



THE IMPORTANCE OF

Good Office Design



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for success

What does a well-designed office have that a poorly designed one doesn't? Highly skilled, satisfied, productive employees, not to mention engaged clients and a sustainable space that can accommodate growth.

Office design is not simply about creating beautiful spaces; it's about creating solutions. Good office design goes beyond the superficial and strategically attends to an organization's existing and potential issues.

Consider this: it's possible for five different generations to be working together in today's workforce. The defining characteristics of the Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and the iGen are undeniably different – creating an incredible challenge for business operations. Attempting to navigate such a diverse team requires careful planning and balance.

This is especially true given the fact that over a third of people declare office design as a crucial component to whether or not they'll work at an organization (according to a global study¹ involving 7,600 participants).

Designing a workspace that tends to the desires of Millennials (who now make up the majority of the workforce) while also meeting the needs of every other demographic is no easy feat, but it is important. Many agree that the level of success an organization achieves hinges on it.

The following information will help business owners and operators understand what good office design actually means, and how to use it within their organization.

Brand + Culture

Every organization has a corporate culture. Whether this culture is one that attracts the best employees and clients is another issue altogether.

Corporate culture is the embodiment of an organization's vision, values, and goals. Companies with clearly defined values enjoy the benefits of a strong, cohesive office culture. Conversely, companies with loosely defined values and unclear goals struggle to operate as productively.

Why is this? Because like attracts like. In other words, businesses with strong values will attract people whose values align with theirs.

In terms of office design, the physical space a business takes up should reflect the message the business is trying to send. By the time people (employees and clients) enter an office, they've already connected with the company's values. That means what they see upon walking into the office should support these values.

For example, research shows that the color of a logo is the most recognizable aspect of a brand. In fact, studies indicate that color improves brand recognition by up to 80 percent. ² Furthermore, experts suggest that "60% of the time people will decide if they are attracted or not to a message - based on color alone." ³

What does this all mean for office design? Well, since the logo is the clearest way to define a company's brand, and the color is the most impactful part of the logo, then it's important to include colors from the corporate brand in the office design. So, when employees and clients enter the office, the space they see should support the brand and values they've already bought into.



Color as a Strategy

With up to 90 percent of the information people retain being absorbed visually, the important role color has in office design is clear. Not only does it appeal to people's sense of style, but it also has the ability to influence their productivity, mood, and concentration.

Although it's been advised to promote a brand using color, take care not to overdo it. Covering an office building only with the corporate colors will likely produce adverse effects. Instead, integrate brand colors strategically, while using other colors to define different spaces within the office.

For example, in areas designated for creative purposes (brainstorming rooms, collaborative workspaces), paint the walls blue. Why blue? Well, a study from the University of British Columbia found that "blue is best at boosting our ability to think creatively." Because people often connect the color blue with nature (think water and sky), the study's author suggests the color brings with it feelings of openness and tranquillity. He says, "The benign cues make people feel safe about being creative and exploratory."

Additionally, the research indicated that "red is the most effective at enhancing our attention to detail." Because people associate red with danger or errors, the study's author states that red, "makes us vigilant and thus helps us perform tasks where careful attention is required to produce a right or wrong answer."

While red certainly isn't ideal for all detail-focused jobs, it can be highly beneficial for others. The point is, it's important to consider the psychology of color when designing an office space. There's so much more to it than personal preference and style.

Consider the following breakdown of other (non-red or blue) colors and the words typically associated with them:

- Green – nature, health, growth, money, safety (green is the easiest color on the eyes)
- Yellow – youth, playfulness, optimism, hunger (most fatiguing color on the eyes)
- Purple – sophistication, power, luxury (darker shades); femininity, fun (light shades)
- White – neutrality, cleanliness, spaciousness, peace
- Brown – reliability, stability, comfort, nature
- Orange – warmth, appetizing, stimulating, enthusiasm
- Grey – nothingness, loss of direction

A Space for Every Need

A large study⁶ conducted by the World Green Building Council, titled Health, Wellbeing and Productivity in Offices, exclaimed that “the way the interior of an office is configured (including workstation density and configuration of workspace, breakout space, and social space) has been found to have an impact on concentration, collaboration, confidentiality and creativity.” And since achieving the highest levels of each of these is likely a goal for every business owner and manager, ensuring employees are provided with the spaces necessary to achieve this goal is critical.

