NEW SPACE FOR HEALTH

THE WHO CHINA OFFICE
# Table of contents

1. Ni hao .................................................. 4
2. The old way of working .................................. 8
3. A new way of thinking ................................... 12
4. Nature, the environment and us .......................... 17
5. Practicing what we promote .............................. 20
6. The WHO health dialogue ............................... 24
7. Communicating our message ............................. 26
“When the idea for a completely open plan office was first proposed, I admit that I wasn’t sure if it would work. But now I see it in action – and it is great. Every time I come to China, I enjoy seeing our happy staff and how they work together in this space. And I enjoy seeing WHO engage with national and international partners on the big health issues facing China.”

Dr. Shin Young-soo, Regional Director
WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

Welcome to the World Health Organization in China – and our new space for health. China is a fast changing place, both the country at large, as well as its challenges and needs. The work of the WHO in China is evolving too. In response to the health issues created here by rapid demographic and economic change – and in the role we play in helping share its many health successes with the rest of the world – our outlook and perspective is taking on a different look.

In many ways, the transformation at WHO China symbolizes the broader process of evolution underway. In creating a modern, innovative, and transparent environment, we have consciously shed the old ways of working, and opened ourselves up to the new. In the 21st century, the major health challenges for both China and the world, require dynamic thinking and different approaches.

In the following pages, we want to share our new physical environment, and the values and philosophy which underpin it.
When the idea for a completely open plan office was first proposed, I admit that I wasn’t sure if it would work. But now I see it in action – and it is great.”

Dr. Shin Young-soo, Regional Director
WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific
“The World Health Organization has had a presence in China for more than 30 years. Our prospects for working with Government to improve the health of people here keep looking brighter and brighter. China has won respect for its pragmatism and innovation, and for finding solutions to longstanding health problems. I hope that the values and vision described in this book will stimulate more collaboration for better health.”

Dr. Margaret Chan
WHO Director-General
WHO Director-General Dr Chan and Regional Director for the Western Pacific Dr Shin meet with WHO China staff in the new office.

“I love coming to work every day – because this is so much more than just an office, but a space for promoting better health. Our physical space reflects our team’s values of openness, transparency, creativity, innovation, and striving for excellence in all we do.”

Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer
Our office is in the heart of Beijing, surrounded by willow trees and besides the Liangma River. The view from the windows remind us of the environment we work in, and the people we are here to serve. But until recently, this valuable perspective wasn't available to us all.

Located in an older-style diplomatic building, our old office was a very outdated design.

Most of the desks were positioned away from the windows, depriving our staff of fresh air and natural light. They were also spread over two large floors, divided into a maze of small rooms, and disconnected from one another. At the same time, inefficiency in the design saw corridors turned into makeshift cubicles, colleagues squeezed together in cramped conditions, and surrounded by piles of books and documents.
A blocked space produces blocked minds, but equally we believed that an open space helps create the opposite effect.
A New Way of Thinking

I used to work in the corridor. Now I have a desk by the window like all of my colleagues. I am more valued and my work is more respected.

Zhuang Yichuan

We began with a fresh vision – a vision of ‘space’. Instead of asking which walls and doors we should keep, we looked at the floor plans and asked our designers which ones we could not remove. We gave ourselves a blank sheet to start from. Gone were the walls and doors that were a barrier to each other and, in their place, a space where we could see each other, work together, and think as a team.

We wanted a transparent space, but one that was equitable too. In the old office, very few of the staff had access to a window. Now, everybody – regardless of position or job description – can see the trees around our office. The design has helped create an environment where everyone feels that their work is equally valued. There is mutual respect, natural light, and a view onto the nature we live besides. Open spaces, open minds.

While we actively promote a team mentality, there is of course the need for privacy. That is why we integrated areas where people can go for a private conversation: the library, and the sofa pods where we sit alone, or meet in small groups. A coffee bar strategically positioned in the middle of the office provides a natural meeting point, where colleagues meet informally to brainstorm new ideas.

