Co-funded by
the European Union

Outdoor Workspaces as a Strategic Asset

Economic
Development
Centre

Reimagining the Workplace Through Outdoor Working

The aim of the project “Innovativa Solutions for the Office of the Future” was to establish innovative methods based on the outdoor office concept in order to promote creativity, work motivation, and in the long term, occupational well-being among knowledge workers in Ostrobothnia.

The project was funded by the European Social Fund Plus through the Centre for Economic Development and implemented by the Centria University of Applied Sciences.

---

https://net.centria.fi/en/project/innovative-solutions-for-the-office-of-the-future/

- Maria Hofman-Bergholm & Sara Kåll-Fröjdö, Centria University of Applied Sciences, 2026.
- Layout: Johanna Essel
- Photos: Sara Kåll-Fröjdö
- Print: Wasa Graphics

centria
University of Applied Sciences

Introduction

The work environment directly affects employees' well-being, ability to concentrate, creativity, and productivity.

One of the most underutilized resources in the work environment is the surrounding environment of an organization.

This guide combines research findings with practical recommendations for organizations interested in introducing outdoor work practices.

Outdoor working can be a highly cost-effective approach to improving workplace wellbeing, creativity and motivation. Unlike many other workplace development initiatives, it require no additional infrastructure and can often be implemented using existing surroundings and facilities.

Organizations across sectors are increasingly exploring ways to integrate outdoor spaces into everyday working life. Yet significant opportunities remain underutilized.

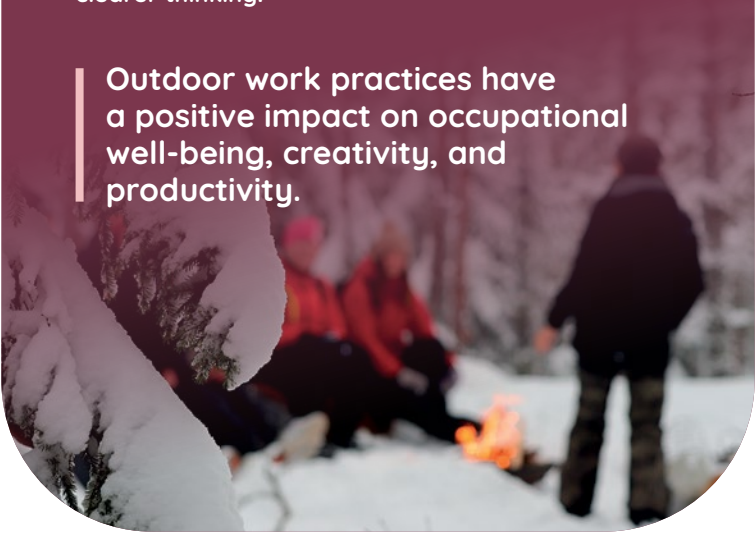
Why Introduce Outdoor Work Practices?

Having the opportunity to step outside for a while and work outdoors can improve the work environment by increasing exposure to natural light and fresh air, adding variety, and reducing sedentary behavior. Being in natural surroundings restores our executive functions and creativity.

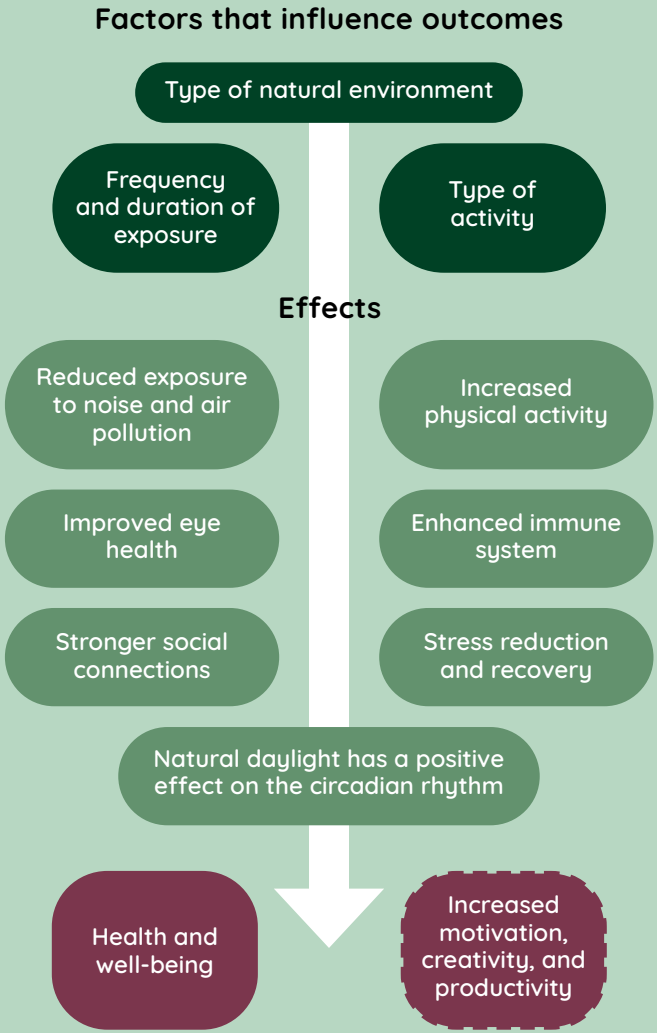
The positive effects of nature on physiological, psychological, and social processes are scientifically established, and benefits can be noticed after a short period of time.

