

Workplace brief

## Keeping connected

When technology and design bring people together

## Workplace brief: Keeping connected

When technology and design bring people together

In Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Honeywell has used its expertise in technology to create a workplace that places people in the centre of its design.

From small villages to high-rise megacities, Asia has it all. With a global population of almost 7 billion people (and growing), Asia continues to flourish and people's lives and lifestyles continue to change rapidly. Driven by a breadth of dynamic drivers such as investments, job creation, security, health, education, urbanisation and the rise of technology, some countries within Asia are already fast outpacing the rest of the world on growth in GDP per capita.

For example, if the 10 member states that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) were one single country, it would already be the seventh-largest economy in the world. Although at vastly different stages of development, ASEAN's 10 member states all share immense growth potential due to a swelling middle-class population and a growing number of affluent people.

When Honeywell established its ASEAN Headquarters in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2017, these factors, combined with the ease of technology adoption and savviness, were central to its plans. As the world becomes more interconnected through technology, companies in ASEAN, like Honeywell, are experiencing opportunities but are also feeling the rising competition that such connectedness brings.

"To expand its presence in the fast-growing ASEAN region, Honeywell picked the Greater Kuala Lumpur area to establish its regional ASEAN headquarters," says Briand Greer, president of

Honeywell ASEAN. "As a multinational company in a fast-growing sector where the competition for talent has led to workplace innovation, we saw this opportunity to thoroughly think about the future of the ASEAN Headquarters office in Kuala Lumpur. We had to ensure that we provided our employees with a workplace and environment that not only excites them, but also, one that satisfies their job needs and requirements on a daily basis."

Rae Han, workplace leader for Honeywell in Asia, explains that the opportunity for a spruced-up workplace came knocking when the business leaders in the ASEAN region requested for a consolidated office premise that was "unique and different" and conducive to promoting a ONE Honeywell solution and culture. A workplace that they could promote as a distinct differentiator for attracting some of the best talent in the country and in the region.

"We wanted to provide employees with an office that they can be proud of, a stimulating working environment that enhances their overall well-being at work. An environment where everything works, is functional and comfortable, clean with a lot of natural light, with a good balance of casual, informal and formal spaces that help inspire collaboration and creativity. This in turn helps build pride, branding and above all, higher productivity at work," shares Honeywell's Asia-Pacific vice president of human resources, Sarinah Bakar.



"We had to ensure that we provided our employees with a workplace and environment that not only excites them, but also, one that satisfies their job needs and requirements on a daily basis."

Following Honeywell’s Connected Workplace Strategy and functionality standard, which was first introduced at the organisation’s global headquarter building in Morris Plains, New Jersey, the new ASEAN headquarters features a contemporary, comfortable and efficient floor plan for maximum flexibility and growth. Under this strategy, the headquarters was designed as a cutting-edge work environment that focused on enhanced user experiences, connected communities, a consistent Honeywell look and feel, and an environment rich with Honeywell technologies – an environment that employees could proudly showcase to their customers and families alike.

According to Jonathan Speary, the global workplace director, the project had two further key objectives. As much as 40% of the organisation’s previous workplace in Kuala Lumpur was underutilised – somewhat typical of a big corporate – so the goal was to reach 80% utilisation of the new space. The second objective was to improve employees’ experience of the workplace by making the environment as ‘frictionless’ as possible so that people could get on with their jobs.

This creates a fascinating yet purposeful contradiction that says a great deal about contemporary progressive approaches to workplace design. Han and her teams wanted to make practical and cost-effective use of the space while understanding that the employee’s experience of a workplace does not exist within normal metrics. Honeywell’s ASEAN Headquarters office needed to achieve 80% utilisation, but it also had to be frictionless.

To achieve these overarching objectives, the organisation leant heavily on its expertise as a technology solution provider. However, it did so clear in the belief that technology in the workplace should ultimately service the people that inhabit it.