Nobody has an individual office – not even the WHO Representative who, as the head of the team, has the responsibility to lead by example. There is one private meeting room that is reserved for high-level guests and confidential management discussions – but even this is encased in glass doors. Other public areas are used for larger meetings and conferences, and can be easily reconfigured through the moveable walls. It gives us flexibility and encourages a spirit of fluidity.
We had 100 days to achieve our vision and we delivered on time and under budget.
BEFORE
Creating our office was as much about the ‘new’, as it was about the ‘old’. We upcycled cupboards, drawers and chairs, and gave a new lease of life to our conference tables by adding castor wheels onto their legs. We also significantly reduced our total office footprint by dispensing with one of our two floors. But, ironically, we feel we have more space today than we did previously, because of the high efficiency that the new design has given us.

As for the style, we blended in a range of Chinese cultural elements, mindful of this country’s rich history and the people here whose health we seek to improve. But we were equally conscious of combining that with the value we bring as an international organization, adding Western elements and a more minimalistic feel.

The environment played into every decision we made. Apart from recycling furniture, we also reduced and centralized our printing facilities.

With printers at either end of the office – instead of at every desk – we not only cut cost and wastage, but we also get up, walk, and meet our colleagues naturally for a chat during the day.

We chose our materials with care because we wanted our new vision to be in harmony with the environment outside our windows. Wood is especially abundant, from the walls to the book shelves, while bamboo – which has special significance to China – features as an artistic motif and, when attached to castor wheels, functions also as vertical room divider. We have cork walls, which help absorb the noise that an open-plan office can generate.

At the entrance hall, there is a carpet that is colored the blue of the WHO logo, and with words from the Hippocratic Oath: The health and life of my patient will be my first consideration. It is the first thing we see when we walk in every day, and reminds us each time we enter our space of the reason we are here.

“...we think of people, how they work, and also their needs. We created a made to measure concept that embraces ‘lifestyle at work’. We integrated a lot of bamboo, which symbolizes flexibility and uprightness, as well as education and civilization. It is used in Traditional Chinese Medicine, while in contemporary international design, bamboo is environmentally friendly and loved for its elegance.”

Liu Linian and Jehanne de Bioley, Designers
“The new office and its interactive set up brings out a caring spirit. My colleagues and I have become more accepting, and less afraid of change.”

Xu Huabing
“I love the new style of work. It gives us more focus, more openness, and more proactive support for each other. It’s never too late to learn.”

Wu Linlin
Our values must be reflected in the way we live and in the way we work. If our purpose is better health for the people of China, we must also strive to create better health for ourselves.

During the work day, we have the option of breaking away from our desks for 15 minutes, and either stretching in the corridor or practicing tai chi. The multi-functional rooms can be turned into fitness studios, where we have regular yoga classes and other exercise. At events we host, we serve healthy refreshments like fruit, salads and juices to help promote the importance of healthy lifestyle choices.

One of the biggest changes in our professional and personal lives has been in the way we travel. For many years, bicycles were the main way that people got around in China – and paying homage to the efficiency and environmental friendliness of the bicycle, we ordered a number of WHO-branded bikes that all of us can use. We use our WHO bikes to cycle to and from meetings and events. The sight of WHO staff cycling around the iconic Bird’s Nest Olympic Stadium, and on our bikes to an official event at the Great Hall of the People, has not only made for memorable pictures, but has helped inspire a new mindset in our government counterparts.

We have reduced the number of office cars from four to two, and replaced them with energy-efficient vehicles. Our representative car is the first ambassadorial vehicle in China to be fully electric.

Practicing What We Promote

“I have transported our new working spirit to the way I eat, the way I exercise, and the way I consider the environment.”

Zhang Pingping
If our purpose is better health for the people of China, we must also strive to create better health for ourselves.
The WHO China team at a cycling event inside the iconic national ‘Birds Nest’ Olympic stadium.

Promoting healthy lifestyles: the WHO team at walking event in Beijing’s Olympic Forest Park with National Health and Family Planning Commission Minister Li Bin.
Weekly yoga classes take place in the office.

