

Life Sciences: Unique Challenges and Stewards of Progress



What do we do next?

This question is on the mind of all business leaders, worldwide. There is of course no, one right answer. The best, next step is likely dependent on endless considerations¹. Industry type is an important consideration, given that the type of work being done provides insight to the needs of employees, requirements for space, and potential work styles among other inputs. Though individual and immediate needs will vary, we can identify themes that may assist in helpful conversations for future planning.

In this article, we will discuss the Life Science industry. The growth and productivity of this industry are being driven by the lightspeed adoption of new technologies and rapid advancements in innovation. Combined with the aging population, need for innovative solutions for our current environment, and the immense pressure of consumer demand, those in this industry are confronted with problems that require immediate attention².

The Life Science sector is unique from others in several ways, including safety requirements, personnel, space needs, and future planning – each of which we will discuss in this article. Thoughtful consideration of these areas can foster health, productivity, and growth.



① Safety Culture is Mandatory

The phrase “safety first” is more than a motto, it is a requirement and a culture. Specific safety regulations may differ regionally and by process, however a full understanding of the requirements and strategies must be present in early planning stages for every space.

Life Science companies not only need to comply fully with local regulations but may also benefit from understanding the strictest relevant regulatory processes, as requirements are likely to trend that direction.

Depending on specifics of work, safety requirements may include considerations for eye wash, biohazard, waste disposal, and heat source considerations, all of which necessitate deliberation in planning. However, given our current environment, all spaces should consider health and safety considerations like hand washing, cleaning procedures, PPE, and ventilation. Ergonomic considerations are also important to ensure continued health and safety of employees. Due to the complexity of this topic, is recommended that skilled consultants are engaged for advice if there is uncertainty on needs.

Beyond requirements and regulations, employees will have individual needs that may need attention to ensure personal safety. Open and two-way communication is important to understand these concerns. Employees must be able to feel comfortable to voicing their needs without fear of reprisal and employers should be able to address and/or communicate alternative approaches.

2 Employee Health and Wellness is Paramount

The essential workers in the Life Science industry have endured a huge burden during the COVID-19 pandemic. Work environments may have been less flexible than other knowledge worker industries, and the nature of the work may feel weightier given the current cultural climate. The combination of high stress, high output, and uncertainty create environments prone for burnout and turnover. To make matters worse, it has been suggested that medical technicians and administrators were “less likely to take preventative steps to manage trauma than those in other sectors³.”

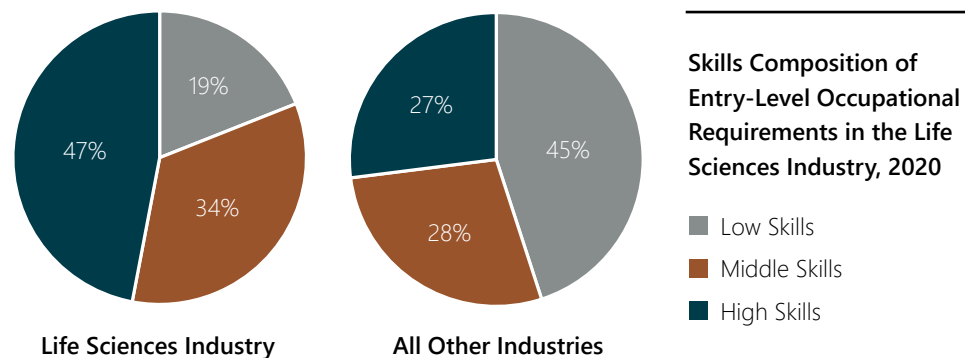
Employees within the Life Science industry are more likely to have a special and high skill set compared to other industries⁴. Given this, it is important to retain employees, to maintain their health, consider their workplace satisfaction, and to keep them engaged. Attraction of new talent is also a top consideration.

