

# Talking Talent: Workplace Well-being and *Cultural Currency*

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Knoll convened a roundtable in Denver in July 2019 with thirteen workplace professionals to explore themes of talent: well-being (mind, body, individual, community, spaces) and *cultural currency* within the workplace. Future roundtables will explore similar themes and findings will be compiled into a comprehensive study. In the meantime, we are sharing some noteworthy insights we learned.

## What We Learned: Five Insights From Our Conversation

### 1. Attitudes around work have changed

Lines between work and home have blurred to the point that work has become an increasingly large part of our identity. Not only are work associates considered family, but some wonder how to integrate family into our work life.

*“Work is a lifestyle. It’s not a thing we do, it’s part of who we are.”*

### 2. Talent is driving the escalating level of amenities

The most sought-after talent (typically software development teams) is often the most demanding, noting their numerous employment alternatives, each with superior amenities, and that they feel they deserve more than they already have.

Expectations must be managed and implementation must be democratic. Efforts that cater to particular groups, whether it’s bagels or standing desks, typically generate blowback from coworkers.

While some see the demand for amenities continuing to escalate, others predict a halt at the next economic downturn when demand for talent dips and company’s willingness to invest in amenities goes down. Others see a shift in focus from recreational diversion to holistic well-being.

*“Furniture is huge currency at our office. We have standing desks for mostly everyone.”*

### 3. Cultural currency takes many forms

*Cultural currency* encompasses both tangible assets and intangible attributes and is an important tool in employee happiness. Highly coveted physical effects include food; specialty pens and furniture, particularly standing desks.

Also highly valued in many firms: an atmosphere of trust; flexibility, mentoring; a sense of contribution and a headquarters-level experience for distributed employees.

### 4. The work space is an important tool to encourage engagement and innovation

While open, internal stairwells, well-stocked pantries and game rooms are tried and true ways to encourage the casual “collisions” that foster collaboration, cross-pollination and innovation, sometimes less formally planned elements are equally successful in supporting engagement and ideation. Examples include:

- + **Taking a break.** Active recreation—foosball, ping pong, volleyball tournaments or going for a walk—can refresh minds as well as bodies.
- + **Waiting in line.** A company noticed long lines at the espresso bar and was prepared to put in a second station. Upon closer

observation, the organization saw interaction and engagement happening while people were in line, and ultimately decided against the second station.

- + **Bridging the gap.** Building in walking distances between teams, amenities, parking garages and other daily destinations expands connection opportunities.

### 5. Addressing wellness and well-being is a holistic effort

Wellness and well-being are of broad interest to employers and employees across all age groups and encompasses many elements.

*“Well-being doesn’t have to mean working out.”*


- + **Food.** Having healthy options available makes wise food choices easier.
- + **Physical comfort.** Onsite clinicians, masseuses and chiropractors are now seen in the workplace.
- + **Activity.** Walking meetings and group activities such as games, volleyball or yoga build in movement opportunities throughout the day.
- + **Managing technology flow.** In an always-on world, workplace technology is a constant source of stress and distraction. Some organizations are implementing “digital sabbaths” and sabbaticals.

*“What do you need to do your best work each day? Ergonomics, technology; all the necessary tools, the right connectivity everywhere.”*

- + **Fitness.** Many employees consider fitness a personal experience and prefer options with greater privacy over group exercise classes.
- + **Emotional balance.** Quiet rooms allow employees to decompress, make private calls.
- + **Building and maintaining friendships.** Having friends at work builds employee engagement, happiness, retention and loyalty, and improves productivity and performance. The difficulty of making friends after college means work is important source of

friendships. Company social activities are an important tool in establishing and building friendships between employees.

Friendship and camaraderie in the workplace are taking on greater importance as organizations focus more on connection and cultural change in addition to physical space. The rise of microcultures based around common interests, and often enabled by software collaboration tools, means connections can be virtual.

- + **Empathy.** Building empathy into culture can encourage stronger collaboration, less stress, higher morale and greater resilience.
- + **Biophilia.** In addition to providing a healthy dose of nature and its benefits, plants and biophilia are also sensory elements that allow employees to physically experience company culture. 

## Participants

A special thanks to the following individuals as well as participants who wished to remain anonymous.

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