

Workplace brief

EDGE Olympic

Designing on the cutting-edge
of workplace wellbeing

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EDGE Technologies is on a mission to make the world’s healthiest buildings. The company’s new head office in The Netherlands, which was awarded a Leesman+ certificate in June 2019, is proof that it’s on the right track.

In 2015, Bloomberg described The Edge, Deloitte’s flagship headquarters in Amsterdam, as the “smartest office space ever constructed”. “It knows where you live. It knows what car you drive. It knows who you’re meeting with today and how much sugar you take in your coffee,” wrote journalist Tom Randall. From that moment, The Edge has been celebrated as one of the most sophisticated workplaces in the world and used often as the go-to example when experts want to demonstrate technology’s potential.

For real estate developer EDGE Technologies, however, The Edge simply represents the first generation of what’s possible. The company responsible for building this global icon uses the data from its sophisticated smart platform to inform every new EDGE project in a process of continuous learning and development.

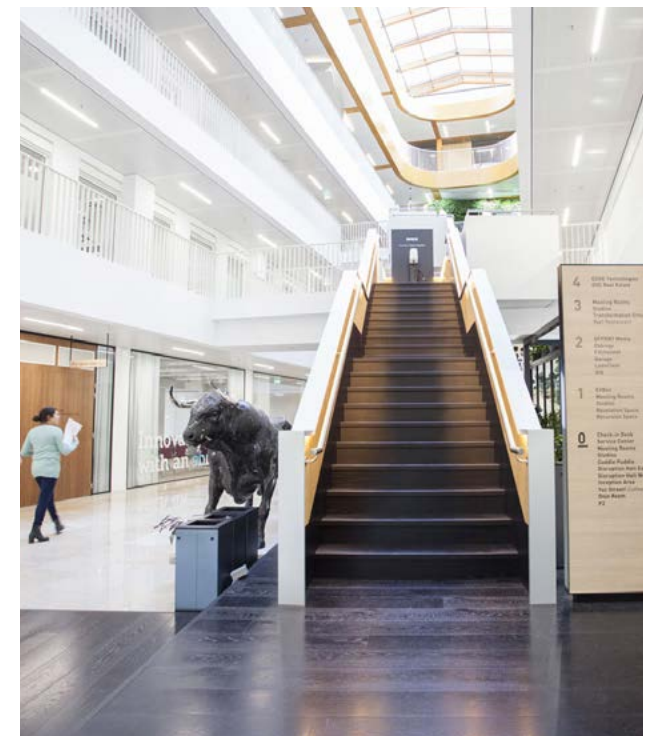
In 2019, the company opened EDGE Olympic, a new 119,000-sq-ft building in Amsterdam’s central business district. This second-generation space comprises EDGE’s new headquarters, the offices of three other long-term tenants, co-working studios and desk space, a central atrium, a cafeteria, and terraces on the rooftop and ground floor.

The 20-year-old company recently changed its name from OVG Real Estate to EDGE Technologies to better capture what it does

and who it wants to be. Part of the necessary change for EDGE was to transform itself from a building provider to product provider, leveraging its smart platform.

That product is built on four pillars: wellbeing, sustainability, design and technology. Sandra Gritti, product excellence director at EDGE, however, makes it clear that the smart platform is the tool rather than the solution. “We are focusing on the health and wellbeing of tenants,” she explains. “We are fighting two problems – global warming and the need for better workplaces – and we approach these through the technology and the design of our buildings.”

As part of that mission, the company employed Leesman to carry out employee experience surveys of its spaces in the spring of 2019. Leesman was able to conduct pre- and post-occupancy surveys with EDGE staff, while all other occupants completed a post-occupancy survey. The results were emphatic. EDGE’s HQ scored an LMI of 81.7, earning it a Leesman+ certificate. Respondents agreed almost unanimously that the building is a place that they are proud to bring visitors to (97.8%) as well as an enjoyable environment to work in (96.7%). This achievement adds to the project’s WELL V2 Platinum certification, which scores workplaces on areas including water, nourishment, light, movement, thermal comfort, sound, materials, mind and community.



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Growing pains

Leesman's pre-occupancy survey of EDGE employees confirmed what the organisation already suspected: it had outgrown its old space. Having doubled the number of employees, EDGE needed to re-evaluate the workspace and what its people needed to feel supported in their roles.

There was significant dissatisfaction at the old office with the 'variety of different types of workspace', the 'small and large meeting rooms', 'quiet rooms for working alone or in pairs', and 'noise levels'. The fact that only 35.5% of respondents were satisfied with the variety of workspace provided in the previous office was particularly troubling given that more than half of EDGE's team work flexibly or at non-allocated desks.

Armed with that data, however, the company was able to make the right design choices for its new space at EDGE Olympic – and scores across these particular areas skyrocketed. In the post-occupancy survey, 97.1% of respondents reported satisfaction with the variety on offer in the new space, which represents a 61.4% increase in percentage points. Likewise, satisfaction with small meeting rooms jumped by 65.5 percentage points to 85.5%.