Holistic wellness initiatives can help to improve moral, attention, attendance, and employee satisfaction⁵. Successful wellness programs consist of considerations for multiple dimensions of physical and mental health and wellbeing, and should be integrated in the culture and fostered by the built environment ([read more here](#)).

Considerations for stress management and mental health are especially critical in the Life Sciences. The WELL Building Standard emphasizes the need to mitigate stress: “States of chronic stress are associated with increased risk of numerous adverse health consequences, such as depression, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and upper respiratory infection⁶”.

The design of the environment can support mental and emotional wellness by considering inclusion of areas for privacy, rest, respite and/or prayer or mediation. Additionally, biophilic elements, such as greenery, natural materials, and thoughtful layouts have been shown to have positive impacts on stress reduction, mood, and emotion⁷.

In addition to design considerations to, company policy and culture need to promote mental health as well. Sick leave and family support policies have been connected to improved stress³. Consistent and on-going, open communication between coworkers and managers can also help increase understanding, empathy, and build resilience ([read more here](#)).



③ Unique Space Requirements to Support Work

The work that happens by employees with the Life Science field often requires equipment and floor plates quite different than other knowledge worker office spaces. Employers, brokers, and space designers must consider multiple inputs, including but not limited to:

- **Can the building accept the needs of a science-based industry?**
- **What are the needs of the space?**
 - What do employees do while “on carpet” and “off carpet”?
- **What is the workflow and how does that impact logical location of spaces?**
- **What are the needs of meeting spaces?**
 - What considerations for acoustics are required?
Where and how will it be designed into the space?
 - What areas require capabilities to share content or have remote/video meeting capabilities?
- **How do hybrid work programs impact the space need?**
 - What is the company's growth plans? Does the space allow for company growth and is it flexible for changing needs?

④ Planning for the Future, Stewards for Progress

Employees want to know that they are working for something meaningful, that they have purpose and that their company is mindful of important causes. The Life Science industry is often at the leading edge of these conversations.

The nature of the work means that companies within this industry need to manage the speed of rapid growth and establish realistic expectations in the market. Additionally, an understanding of corporate sustainability and an awareness of social initiatives are often seen as an asset by employees.





5 Perspective: Top characteristics of a successful Life Science workplace

We asked one of our network allies, Safety Partners what makes a successful life science workplace.

Lauren Laidlaw responded: “establishing a safety culture and making workplace safety a top priority. In terms of space the HVAC system is a very important and making sure we meet appropriate air ventilation based on biosafety levels. Appropriate plumbing outfitting is important too. When it comes to space it’s really about making sure companies are moving into lab space that design appropriately to help eliminate risks when working with equipment and materials.”

6 Perspective: Biggest Challenges of Industry is finding available space in the LS clusters

Biggest challenge to workplace safety side is the infrastructure and finding available space in the Life Science clusters. The market for available space is currently extremely tight and there are somewhat limited options, often forcing clients to make quick decisions regarding space. Some companies are resorting to utilization of subleased spaces until larger space requirements can be met. This space requirement, combined with consistent industry requirements of research speed, lead times, and supply chain have put immense pressure on the individuals in this sector.

Summary

Attraction and retention of employees in Life Sciences is crucial, therefore wellness, psychological safety, and space considerations need to be fully accounted for. Additionally, unique space requirements make design, specification, and maintenance uniquely challenging for those within the Life Science industry.

References and Resources

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About Safety Partners

Safety Partners is a portal into a rich array of EHS experience and expertise, giving you a wealth of knowledge at your fingertips. Our workplace safety and compliance programs are smart, tailored and right-sized. Our Quality, Research and Training team (QRT), is our differentiator. QRT keeps current with regulations, guidelines, and the pulse of industry best practices to provide our Consulting Officers on-going support to meet client challenges. They have over 650,000 consulting hours for more than 700 life science companies. Safety Partners is proud to be recognized as a Certified Women Owned Business. For more information got to; safetypartnersinc.com/about.