Yet, in many instances, employees aren’t being provided with the workspaces needed to do their jobs effectively. As an example, research conducted by Steelcase⁷ demonstrated that “70% of workers today say they waste up to 15 minutes just looking for a space to meet and 24% waste up to half an hour.”

Imagine how much more productive organizations could be if space was allocated appropriately. Instead of seeking out appropriate places to work, which is both frustrating and a waste of time, employees could accomplish their responsibilities more efficiently.

Square footage, which is a hot commodity, should be assigned according to priority. This requires the office designer to gain an in-depth understanding of an organization and how it operates. Once they see the big picture, the way space should be divvied up becomes clearer. Wasted space is eliminated - making room for high traffic areas.

Many of the spaces in an office can be divided into two categories: collaborative and individual. Here’s more information about each:

Collaborative

Over 80 percent of white-collar respondents in a workplace study 7 felt that working with others was a necessary part of doing their job. The paper described the workplace as an “exchange where workers build on each other’s ideas and create new knowledge together.”

Considering this information, designing an office with collaborative workspaces, such as the following, is important:

- Large, dining room-like tables enable people to work together or individually; but by working in close proximity, opportunities for discussion are always available.
- Lower-partition cubicles give an impression of a personal workspace while still allowing for open discussion between coworkers.
- Interactive hallways offer an innovative way to promote joint creativity and spontaneous interactions. Taking shape as chalk, glass, or whiteboard walls, these spaces encourages employees to jot down ideas as they develop. In doing so, it may trigger fresh ideas in the next person wandering down the hall.
- Benching stations are one of the latest solutions for teams who require a designated space through the duration of a project. These easily reconfigurable stations allow team members to spread out, brainstorm, and settle into a project for as long as necessary. In an article titled, Better Teamwork Through Better Workplace Design, the Harvard Business Review suggested that people’s ideas are actually embedded into the space they’re working in. The author explains that a team zone can “provide cognitive space to hold ideas and experiences,” and that, “returning to the same workspace each day...can help teammates maintain a shared project mindset, sharpening their focus and speeding up the collaborative process.”

Individual

Although many workplaces favor open-concept, team-focused layouts, organizations shouldn't discount the value of individualized workspaces. For many people, having a separate, non-disruptive area to work is important to their sense of well-being at work. Without some level of privacy, collaboration won't work. In fact, a UK Workplace Survey 8 demonstrated that in order for open plan workplaces to be effective, they must provide employees with "access to a range of alternative settings and enclosed spaces."

Variety, in the case of office design, is key. Here are a few examples of personal workstations:

- Enclosed offices provide the greatest amount of privacy for employees. However, take special care that the walls separating workers don't pose a barrier to collaboration and teamwork.
- High-panelled cubicles offer a great solution for businesses benefiting from privacy, but still desire a supportive, team environment. Employees enjoy self-expression since they have their own space, but can still learn from and interact easily with coworkers.
- Small booths (almost like a phone booth) give employees a place to conduct detail work or make confidential phone calls in complete privacy. The booths occupy very little space – freeing up square footage for other, more frequently used workstations.
- Privacy pods provide separation, while still keeping employees in the middle of the action. Most commonly, privacy pods look like a restaurant booth, but with high backs (although some have roofs). They're designed with sound-absorbing panels to reduce noise and visual disturbances.



Office Getaway


Until recently, employee breaks were discouraged - even regulated. Business owners and managers felt that interruptions to workflow were counterproductive. Previously, workers were granted a morning coffee break (maybe even another in the afternoon for the lucky few), as well as a lunch break. Apart from these disruptions to work, employees were expected to remain at their desks as much as possible.

However, thanks to a shift in worker mentality (as Millennials take over the workforce), paired with research supporting a different way of thinking, time away from the desk is actually being promoted.

Too much of a good thing

One researcher understood what many people have repeatedly experienced: after concentrating on a task for an extended period of time, “you begin to lose your focus and your performance on the task declines.”⁹ The study explained that this is because “constant stimulation is registered by our brain as unimportant” - even comparing the phenomenon to wearing clothes. Shortly after getting dressed, people become accustomed to the sensation of fabric on their skin and no longer pay it any attention.

