p-Tools
Productivity methodologies, tools, and techniques

Office design and employee productivity

Most urban-dwelling people spend approximately 50% of their lives within an indoor environment today, which greatly influences their mental status, actions, abilities, and performance. Keeping this in mind, office design must be a perfect blend of good air quality, adequate light, comfortable temperature and noise level, and exotic/refreshing color schemes to reduce stress and enhance job performance.

Office design is basically the arrangement of workspaces in order to let employees perform their jobs the most efficiently, as a better workplace environment produces better results. The office should be designed with due importance given to the specific nature of jobs and the individuals who work there. An office with a pleasant physical environment boosts employees' performance and ultimately their productivity. Many surveys of multiple offices and office buildings indicate that dissatisfaction, cluttered workplaces, and the overall physical environment play dominant roles in the loss of employee productivity, and the majority of dissatisfied employees mention the working environment as the main cause of their unhappiness.

The desire for increased personal control and the comfort requirements of employees were the initial concerns prompting organizations to provide an environment and office design that fulfill those needs while helping to increase productivity. Office design should incorporate both ergonomics and workflow, which means that the ways in which work is performed must be examined in order to optimize the layout. After the work is analyzed and how it is accomplished is determined, then the overall setup of the office is arranged according to the workflow to ensure smooth operations without hindrances.

Common office design elements
Studies show that comfort and productivity are interrelated, and almost every office could benefit from a few changes in layout and organization. For better office design, greater focus should be on employees' effectiveness, creativity, and productivity. Experts agree that factors that affect productivity, according to their relative importance, include furniture, noise, flexibility, comfort, communication, lighting, temperature, air quality, and spatial arrangements. It has been pointed out that the best ergonomic furniture available today improves performance by 10–15%. Poor air quality leads to discomfort and potentially a variety of illnesses, which trigger additional stress among employees. If the ventilation rates of indoor air are increased to twice the minimum ventilation required, it increases employees' productivity to a significant extent. Temperature is a factor that affects all in the workplace. Too little or too much light affects individual performance and can also increase stress. It is not only the quantity of light which affects people but also its quality can be a problem. Because different types of lighting have different properties, accomplishing daily tasks in workplaces

with less-than-optimum or dim lighting leads to eyestrain, thus causing headaches, irritability, and depression.

The noise in offices is produced by coworkers, machines, computers, and other mobile devices. Office noise contributes to job dissatisfaction through stress and distraction. Effective use of office space aids employees during their day-to-day work, and employers should ensure that both private and open-plan offices must utilize space effectively. Apart from productivity, congested spaces can also give rise to incidences of rudeness among coworkers.

Studies also reveal that women employees are more concerned about their workplace environment than their male counterparts. In similar surroundings, women employees are more concerned about furnishings and spatial arrangements, whereas men are affected more by noise, light, and temperature.

Tips to improve office design
A few simple, relatively inexpensive measures can be taken to improve office design for higher productivity and morale. For example, comfortable, ergonomically structured furniture can changes the attitudes and overall productivity of employees. To enhance the effect, seating arrangements can be changed, and adjustable and movable furniture can be provided. Employees should be able to adjust their chairs to the proper height and angle so that feet are on a footrest or firmly on the floor. Similarly, monitors and other equipment should be adjustable according to employees' needs to avoid stress, eyestrain, and back pain.

It is recommended that sound levels be kept under control for the smooth performance of daily office activities. For this purpose, separate areas for noisy equipment, like fax machines and copiers, can be allocated, and work teams can be seated together in shared areas away from the employees who require quiet workplaces. Panel systems, carpeting, and acoustic ceiling tiles can also help to control sound levels.

Natural light can be increased by building angled ceilings that reflect light coming from windows. Overall improvement in lighting conditions in the office can be a cost-effective way of increasing productivity. Apart from natural light and windows, offices can be made more pleasant with tasteful nature photos; live plants add both beauty and fresh air to the workplace. Special attention should be given to the thermal environment of the office. Studies show that warm environments promote productivity more than cold ones.

Employees can be encouraged to customize their workplaces with acces-

sories that help them work comfortably such as footrests, screens, etc. To relieve stress, employees can incorporate some of their own touches and style to express themselves. They can be allowed to use small plants, pencil holders, family photos, rugs, and other items to decorate their desks and workplaces. However, employees should also be advised to ensure that such items are put in their proper places so that workspaces are clutter-free.

The office space can be so creatively and intelligently utilized that it balances the organizational requirements of communication, concentration, and the basic process of social interaction at work. Ultimately, an environment can be created that conveys a sense of warmth, comfort, and professionalism while being conducive to uninterrupted workflows.

Office design elements are equally important and relevant for home and nonoffice work environments. Home offices must create a space where work can be conducted in peace and quiet. At home, locating an office in a space with windows, if possible, helps maximize the benefit of natural light. To make home offices healthy, comfortable workplaces, the use of ergonomic furniture, proper lighting, natural plants, and a functional design can minimize discomfort and distractions and help people work more productively.

Most organizations do not give sufficient importance to office design, although there are ample reasons to consider it as an important factor to increase their employees' productivity. The spatial arrangements, noise, lighting, and thermal environment have tremendous influence on productivity. To gain a better understanding of these relationships, research that combines human resources management, workplace layout, and performance management needs to be developed. It will help to evaluate office design in terms of comfort and loss of productivity. For organizations, creating a professional, functional, comfortable office space will project the right image to business associates and potential clients and simultaneously boost employees' motivation, creativity, and productivity.

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