Spending time in natural surroundings lowers blood pressure and stress hormones, improves concentration, enhances mood, and promotes clearer thinking.

> **Outdoor work practices have a positive impact on occupational well-being, creativity, and productivity.**



Scientifically Established Health Benefits of Spending Time in Natural Environments



Modified from: Hartig, Mitchell, de Vries & Frumkin 2014

Restoring Executive Functions

Executive functions refer to the ability to engage in advanced thinking, to direct and maintain attention, to shift attention between tasks, to plan ahead and execute a plan, resist impulses, and to reason logically through multiple steps.

Demanding specialized work strains the brain's executive functions, making recovery an essential part of working effectively.

Research shows that certain activities have been found to be more restorative for our executive functions than others *:

- **experiences in nature**
- **exercising and being physically active**
- **feeling a sense of connection with others**
- **sleeping.**

*) Hansen 2021, Bäcklander 2020

> **What matters most is what you do consistently in your everyday life. The effects of isolated recreational days are short-lived.**

Creativity and Cognitive Performance

Creativity cannot be forced

Knowledge work often involves a large number of simultaneous tasks, decisions, and interruptions. In such an environment, it is easy for one's attention to become overwhelmed. Prolonged work at a computer screen also tires the brain.

A natural environment helps restore concentration and supports creative problem-solving. At the same time, physical activity increases blood flow to the frontal lobe of the brain, which in turn improves memory, concentration, creativity, and stress tolerance.

> **The combination of physical activity and green surroundings provides a powerful boost for the brain.**

A Leadership and Organizational Opportunity

Supporting outdoor office work is more than the well-being practices of the individual worker. It is also a leadership opportunity and a workplace development strategy. Organizations that support outdoor work practices may strengthen:

- a more attractive employer brand
- the ability to attract and retain talented professionals
- the organization's appeal among international talent
- enhanced creativity, motivation, and productivity.

Best of all: outdoor office practices can be implemented without significant investments.



The Importance of Organizational Culture

The wider adoption of outdoor work requires a supportive organizational culture built on trust. Organizational values, workplace practices, and managers' attitude influence whether working outdoors is perceived as a genuinely accepted part of the workday.

Recommendations for management

- Consider outdoor office work as part of the development of workplace and leadership practices.
- Create a supportive work environment based on trust.
- Establish clear and simple guidelines regarding outdoor office work.
- Include outdoor office spaces and meetings in room-booking systems.
- Communicate the benefits of working outdoors to employees.
- Continuously encourage outdoor work and suggest suitable tasks.
- Be a role model: adopt outdoor office work yourself and share your experiences with your coworkers.
- View technology as an enabler rather than a limitation.
- Keep outdoor meeting equipment readily available, such as insulated mugs, seat pads, blankets, pens, and paper.



For the Individual Employee

Would you like to test how outdoor office activities fit into your working life?

1. Outline the tasks you perform during a typical workweek.
2. Consider which tasks could be carried out outdoors.
3. Schedule outdoor work sessions, including how and where you will perform them.
4. Try out different types of outdoor office activities to find what works best for you.
5. Gradually expand your repertoire and continue trying new work tasks outdoors.

Modified from Toivanen 2019

Find the Approach That Works for You

The type of outdoor work that suits an individual employee depends on:

- the nature of core work tasks
- the current work situation
- personal characteristics and preferences.

Do short moments of reflection or problem-solving walks work best for you?

Do you need an activity that raises your heart rate, or a quiet moment in a restorative environment?