The study continues on, suggesting “even brief diversions from a task can dramatically improve one’s ability to focus on that task for prolonged periods.” This contradicts previously held beliefs that people need to eliminate distractions entirely and instead try harder to focus. Rather, the author points out that, “prolonged attention to a single task actually hinders performance.”

A bright, modern office space with large windows and a brick wall. Several people are working at desks. In the foreground, a woman in a dark sleeveless top and a man in a red checkered shirt are sitting at a desk, looking at a laptop. In the background, two men in business attire are sitting at another desk, also working. The office is well-lit with natural light from the windows. There are various office supplies, a small red robot figurine, and a potted plant on the desks.

A great way to encourage such diversions is by providing breakout spaces in which employees can retreat to. If fun, relaxing, and engaging areas exist, people will take advantage of them, and the quality of work output will improve. Such spaces are especially valuable in organizations where employees work long hours.

Spending 12 hours in the office proves painful if spaces don't exist for workers to relax in. Instead, if people have a comfortable place to shut themselves off from their work, staying at the office for an extended workday will feel less offensive.

Create Community

In addition to the mental benefits, breakout areas also provide social implications. Organizations offering such spaces experience an increased sense of community. Coworkers will be more likely to engage in casual discussions, possibly leading to unexpected brainstorming sessions and new ideas, not to mention friendships.

Breakout spaces can range from formal and traditional to quirky and innovative. Either way, the key is encouraging time away from the desk. Here are a few examples:

- Cafeteria/dining room
- Library
- Lounge (can be formal or ultra casual)
- Game room
- Workout area



Activity Based Working and Well-being

Activity based working (ABW) is a term created by workplace consultant, Erik Veldhoen. His company described ABW as “organizing your work in a more productive and enjoyable way. Creating the best circumstances for each activity, whether it is developing ideas, delivering content or sharing knowledge.” In other words, activity-based workplaces empower employees to choose how, where and when they work - all within a captivating environment.

Rarely can one job be conducted entirely in one space - at least not efficiently. Rather, an employee may need multiple different work areas to complete the range of tasks they're responsible for in a day. Instead of assigning each worker to a specific workstation, ABW encourages the use of multiple shared spaces. Employees are handed the reins and given control over selecting the most effective workspace for each task.

With the following guiding principles, activity based working improves employee well-being:

- Eliminate barriers - As the literal walls come down and are replaced with open spaces, employees enjoy a sense of equality. Without offices to set boundaries between management and the rest of the group, ideas flow more freely.
- Show respect - Employees are given the responsibility to complete tasks efficiently, showing that their employers respects and values their abilities.
- Increase movement - As people have the choice to use different workstations throughout the day, people find themselves moving around more frequently. Increased movement stimulates both the mind and body, leaving employees healthier as a result.

- Create balance – The more flexible the work environment, the less stress employees experience. Workers can find a work/life balance that makes sense for them – resulting in a healthier lifestyle overall.

Examples of activity-based workspaces include group worktables, standing workstations, an employee lounge, private workstations and stimulating boardrooms. These spaces are all multi-purpose, shared areas designed with efficiency and productivity in mind.

Business owners often raise concerns that their people will feel unsettled or undervalued because they don't have their own 'real estate' within the office. However, studies show that people actually look for opportunities to work in unique settings. The findings from one particular study 10 explained that of those who had access to "alternative work areas, an overwhelming majority (87%) took advantage of them." The author suggests this is because people look to "collaborate, change postures, and focus on their work."

Employees in the modern work environment aren't content with solidarity and stillness. What's more, the work required of today's employees doesn't suit this type of work. People want and need options.

Flexibility is a core component of activity-based workplaces, and this is for a reason. Research 11 shows that "Flexible work arrangements result in happier, healthier, and more productive employees."

What's the reason for this? People experience a healthier balance in their lives, leading to better productivity at work. As the author of the study said, "workplace flexibility is beneficial--not detrimental--to organizations."

Truspace

Truspace is innovating the way office design build is being done throughout Canada. We define, design and create sophisticated workspaces, taking care of everything in the process, so you don't have to. The end result is a truly inspiring work space your business and your people deserve.

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