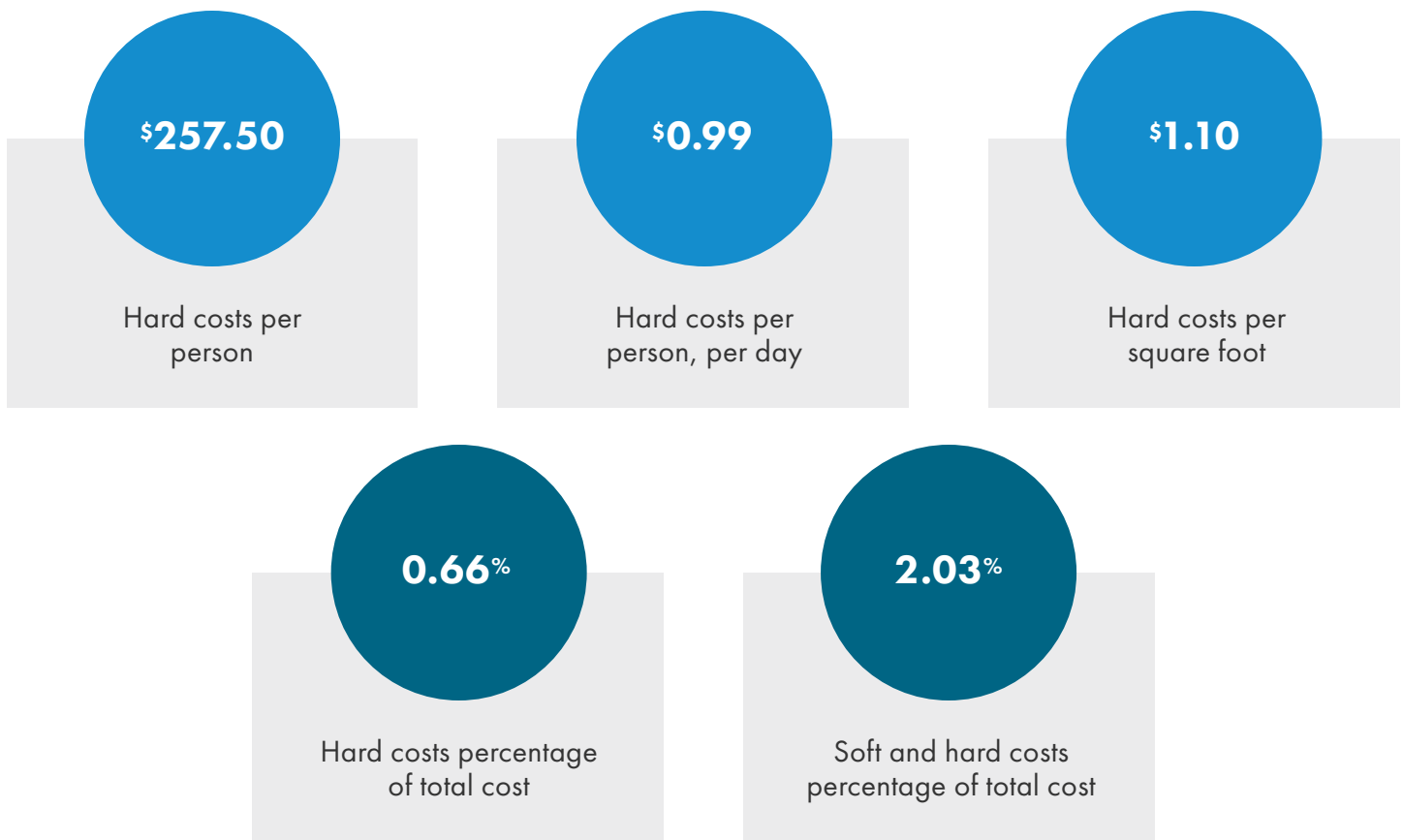
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At Structure Tone's headquarters in New York City, the first WELL project in New York, visitors note that the space is different – there is something different about the area they can't quite put their finger on. The WELL plaque greets occupants at the door, a head nod to the organization's value in their staff and visitors' health and wellness. The lobby bursts with the connection to place and celebration of culture with the company logo flying overhead and in fragmented hints on the glass conference room partitions. Workers have ergonomically appropriate workstations and 100% sit-stand seating throughout. There are a variety of workspaces available to suit collaborative or heads-down concentration. The indoor air quality and water quality were tested to meet the standard's rigors along with acoustics and lighting. The space is energizing and at \$257.50 per person it's not a cost, but an investment where the immediate return on that investment is in employee well-being.

In the STO Building Group's 2019 sustainability survey, 88% of end-users say that incorporating wellness features and amenities is essential. The top driver for end-users is attracting and retaining talent while increasing employee productivity comes in second. Additionally, the survey data showed that the WELL Building Standard is the most respected of the two major standards that, at their core, address health and wellness and third overall of the green building rating systems asked about, beat out only by LEED and ENERGY STAR.

WELL By the Numbers

**Costs are specific to Structure Tone NYC HQ, 330 W 34th Street, New York, NY*



Better Well-Being Outcomes at Structure Tone HQ

Scores by Occupancy Status



Looking beyond industry trends, the question remains – does the WELL Building Standard provide opportunities for better health and well-being outcomes? Overwhelmingly the pre-and post-occupancy data from Structure Tone’s space concludes that it does. Environmental condition satisfaction scores in air, physical comfort, thermal comfort, light, cleanliness, maintenance, fitness, water, nourishment, safety, and workplace wellness policies all garnered high marks compared to their previous office space. Structure Tone’s employees reported statistically significant improvements in feeling motivated to work at their best every day, looking forward to coming to work, and pride in being part of the organization. As if that isn’t enough, there was a marked improvement in employees feeling like the organization cares about how the physical work environment impacts mental health. The employee’s perceived mental health scores rose between the pre-and post-occupancy surveys to above the U.S. average.



Reflecting on workplace investment means providing thoughtful workplace design that meets the requirements for employees to excel. CBRE's North America studies concluded that "employees place their highest value on views of the outdoors and natural light. The top 5 valued amenities per CBRE's studies were as followed in this order: 53% views of outdoors, 53% on natural light, 44% on-site café/food, 37% kitchen, and 28% open office space." Knowledge and advancement of a workplace starts by knowing the facts, understanding environmental health, behavioral factors, and workers' health outcomes in a built environment. Creating WELL spaces provides an opportunity for employee satisfaction, optimizing health and well-being opportunities while simultaneously creating harmonious, healthy, and sustainable spaces where people thrive.

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Cited Sources

- [CBRE - North America: How Workplace Experience can Boost Employee Engagement](#)
- [STO Building Group 2019 Survey on Sustainability, Wellness and Resilience](#)