



Money matters, but so does working comfortably



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Workplace wellbeing is increasingly becoming a top priority for many businesses, with a growing number of organisations positioning workplace health as part of company ethos and strategy. According to research from Willis Towers Watson, 82% of employers are investing in wellbeing initiatives, or plan to within the next three years. Part of this trend is a growing awareness amongst businesses of the positive impact of well-designed workplaces and furniture on employee health and productivity.

Overall, the outlook for better employee wellbeing and engagement is on the up. However, in the finance sector, statistics suggest that the emphasis on health and productivity may not be as high compared to other sectors yet. In a survey of over 36,000 employees working in 25 banks and building societies in the UK conducted by Banking Standards Board, 26% of respondents agreed with the statement: 'Working in my organisation has a negative impact on my health and wellbeing'. Furthermore, according to Finance Monthly, 50% of working adults in the banking and financial services industries believe that businesses are not doing enough to support the physical and mental wellbeing of their employees. It is a concern, but as has been shown in other sectors, there are certainly factors that can be

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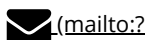
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As has been shown in other sectors, there are certainly factors that can be

addressed in terms of the physical working environment that can help employees

in finance to work more comfortably, and therefore more productively.

The challenge faced by finance organisations has to do with minimising the

sedentary nature of the work undertaken by employees in most banks and

financial organisations, who are part of the 81% (Workplace Insight) of the UK's

working population spending a good portion of the day at a desk. Remaining static

causes physiological issues. According to the

Chartered Institute of Physiotherapy, in the UK, 40% of all sickness absence is due

to work-related musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) such as short-term back pain.

While rarely life threatening, MSDs can have a large impact on our quality of life.

Aside they also have serious implications for the economy, since they are

of all working days lost due to work-related ill health.

Fortunately, small changes can have big benefits. The principles of ergonomics, the

science of refining the design of products to optimise them for human use, have

key roles to play in helping us to work more comfortably. They centre around the

importance of working in neutral postures at the proper height, reducing excessive

force and motions, minimising fatigue, static load, as well as minimising pressure

points, and maintaining a comfortable environment. Main focus areas of

ergonomics include computers, the desk on which a computer sits, the chair on

which a worker sits, the keyboard they use and how their hands work with it. These

are typically the products most employees, including those in finance, use

throughout the day to do their jobs. If they are badly designed, they lead to stress,

fatigue, or even injury, which of course negatively affect the employees themselves,

but also can reflect badly on their employers.

A good example in the finance sector is contact centres, where employees spend

much of their working time sitting in front of a computer. According to a report,

'Multi-Stakeholder Perspectives of Factors That Influence Contact Centre Call

Agents' Workplace Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour', call agents spend

more time (90%) at work sedentary and desk-based. Ensuring that they have their

monitors and keyboards at the correct height will immediately reduce eye strain

and increase comfort levels. Also, providing comfortable, adjustable chairs that fit

with monitors and keyboards is vital to making sure employees are working as

productively and comfortably as possible. However, even if a workstation is set up

correctly, employees can still get tired from staying in the same position for too

long. Flexibility is key: desks that can support sitting or standing, or even be folded

away, enable this adaptation.

In having a choice of how they work, employees have the power to control their

working environment themselves. Not only does this add to comfort levels and

health benefits, employees become more productive when they are content.

According to a study from Warwick University, happiness makes workers around

12% more productive.

Assuring that financial workers have a safe, comfortable and productive

environment in which to work should not be an afterthought. And with 59% of

people (Global Banking and Finance Review) stating that the government should be

doing more to promote wellbeing, well-designed workplaces and furniture are becoming key differentiators between employers who promote employee health and productivity, and those who don't.

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