



ASID

American Society of Interior Designers

Workplace Values

How Employees Want to Work

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Message

President's Message

In the battle to find and keep qualified and talented people, the workplace environment is becoming increasingly important as a tool for recruiting and retaining employees. Employers who recognize its importance are gaining a critical advantage over their competition. This creates an enormous opportunity for the interior design profession.

Since 1997, ASID has led the way in workplace research that links effective workplace design with productivity and profitability. This started with *Productive Solutions: The Impact of Interior Design on the Bottom Line* conducted in 1997, which uncovered the factors that management saw as important to creating an effective workplace, and it continued with *Productive Workplaces: How Design Increases Productivity* in 1998, and *Recruiting and Retaining Employees-by Design* in 1999, which demonstrated the importance of the workplace in finding and keeping qualified employees.

This current study, *Workplace Values: How Employees Want to Work*, builds on that prior body of work and delves into what employees value in the workplace and the extent to which that differs or coincides with conventional wisdom about what makes for an effective workplace. This report also provides guidance on how interior designers can better tailor the workplace to how people work.

Discover what is considered to be most important to employees. Learn what leading interior designers and other business environment experts suggest in order to accommodate these important workplace elements.



Terri L. Maurer, FASID
2000-2001 National President
American Society of Interior Designers





Introduction

Background

We live in a “24/7/365” work world with a fluctuating new economy fueled by information exchange, the application of knowledge and unpredictability. The strategic business intent of most organizations is to achieve innovation at lightning speed! Many employers are demanding more than ever from their workers. Companies want to grow intellectual wealth. They want people to work better, smarter, faster.

Businesses are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified and talented employees necessary for their success. Changing work attitudes among younger generations and the emergence of Web-based job search resources like Monster.com have helped to create a fluid workforce able to constantly search for that next perfect job. In the past decade, average churn rates have jumped by more than 14 percent according to the International Management Association.¹

As employers strive to meet workforce challenges, they find it more difficult to differentiate themselves with the traditional enticements of compensation, benefits and other perks. At the same time, employees find the traditional attractors of job security, entitlements and benefits have been severely reduced or they are non-existent. Peter Cappelli, in his book *The New Deal at Work*, states that the new employment alliance is like an uneasy dance between the open-ended relationship and the pull of the market, with each party constantly renegotiating its commitments.² Developing a facility strategy to design a workplace where employees want to be is increasingly important.

Research conducted by BOSTI (Buffalo Organization for Social and Technological Innovation) indicates that workplace design has a direct link to employee behavior and is important in achieving strategic business objectives.³

“Our benefits package is innovative and our motivational workplace is remarkably friendly, beautiful and energizing. This is unlike anywhere you’ve ever worked before!”

**Monster.com Job Search
Detail, ResearchWorks, Inc.
7/2001**

“The physical place of work is still so important that its quality is frequently used as a recruiting tool at even the most technologically sophisticated companies such as Sun Microsystems, Cisco Systems, Adobe and Microsoft.”

**Strategy and Place, Martha
O’Mara, 1999**

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) prior research – *Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Employees-by Design* (1999) – demonstrated that workplace design plays a significant role in influencing whether or not people stay in their jobs or make the decision to accept a job. Some of the research findings indicate:

- The workplace environment is one of the top three factors influencing the decision to take a job or stay in a job.
- The ability to be productive and work as they would like is of paramount importance to employees when they evaluate the workplace environment.

People do want to work; it is in our nature to want to work. Michael Maccoby writes, “Work ties us to a real world that tells us whether or not our ideas and visions make sense...through work we express ourselves. Work is an emotional necessity directed by our values...values are slippery concepts.”⁴ Many work environments have not accommodated the changes in technology, the new ways work is accomplished, the changing workforce demographics, or considered what employees value in the workplace.

Dysfunctional work environments often frustrate employees and can lead to reduced productivity as well as the loss of high performers. “Employees are going to feel confused and frustrated if the physical work environment creates obstacles to how they can best perform the tasks related to their specific jobs,” said Patricia S. Algiers, ASID, a design/brand strategist with KSCConsulting, a division of Kahler Slater Architects, in Milwaukee. “Design is not only the tangible artistic expression. It is a strategic investment that assists in formulating, translating, and expressing an organization’s structure and style.”