Florijn Vriend, product lead wellbeing at EDGE, believes this is a vindication of the organisation's efforts to boost social interaction. "We truly believe that interaction in the workplace is of extensive value, but only when it occurs at the right time and place," she explains. "Today's office worker needs to get focused work done, alone. Research shows that it takes around 25 minutes to reach deep concentration, yet in an open office the average worker is distracted at least every 10 minutes."

The solution for EDGE was to provide a solid variety of spaces so that people can withdraw from the hustle and bustle of the office when they need to focus. And this strategy is clearly

working. Satisfaction with 'individual focused work, desk based' climbed a massive 69.8 percentage points (26.7% to 96.5%) from the old head office to EDGE Olympic. Meanwhile, employees' sense of both personal wellbeing and productivity improved by approximately 50 percentage points after the move.

This was made possible by a series of purposeful additions to the new workplace: different zones to match employees' needs; open office space that boasts strong acoustic performance; a library for those who want to focus; an informal kitchen area; phonebooths for private conversations; and even a sound-scaping area that plays natural sounds. Communal areas on the ground and third floor are proving to be popular with the EDGE team, particularly for informal meetings and when welcoming visitors, and with other tenants who are making use of the extra space, as they grow quickly.

Finally, providing variety as a means to support wellbeing has also encouraged EDGE to introduce a gym, a games room and a meditation room. Satisfaction with 'informal work areas/ breakout zones' stands at 96.8% in the new space.

Getting smarter

EDGE's smart platform means that choice and variety does not end with the physical design of the new space. In fact, the technology at EDGE Olympic can, among other things, shape the employee experience and improve workplace wellbeing.

Throughout the building, sensors measure temperature, CO2, humidity, daylight, and noise levels. In addition to this, every occupant has access to a mobile app, empowering them to make decisions about where and how they will work in advance or on the fly. People sitting at desks can also adjust the lighting and the temperature.

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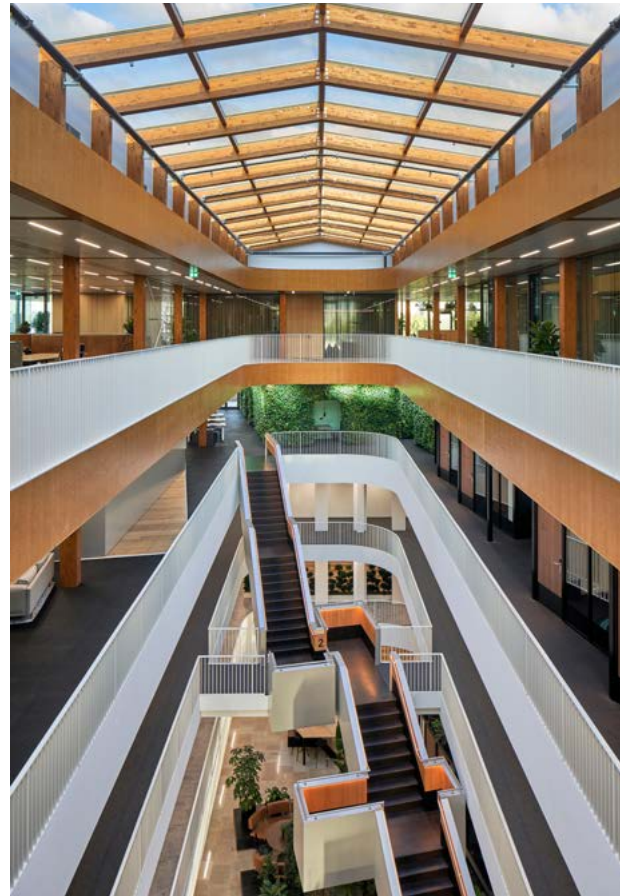


The survey data suggests that these additions to the space have made a huge difference to the employee experience. Satisfaction with ‘noise levels’ has surged from a meagre 7.1% to 68.1%, while ‘air quality’ and ‘natural light’ both now sit above 70%, the Leesman+ benchmark.

Ultimately, however, EDGE uses its plethora of technology to make increasingly accurate evidence-based improvements to the design of its spaces. Vriend explains: “With our smart building technology we are able to measure the performance of our building in real-time and on an objective level. For example, we can see the level of air quality in every space. Comparing that to the subjective data from Leesman allows us to see where the overlap is, but also where the differences lie.”

EDGE has also committed to sharing that ability with all of its future tenants, through a pre- and post-occupancy sensor-test and survey, in what it calls a Workplace Performance Check. “This offers valuable insights for tenants regarding fit-out decisions such as what to take to their new office but also what to improve on,” says Vriend. “This data-driven way of making decisions helps to finetune choices and build the best building in town.”

Bloomberg marvelled at EDGE’s technology as if it were make-believe – and perhaps the publication was right, too. Science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke once wrote that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic”. But for EDGE it’s simply a tool to advance to the next-generation of the workplace.



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