



Chris Irwin, VP of Sales Europe and Africa at Distech Controls SAS, examines the role the Building Management System (BMS) can play in supporting and improving the well-being and comfort of occupants in a commercial building.



PUTTING WELL-BEING FIRST

Building controls and the comfort factor

Do you like the office you work in? Is it pleasing to the eye? Is it comfortable and does it stimulate you to work more effectively? These are important questions for those designing and building office spaces.

For the last few years, we have been concentrating on making buildings green and focusing on the energy efficiency credentials but the health and well-being of occupants is now coming to the fore.

Well-being is currently a hot topic for those involved in the development of major office projects and for very good reasons. A new study, conducted by market researchers Ipsos for the US furniture business Steelcase*, involved over 12,000 workers across 17 countries.

It revealed that, in the UK, a third of employees do not like their office environment, with 45% being dissatisfied with the room temperature at work and 32% being unhappy with the light intensity.

The BMS can play an important role in improving environmental conditions of employees and is capable of delivering the features now being required by building developers. Here's why...

Concern about the quality of the indoor environment is not something new; remember the furore about "sick building syndrome" many years ago, and for years now, CO2 sensors have been used in schools to ensure adequate ventilation to avoid drowsiness.

What is new is a pre-occupation with a broader concept of "well-being" in the workplace. This has been driven by a realisation by the senior management of office based businesses that improvements in the quality of the workplaces can make a significant difference to their employees' productivity, and crucially, their ability to attract and retain the best talent, which has a direct impact on the businesses profitability.

As an organisation's workforce is their most important asset, any improvement in productivity and employee retention can have just as big an effect on the bottom line as energy savings or improvements in maintenance efficiency.

James Lang LaSalle recently undertook a survey of properties it manages and concluded that the productivity gain was 10 times more valuable to a business than operational efficiency, which was in turn 10 times more

valuable than energy management.

Adapting to this new interest in well-being requires a shift in mind-set for building operators who have historically been strongly focused on operational and energy cost reduction measures.

So what is meant by "well-being"? It is a somewhat nebulous term, and as with so many market trends it is actually an umbrella term for a range of issues that affect how an employee performs.

Perhaps the most important factor, which the office environment cannot help with, is the relationship we have with our immediate boss, and another is of course pay, but there are many other factors that collectively make a big difference to an employee's attitude towards and experience of the office where he or she works.

These include the air quality, the visual ambience, the lighting levels and quality, the seating quality, the catering facilities, the availability and quality of exercise and showering facilities, and the ease of access to the building.

What has all this got to do with the BMS?

Firstly, the primary function of the BMS is to provide a comfortable working environment by maintaining an appropriate temperature, humidity and air quality. From a well-being perspective, the provision of a high quality (easy to use) user interface that enables occupants to understand what the current conditions are and how to adjust them is important, whether it be wall-mounted or via an app on their smartphone.

Secondly, the BMS should be integrating control of HVAC, lighting and sunblinds, so that the user has only one user interface to learn. Thirdly, the BMS should seamlessly integrate with the various applications used for meeting room booking, concierge service, catering, car-pooling, etc. so that all data can be shared on only one app. Building developers and occupiers of large office towers are now requiring an app for the building, which provides all employees direct access to a wide range of services in and around the buildings.

Distech Controls is a leading supplier of this integrated well-being focused BMS in the European market. Our ECLYPSE Connected BACnet/IP and Wi-Fi HVAC controller series and

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ENVYSION responsive HTML5 web-based design and visualisation interface provide powerful connectivity, advanced control and analysis all the while creating value and attractiveness for buildings.

Furthermore, our ECLYPSE product series can be integrated to create a unified system (Smart Room Control) for the control of HVAC, lighting and sunblind, thus achieving the highest levels of comfort for occupants.

Beyond establishing an open network and distributing IP throughout the facility, the ECLYPSE controllers' RESTful API allows for the exchange of data and the creation of mobile apps to offer cutting-edge services that fit with the use of the building and meets the needs of occupants.

Distech Controls' Head Office in Lyon France, which opened just this January, is equipped with all the latest integrated technology, as a real technological showcase.

We are also fully supportive of the Well Building Standard (WELL) now being promoted to qualify buildings with regard to how well they support well-being in the work place. WELL is the first standard of its kind that focuses solely on the health and wellness of building occupants. It identifies 100 performance metrics, design strategies, and policies that can be implemented by the owners, designers, engineers, contractors, users and operators of a building.

Designing spaces that improve the health and well-being of occupants is now just as important as creating energy efficient buildings. The BMS has always been an important element of when it comes to operational and environmental conditions within the building but it also has the ability to help occupants and improve their well-being.

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*<https://www.steelcase.com/eu-en/press-releases/uk-workers-least-satisfied-with-their-office-environment/>

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