

Fitter, Happier, More Productive

1 year ago



Jason Petsch, founder and CEO of [OUTCO](#) addresses how Facilities Managers can leverage outdoor spaces

The Role of Outdoor Spaces in the Workplace of the Future

As organisations refine their return-to-office strategies, workplace design is evolving to prioritise collaboration, well-being, and productivity. While hybrid working models remain popular, businesses are increasingly recognising the need to make physical workspaces more appealing and effective. This shift has led to a growing interest in how outdoor environments can be leveraged to enhance employee experience and operational efficiency.

A key concept emerging in this area is biophilic design—the practice of integrating natural elements into built environments. Research has shown that exposure to nature in the workplace can lead to increased well-being, reduced stress, and improved productivity. Facilities managers, who play a pivotal role in shaping workplace environments, are uniquely positioned to implement strategic enhancements to outdoor spaces, ensuring they contribute to both employee satisfaction and business objectives.

The Business Case for Investing in Outdoor Spaces

Beyond aesthetic appeal, well-maintained outdoor spaces offer tangible business benefits. A 2023 study conducted by PLP Architects, Loughborough University, and the University of Reading found that every £1 invested in biophilic design could yield up to £2.70 in value through enhanced productivity. Previous research by the University of Oslo also demonstrated that access to nature reduces stress and prevents fatigue during high-focus tasks.

Additional studies support the idea that biophilic workplaces contribute to overall business success. A Human Spaces study found that employees in nature-rich offices reported 13% higher well-being and 8%

greater productivity. Given that employee engagement is closely linked to organisational performance, these findings suggest that investing in outdoor spaces is not just a luxury but a strategic necessity.

Rethinking Grounds Maintenance as a Strategic Asset

Traditionally, outdoor maintenance has been viewed as an operational cost rather than a strategic investment. However, by shifting this perspective, facilities managers can turn outdoor areas into assets that enhance productivity, support sustainability goals, and improve the overall workplace experience.

Practical approaches to optimising outdoor spaces include:

- **Planned landscape management:** Developing a structured plan to ensure green spaces remain attractive, functional, and welcoming throughout the year.
- **Sustainable and biodiversity-focused enhancements:** Introducing features such as wildflower meadows, which require less maintenance than traditional lawns while boosting biodiversity.
- **Vertical greenery solutions:** Installing living walls or green roofs in areas with limited external space to improve air quality and aesthetics.
- **Employee engagement:** Involving staff in the planning process to ensure outdoor spaces meet their needs, whether through seating areas, quiet zones, or fitness facilities.

By incorporating these elements, organisations can create outdoor environments that serve as extensions of the workplace, fostering collaboration, relaxation, and overall well-being.

Practical Steps for Facilities Managers

For those looking to enhance outdoor spaces, the following steps can help guide the process:

1. **Define Clear Objectives:** Establish a landscape management plan with short-, medium-, and long-term goals that align with broader organisational strategies.
2. **Balance Investment and Sustainability:** Consider cost-effective improvements, such as sustainable planting or habitat creation, that require minimal ongoing maintenance.
3. **Think Beyond Aesthetics:** While curb appeal is important, the real value lies in how outdoor spaces contribute to employee engagement, productivity, and environmental compliance.
4. **Align with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Goals:** Enhancing biodiversity and incorporating sustainable water management solutions can support compliance with biodiversity net gain regulations.

The Future of Work Includes Nature

The modern workplace is no longer confined to four walls. As businesses seek ways to improve employee well-being and productivity, outdoor spaces are becoming an increasingly valuable component of workplace design. Facilities managers who take a proactive approach to integrating nature into the built environment can help create workplaces that are not only more sustainable but also more engaging and effective.

By viewing outdoor spaces as strategic assets rather than maintenance burdens, organisations can unlock significant benefits—from improved employee well-being to enhanced corporate reputation and long-term cost savings. As research continues to highlight the value of biophilic design, the role of outdoor spaces in the future of work is set to grow, making now the perfect time for facilities managers to rethink how they manage and invest in their external environments.