The design challenge is to identify and interpret employee values and needs, eliminate the negatives that obstruct great work and create a positive, great place to work. Understanding what employees value versus what they need is fundamental.

In this new study *Workplace Values: How Employees Want to Work*, ASID in collaboration with Ecophon, Haworth and Vista Films, has conducted new research to determine what employees value in the workplace and how they prefer to work. They commissioned independent research involving telephone interviews with a representative sample of 382 people currently working in office-like environments. Twenty-six commercial design practitioners and other workplace experts were also surveyed for additional insight.

This report will help designers create a more effective workplace environment. It will also inform company leaders what their employees value in the workplace setting and build a stronger connection between the 'decision-makers' thinking with that of their employees.

ASID Research Comparisons

The ASID study, *Productive Workplaces, How Design Increases Productivity: Expert Insights*, was conducted in 1998 by surveying three groups of productivity experts. Leading interior designers, management consultants and researchers from major universities were interviewed for a broad range of knowledge. The results of this research indicated the four primary ways in which interior design affects office productivity are:

- improving **access**
- increasing employee **comfort**
- increasing **privacy**, including limiting noise and distractions
- providing **flexibility** and customization

These factors are related to effectiveness and productivity. This information helps develop a process-focused design solution.

In 1999, another ASID study, *Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Employees – by Design*, suggested there was a distinct difference of opinion between employees and management on the importance of the physical workplace environment. Both groups identified access

and comfort as important factors. Functionality and efficiency were mentioned by both groups but interpreted in different ways. Managers are more likely to focus on privacy and flexible workspaces as being important, while employees emphasize effective utilization of space and having a workplace that allows them to work efficiently. Factors impacting job satisfaction were:

- supports **productivity and efficiency**
- sustains **privacy**
- offers **comfort** of furniture or equipment
- provides **visual appeal**

The challenge here is to create an employer-focused design solution keeping in mind the business' need to attract and retain talented people. It is important to consider the important issues mentioned by both management and the employees, understand the similarities and the differences in their concerns. Employers need a workplace environment that helps attract and retain workers who enhance the organization's collective intelligence.

This new ASID study, *Workplace Values: How Employees Want to Work*, substantiates the findings in the two previous research reports. However, this research represents the first quantitative inquiry with the employees themselves to discover what they value most in the physical work environment rather than rely on what management and other business professionals presume to be the important issues to the workers. According to employees, comfort, communication, access, and functional efficiency are of prime importance in the workplace. This new study will equip designers with information for the development of employee-focused design solutions for the physical work environment.

"In an era where workers are expected to be increasingly productive, effective workplace design is essential."

Mark Rowh – "The High Performance Workplace," *Office Systems*, February 1999



Research Findings

Research Findings

EMPLOYEE RESPONSES

The Main Issues

To better understand what workers value in the workplace, ASID conducted this study, *Workplace Values: How Employees Want to Work*, involving telephone interviews with 382 people working in office-like environments. The employees surveyed offered a range of ideas when asked to discuss their ideal workplace, but most comments focused on making the workplace a more comfortable environment; helping them communicate more effectively; providing them access to people, places and things they need; and providing places and things to be more functionally efficient. The current research reveals that there are four main issues that employees value in the workplace:

- the **comfort** of the workplace, ranging from the physical comfort to the atmosphere or feel of the environment
- open and effective **communication**
- having **access** to the people, places and things necessary to be productive
- having a **functionally efficient** environment