The WHO China team cycling through Beijing's hutongs on their custom-made WHO bicycles.
As part of our new approach to health, we have created the WHO Health Dialogue, a new and innovative series that bring together the best and brightest minds in China and the world. In addition to the traditional seminar and presentation formats, we have adopted a ‘talk show’ style – to create interactive and dynamic discussion between the moderator, speakers and audience.

This format fosters genuine debate in a trusted space. The audience is typically made up of a broad mix of colleagues from government, embassies, academia, development agencies, civil society and the UN. Since the launch of the WHO Health Dialogue, we have created debate around a wide range of subjects. Some, like tobacco control, Ebola and food safety, are timed around the news while others such as vaccinations and regulatory reforms may be specialist areas for our speakers.

Past speakers include Prof. Chen Zhu, former Chinese Health Minister and now Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress; Dr. Seth Berkeley, CEO of GAVI; Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, Columbia University; Dr. Ren Minghui, Director-General, Chinese National Health and Family Planning Commission; Jim O’Neill, Secretary to the UK Treasury; Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS; Richard Horton, Editor of The Lancet; and WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan, and Regional Director Dr. Shin Young-soo.

Our goal is not merely to showcase global thought leaders, but to use our space to engage them with the best minds in China. After all, we are not here to ‘teach’, but to foster meaningful exchange and joint thinking.

“The new space has changed the way we work with our partners. They want to come here now. They also feel inspired.”

Lance Rodewald

The WHO Health Dialogue
The WHO Health Dialogue format fosters genuine debate in a trusted space.
We understand that now more than ever, WHO needs to reach and touch people with the information we can provide and the solutions we can create. But we also know we need to listen, too. Opinion pieces, press conferences and media roundtables are some of the ways we continue to spread our message. But our new space for health has brought with it an energy and ambition to go even further.

Today, China has over 650 million Internet users, more than 4 in 5 of whom are accessing the net through their smartphones. Nine in 10 Chinese Internet users have a social media account. We know that to connect to the critical mass, we need to be online too: increasingly, social media and communications more generally are becoming the public health tools of the modern age.

Through social media, we can reach our audience in a meaningful way. We can improve public awareness about health risks and change behavior, which in turn transforms health outcomes.

We regularly post health messages on Weibo, the Chinese version of Twitter. Individual posts have reached as many as two million people. We use this platform not only to provide information about the WHO’s work, but also to provide important health information, and promote campaigns on key issues and health messages. We want our audience to make informed choices about their health based on accurate advice.
Posters from WHO’s #RUFREE tobacco control campaign on display in the Beijing subway.
“Through social media, we can improve public awareness about health risks and change behavior, which in turn transforms health outcomes.”

The WHO China team conducting a ‘live chat’ with the public via Weibo from the WHO Office.
One of the biggest campaigns we have run so far is #RUFREE, a tobacco control campaign. The #RU-FREE slogan means ‘Are you smoke-free? And do you support smoke-free policies?’ The campaign launch was timed to coincide with the start of Beijing’s ban on smoking in public venues. WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan, Regional Director Dr. Shin Young-soo and WHO China Representative Dr. Bernhard Schwartländer, joined leading Chinese celebrities to warn of the dangers that smoking and second-hand smoke causes to health, and also to promote the benefits of smoke-free environments. The campaign generated more than 20 million hits within a few days of its launch.

The online campaign linked to an offline one too - backed by the Beijing MTR Corporation, our posters were heavily featured in the Beijing subway. We were also thrilled when giant ‘No Smoking’ signs were hung on the iconic ‘Bird’s Nest’ – the national Olympic stadium – on World No Tobacco Day, 2015.

Our online engagement is not limited to Weibo: we are also active on YouKu, a video sharing platform similar to YouTube, where we have been hosting online competitions to crowd source innovative solutions to health challenges. We are excited by the changes – and we are excited as they continue to evolve.
Giant no-smoking signs draped across the iconic ‘Bird’s Nest’ – the national Olympic stadium – on World No Tobacco Day, 2015, to mark the commencement of the Beijing Smoke-free Law.