Take your coworkers for a walk instead of sitting in a conference room for those internal meetings where you're supposed to be creative and brainstorm.

Many people have a monthly meeting with their team members – do it while you're out for a walk!

Maria Östergård Käld
Senior Advisor
LocalTapiola Asset Management



Co-funded by
the European Union

The Future of Work Calls for New Working Environments

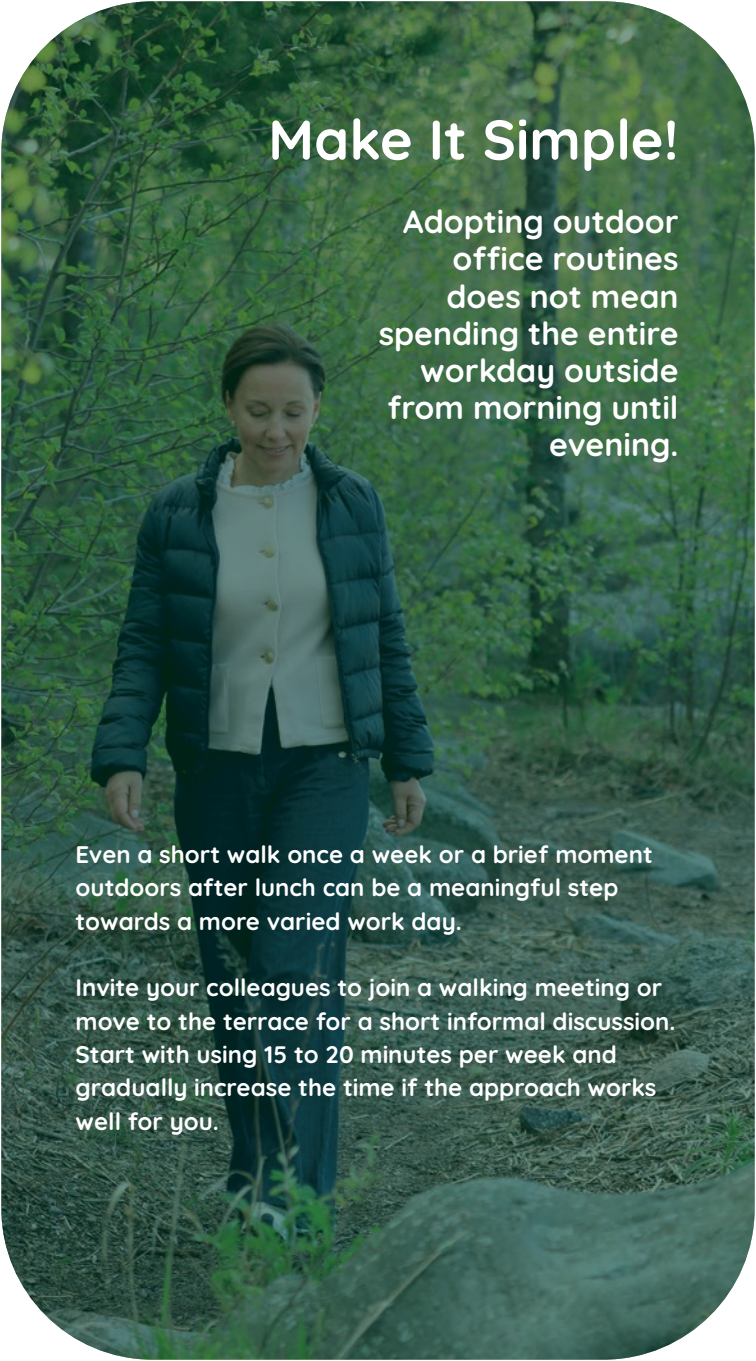
Practical tools for an innovative and sustainable working life



Economic
Development
Centre

Make It Simple!

Adopting outdoor office routines does not mean spending the entire workday outside from morning until evening.



Even a short walk once a week or a brief moment outdoors after lunch can be a meaningful step towards a more varied work day.

Invite your colleagues to join a walking meeting or move to the terrace for a short informal discussion. Start with using 15 to 20 minutes per week and gradually increase the time if the approach works well for you.

Working Independently

Many individual work tasks can be carried out effectively outdoors.

Suitable activities include:

- planning and prioritization
- strategic thinking and reflection
- problem-solving walks
- reading reports and background material
- phone calls
- online meetings and webinars
- short periods of focused computer work.

For creative thinking and mental recovery, it's a good idea to plan and organize things without using digital tools from time to time.