COMFORT

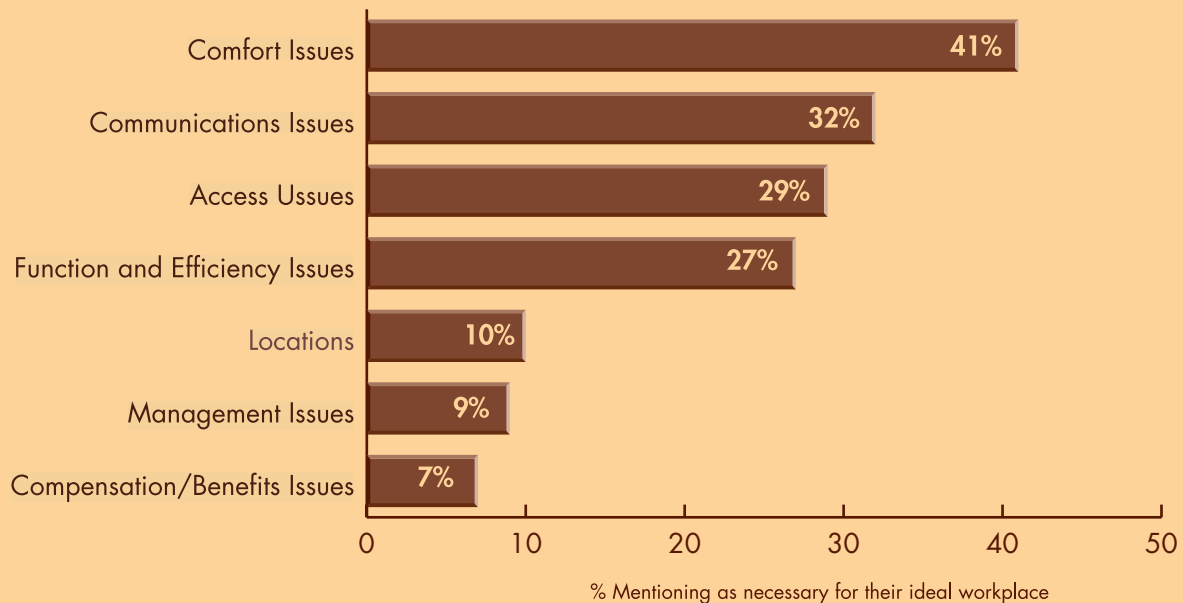
When asked to describe the ideal workplace, 41 percent of the respondents mentioned some aspect relating to comfort: the physical comfort of the furniture or equipment being used or the mood and atmosphere of the environment. It is the employees' perception that people must feel comfortable in order to deal with stress, stay focused and feel good about what they do. Specific factors emerged and indicate what the employees value in workplace comfort.

Comfort Issues:

Good climate and lighting	18%
Good ergonomics	12%
Sound, noise and acoustics	11%
Enough space	11%
Good atmosphere	9%
Clean and neat environment	7%
Adequate privacy	7%

Personal experience and type of office environment employees work in yield subtle, yet distinct, differences in how readily they bring up an aspect of comfort. People who work in a fully enclosed office are much more likely than those who work in an open environment to emphasize comfort issues as a key consideration

What Employees Value Most in the Workplace



when describing the ideal workplace. Because they have more control over temperature, lighting, noise and other dimensions related to comfort, these concerns come to mind more readily. In contrast, those who work in a large, open environment do not tend to focus on comfort issues as quickly when asked to describe the ideal workplace.

COMMUNICATION

Communication issues were raised by 32 percent of the employees as a key element of the workplace. Depending on the type of business engaged in, communication could mean verbal, visual, electronic or printed materials. Regardless of the mode of communication, it is something that employees look for and value. They stated the desire to reach the people with whom they need to communicate – physically in the same space or electronically. There should not be barriers to communication such as distance, walls or noise. Such obstacles raise frustration levels and impede productivity. And finally, employees expressed the need for open communication across all levels of the organization. This includes communication with peers as well as between superiors and subordinates.

Communication Issues:

Can reach the right people	16%
Can communicate easily	14%
Open communication at all levels	8%

"The youngest workers, those in their 20s, are motivated by the need for interactivity. Lots of room for them to gather best fits their needs."

*JoAnn Greco, "Multiple Spaces for Multiple Tasks,"
The Journal of Business
Strategy, Fall 1999*

"Complex knowledge still needs to be transmitted face-to-face. Technology does not yet have the bandwidth to replace face-to-face communication."

*Quote from a Massachusetts
Institute of Technology
report, "10 Trends Affecting
the Corporate Environment,"
Facilities Design and
Management, December
2000, Jeff Waters.*

While employees in all settings view communication as important, those in technology and e-commerce businesses, which tend to have a younger workforce, value it most. They mention it first when they talk about the ideal workplace.

