

Immersive Travel Pod (ITP), the ultimate solution for work-related stress?

How work-related stress undermine the wellbeing of employee and company

World-related stress is pervasive and links with multiple stressors in the workplace, including poor organisational climate, insufficient leadership, the imbalance between effort and reward, and long working hours (Bonde, 2008; Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). Researches between work-related stress and health issues are well established, work-related stress increases health impairing behaviours such as alcohol and tobacco consumption (Kouvonen et al., 2008; Kouvonen et al., 2005), inducing cardiovascular disease (Kivimaki & Kawachi, 2015), exacerbate mental condition (Kuper & Marmot, 2003), and rising healthcare expenditures (Williams, 2003). Yet, work-related stress is not well addressed by many organisations, with nearly half of the employee in Europe felt their workplace did not handle the stress of the employee well (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2013).

The cost of work-related stress is not only limited to those who experienced stress. Stressed employees report higher absence rate and have lower productivity. Compared with employees who suffer from nonfatal injury and illness, mentally stressed employees experience a greater work loss (6 days absence versus 25 days) (Worker Health Chartbook, 2004). Research estimates that absenteeism and presenteeism (in which employee present in the workplace but with compromised productivity) cost Australia \$14.81 billion per year (Econtech, 2008). The perceived costs are likely to increase in the future due to increasing job insecurity and workload (Landsbergis et al., 2014).

Against this background, researchers have investigated the effectiveness of both individual-level and organisational level interventions to reduce work-related stress. While most of the existing interventions focus on management training, cognitive-behavioural therapy, and employee assistance programs (Van der Klink et.al, 2001), travel as a significantly effective way to mitigate stress – has often been ignored. A positive vocation experience can not only contribute to the employee's physical and mental health but also improve job performance by reducing absenteeism and burnout (Lounsbury & Hoopes, 1986; Westman & Eden, 1997). In the traditional context – however - travel and work are considered as mutually exclusive option. Even after a long holiday, the positive effects of travel also tend to fade out within 3 weeks, which is not sustainable in the long term (Westman & Eden, 1997).

Make travel – work compatible and sustainable to reduce work-related stress

Our futuristic solution for these challenges is introducing the Immersive Travel Pod (ITP) to workplaces to make travel – work compatible and mitigate work-related stress effectively. ITP is fully enclosed to isolate from the workplace environment and can accommodate one user each time. Before the user enters the ITP, they can select the destination and the length of their visit (range from 10 minutes to 30 minutes). One of the unique features of our ITP is the ability to combine travel and exercise experience. The travel experience is powered by a 4K VR goggle to provide an immersive 360-visual of the destination. There are range of types of ITP that can be installed in the workplace to allow multiple ways of exploration. For example, type-1 pod have a built-in treadmill that user can explore the destination by walk/run/hike; type-2 pod have a built-in bicycle that provides the riding experience; type-3 pod have a built-in row machine to stimulate kayak paddling.

ITP experience, how good is it?

By presenting an immersive 360-degree visual of an actual attraction, VR technologies remove the barrier of distance and provide tourists with a novel experience of exploring their desired destination with minimal effort (Accenture, 2018). Such experience significantly increases one's spatial presence (i.e., the sense of presence in another place and able to navigate within it), which is positively related to emotional engagement (Wagler & Hanus, 2018). A study on VR experience reveals that users' response toward an immersive 360-degree video tour is more positive than the traditional 2D video and even matchable to the real-world tour (Wagler & Hanus, 2018).

Compare with the traditional VR goggles, ITP has the following unique traits:

1. Benefit from the fully enclosed design, ITP can match the internal temperature/humidity to the real world destination to create an immersive visiting experience.

Getting tired of freezing winter in Canada?



How about enjoying a summer escape to Gold Coast Australia?

2. ITP combines gym exercise with travel, further enhance the visiting experience and relief physical/mental pressure.

Too stressed in the office?



How about a 20min excursion in the autumn Alps?

3. The scent and wind system to amplify the spatial existence.

Imagine standing in a Japanese garden.



Enjoying the spring breeze with the scent of sakura!

4. The VR store option, where the ITP user can walk in a pre-filmed VR store and browsing the local souvenirs like in the real world. The good they bought will then be shipped from the destination. Compare with the traditional VR which only focus on users' sensory experience, the local community can benefit directly from the ITP visitor.

Want authentic art made by local artists in Johannesburg?



You don't have to go all the way to South Africa!

Benefits and future of our ITP

For destinations around the world, ITP provides a great marketing opportunity to promote the destination image and inducing travel incentive. Even at the very beginning stage of VR development, scholars have mentioned the potential of using VR as a marketing tool '*From a marketing perspective, VR has the potential to revolutionise the promotion and selling of tourism*' (Williams and Hobson, 1996, p.425). As the COVID-19 pandemic led the tourism

industry into hibernation, ITP could help destinations to keep their connection with potential customers. The VR store feature allows the remote destination to promote their local products even after travel restrictions are lifted.

For the organisation, ITP provides a comparable experience to real-world travel, which can increase employee's productivity, reduce stress and prevent worn out. A motivated and productive employee means higher work performance, and reduces the cost from absenteeism and presenteeism. As work-site health promotion become an integral part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategy, ITP offers a novel alternative to refine the organisation's environment, and enhance corporation's social control in an efficient way (Holmqvist, 2009).

ITP also creates travel opportunities for vulnerable groups, such as elders, the disabled, people with medical conditions that cannot travel long-distance. Although the United Nations called out that the States should take responsibility to make the person with disabilities have equal access to tourism activities (United Nations, 2006), the physical, cultural and social barriers are still problematic for vulnerable groups (Bélanger & Jolin, 2011). Travel related leisure activities can provide multiple benefits for people with disabilities, such as enhance personal development, improve life quality, and contribute to social inclusion (Kastenholz et al., 2015). Although ITP is designed to reduce work-related stress, the usages are not limited to the workplace. For example, the wheelchair compatible ITP could be used by charities, welfare institute, and age care to encourage more participants from vulnerable groups to enjoy the travel experience and improve mental health.

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