How to take a problem-solving or reflection walk

Take a walk in the environment close to your office and let your thoughts wander at first. Gradually shift your focus towards the challenge or question you are trying to address.

Walk at a brisk pace that feels natural to you. If needed, pause for a moment, sit down, and make notes of any ideas, insights, or reflections that emerge during your walk.



Working in Small Teams

Outdoor environments can create new dynamics for collaboration and discussion.

Examples of activities well suited for outdoor settings include:

- one-to-one meetings
- coaching and development discussions
- planning meetings
- brainstorming sessions
- client meetings
- partner meetings
- team lunches.

Changing to outdoor environments often encourages more open dialogue, fresh perspectives and creative thinking.

Working in Larger Groups

Outdoor spaces can also support collaboration and activities in larger groups.

Suitable activities include:

- team meetings, monthly meetings and steering group meetings
- workshops
- innovation sessions
- presentations and talks.

When deciding which meetings to conduct outdoors, it is important to consider both the meeting objectives and the degree of interaction required.



> Sessions focused on discussion, ideation and engagement are often particularly well suited for outdoor environments.

How to Organize an Outdoor Meeting

1. Plan the agenda in advance.
2. Decide on the route or location and the expected duration of the meeting.
3. Inform participants clearly and provide practical details (where and when to meet, the approximate length of the route, and recommendations for weather-appropriate clothing and footwear).
4. Any walking or transition periods can be used productively by incorporating discussion or reflection activities that support the meeting's objectives.
5. Printed handouts or presentation materials can be used during the meeting if needed.

Carefully consider which meetings are held outdoors to maximize the benefits.

Practical Considerations

To create a positive outdoor meeting experience, consider the following:

- In cooler weather, movement before, during, or after meetings is beneficial.
- Covered outdoor meeting spaces provide protection from rain and wind.
- Choose open spaces during mosquito season.
- Provide shade during hot and sunny conditions.
- If notes are needed, record audio or use pen and paper. If appropriate, use AI tools to transcribe recordings and summarize discussions if no sensitive information or trade secrets are involved.
- Ensure batteries and power banks are fully charged.

Never underestimate the value of a good cup of coffee or tea outdoors.



Infrastructure that Support Outdoor Meetings

- Outdoor facilities such as terraces, benches, tables, roofs, and fire pits.
- Greenhouses can extend the outdoor meeting season in spring and autumn.
- Bookable outdoor meeting spaces simplify planning.
- Store outdoor meeting equipment in a dedicated location.
- Useful equipment includes seat pads, outdoor thermoses, mugs, writing boards, pens, and blankets.

A simple greenhouse can function as a meeting space. A winter garden or an orangery requires more advanced construction but enables solutions such as utilizing waste heat.

Considerations for Different Seasons

Winter

- Walking meetings are an excellent option.
- The benefits of exposure to natural daylight are particularly significant.

Spring

- Warm, sheltered places are ideal for meetings.

Summer

- Avoid forests during mosquito season; open locations are excellent choices.
- Strong sunlight and heat require shade.
- Make the most of outdoor spaces around the workplace. Could your meeting be held on a terrace or patio?

Autumn

- In late autumn, the benefits of natural daylight become especially important.
- Why not organize the company's seasonal gathering outdoors? Torches and open fires create a cozy atmosphere.

Create Pre-Made Routes for Walking Meetings

The adoption of walking meetings can be facilitated by creating pre-made routes for small groups (fewer than five people). The pre-made route should include:

1. Route
2. Number of steps
3. Duration in minutes.

Describe the route.
It should start and end at the workplace.

Add walking meetings to the list of bookable meeting spaces!

Steps: 3,000
Duration: 30 minutes



The Top Three Activities People in Ostrobothnia Could Imagine Doing Outdoors as a Part of their Workday

Responses to a survey conducted as part of the project "Innovative Solutions for the Offices of the Future".

WORKING INDEPENDENTLY:

1. Problem-solving or reflection walks
2. Phone calls
3. Planning and organizing one's own work

WORKING WITH OTHERS:

1. Walking meetings
2. Brainstorming sessions
3. Outdoor lunches



The Outdoor Office Model Is Relevant to Business Value, Leadership, and Organizational Development, Not Just Employee Well-being

The outdoor office model creates value beyond employee well-being. The outdoor office model is more than a wellbeing initiative.

It is a practical approach to developing workplace environments, leadership, and organizational performance while supporting innovation, engagement, and sustainable ways of working.