ACCESS

Access in the workplace is a concept that 30 percent of the employees mentioned as being important in the office environment. They relate access to the proximity of things they need, being able to locate resources or to find facilities, rooms or spaces that accommodate the tasks they need to execute. Much of what the research reveals as being an access issue is the result of real frustrations that bring this issue to the forefront.

Access to needed space	23%
Access to equipment	19%
Access to people	18%

Employees who have worked in an open environment with cubicles and workstations are particularly sensitive to the issue of access and they are convinced of its importance. The more open office environments promote access, and therefore, for those employees, it becomes one of the first requirements they mention when asked about their ideal workplace.

FUNCTIONAL EFFICIENCY

Functional efficiency in the work environment was another concept that 27 percent of the employee respondents talked about. They said an ideal workspace allows them to function as effectively and efficiently as they are able to. This concept often incorporates the other three issues mentioned: comfort, communication and access. Aspects of functional efficiency ranked fourth among the most valued elements in an office environment. From a general standpoint, employees look for a workplace that is designed to support work efficiently. The research shows there is a deficiency in this area in most current workplaces. Employees also see effective utilization of space as a way of making the office environment functional.

Functional Efficiency Issues:

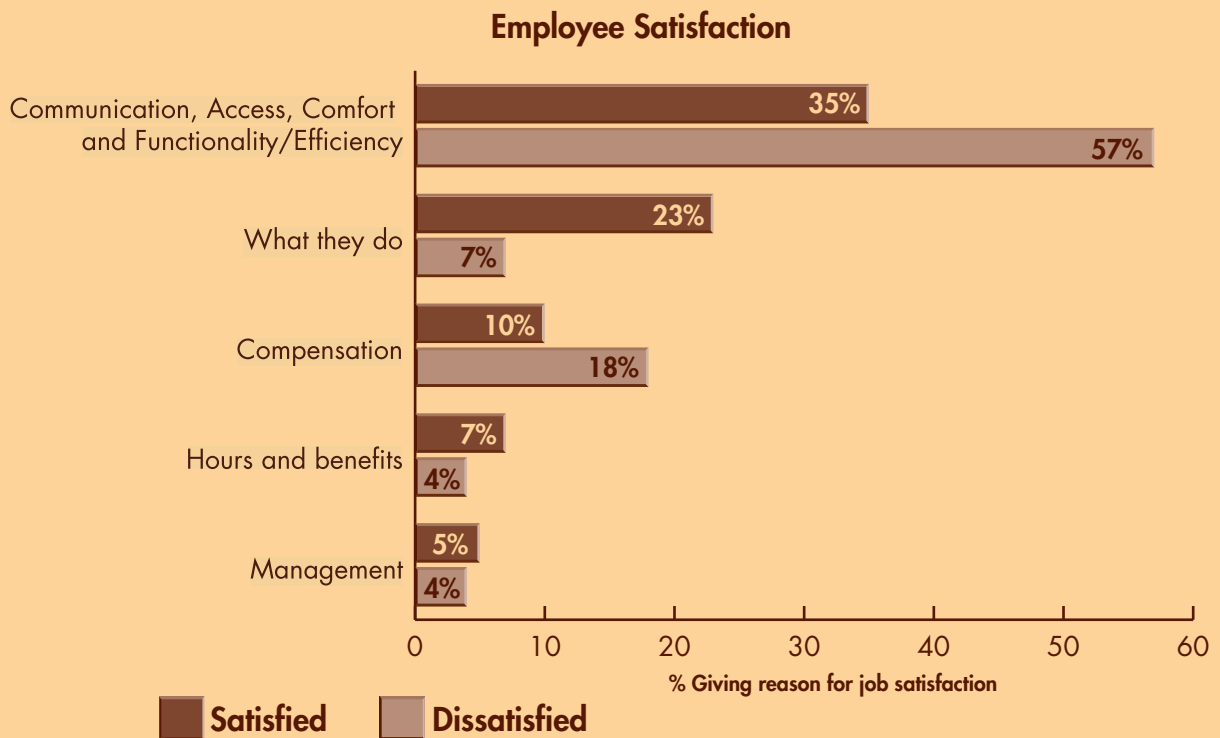
Make it efficient (easy to perform task)	20%
Effective space utilization	15%

Employees in small to mid-size businesses are much more likely to raise the issue of the workplace being a functionally efficient environment than those in Fortune 500 companies. This is likely due to the limitations of resources. Employees in small to mid-size organizations may see achieving a functional environment more of a challenge than those who have a larger infrastructure and support network behind them.