As part of Honeywell’s Connected Workplace Strategy, the organisation’s own building technology solutions is already at work at the ASEAN Headquarters, integrating with the surrounding physical environment to positive effect. The headquarters boast “smart” ceilings embedded with hundreds of sensors that measure temperature, light, motion and air quality.

Han explains: “Throughout the office, employees can get an overall picture of their environment – the quality of indoor air, energy consumption and savings as well as space utilisation. The Honeywell building technology enable employees to see which spaces or rooms are currently available and which are in use, helping to ensure that the office space is being utilised effectively.”

“Technology’s capacity to create a more people-centric workspace will only continue to grow,” she adds. “We are already working on additional features that will be able to not only adapt to an individual’s needs and preferences, but also, automatically adjust everything from temperature, lighting and automated door entries.”

The new Kuala Lumpur office also features a “Solutions Centre” where employees can drop by the ‘bar counter’ with their IT concerns and problems, akin to how mobile enthusiasts drop by the all-white ‘Genius Bar’ with their smart phone problems. Having found that employees preferred face-to-face interactions when asking for IT help, Honeywell wanted the new centre to give employees the same friendly vibe that they get when asking for help from a hotel concierge service team.

Away from technology, how the new office was going to be laid out was an important factor in determining the overall design. The layouts in previous Honeywell offices in Malaysia were consumed with individual offices, cubicles, and very few amenities. Although employees worked side by side, it was obvious that their space needs were often conflicted.

As much as 40% of the organisation’s previous workplace in Kuala Lumpur was underutilised – somewhat typical of a big corporate – so the goal was to reach 80% utilisation of the new space.



“Employees are able to connect more now than ever before,” says Bakar. “Our new office includes valued-purposeful spaces that suit every occasion, interaction and group size. Quiet corners and smaller focus rooms provide space for privacy; enclosed lounges, community rooms and 6-pax meeting spaces for smaller groups and discussions; and sofa pods and enclaves for teams to get together and brainstorm. Bigger, wide open spaces within the office are utilized for town halls and employee engagement activities.”

The new office features an agile workspace, which is largely new to Honeywell in Asia. The system has now been rolled out to six sites on the continent, with Kuala Lumpur being the second. The organisation used a process it calls the “Honeywell Operating System” to make this possible. It formalised a change management team that comprised business representatives, functional support and communications. Led by Liza Damit, Honeywell ASEAN’s senior corporate communications manager, communications were a critical element in the whole change management strategy.

“Involving the employees from the get-go was imperative to the whole change management and planning process,” says Damit. “Instead of designing an office under the blanket statement of ‘we need more collaborative space’, we conducted employee surveys and workshops to collect and analyse data about what values and factors were important to them such as storage needs, tools and platforms, furniture colours, table and chair types.”

“We also sent out regular communication blasts that informed [staff] of the Honeywell Connected Workplace strategy, milestone dates, artist impressions of their future office, surrounding facilities and eateries, possible transportation routes and so much more,” she continues.



Having already worked on numerous workplace projects, Lun Hsu, Asia-Pacific real estate director of Honeywell Global Real Estate, says: “Creating a workplace environment that places people in the centre of its design means empowering employees to have a say, giving them ample opportunity to understand and ask questions. This is a key factor in determining the success of a transformation project, and we did this well in Kuala Lumpur.”

Hsu stresses, however, that Honeywell’s workplaces are always in beta: “We want to adapt and change as the business changes. This allows us to constantly shift, and we have people at each location to help implement [changes] and keep staff engaged once projects are complete.”

The Honeywell team is adamant of Kuala Lumpur’s success. Leadership is happy with the new workplace and so too are the employees. Across Asia, Honeywell continues to create people-centric workplaces that can meet the challenges posed by the rapidly-flourishing region and its inhabitants.



“Creating a workplace environment that places people in the centre of its design means empowering employees to have a say, giving them ample opportunity to understand and ask questions.”