Forty-one percent of those surveyed strongly agreed their current workplace allows them to work as they would like. This is important because this measure has a strong relationship with employee satisfaction. Few employees agree that their current environment allows them to be as efficient as they would like to be.

Employee Satisfaction

When workers are more satisfied, productivity increases. The respondents in this study were first asked how satisfied they were in their jobs. They were then asked why they were satisfied or dissatisfied. In either case, the physical work environment has a tremendous impact on their level of satisfaction. Issues related to comfort, communication, access and functional efficiency, taken together, were mentioned more than three times as often than were compensation, work hours and benefits or management. More than a third of those who said they were satisfied in their jobs mentioned environmental factors. More than half of those who said they were dissatisfied in their jobs mentioned environmental factors.



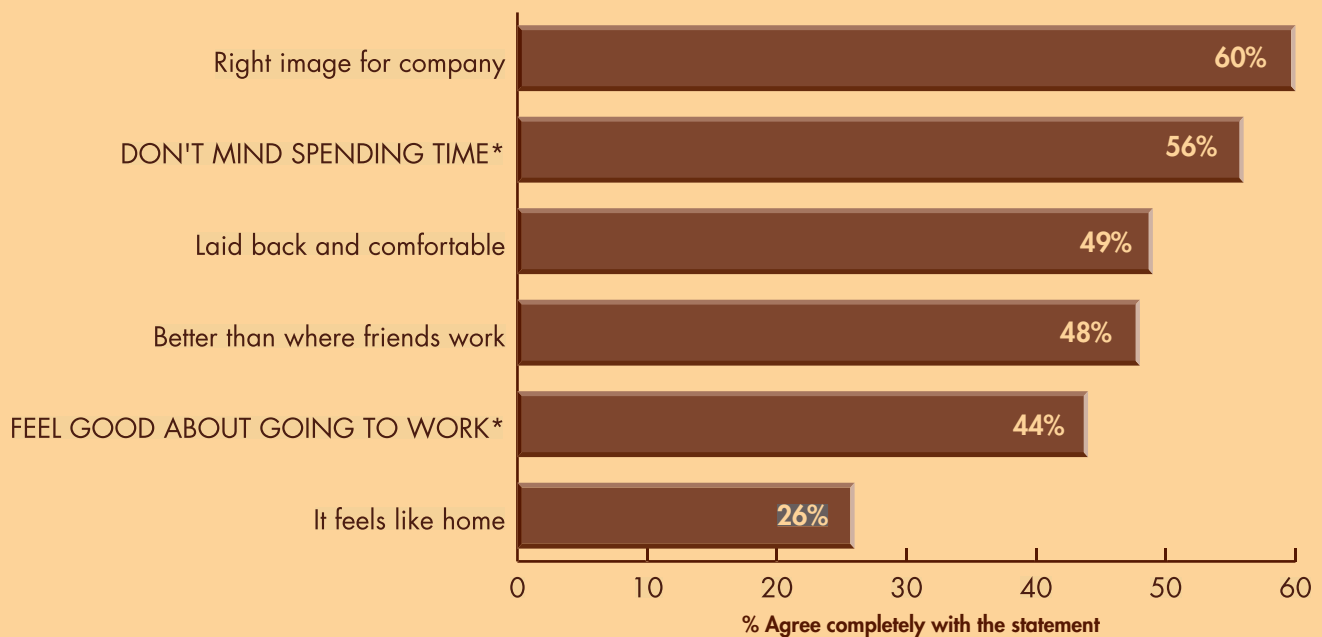
Workplace Feel

The feel of the workplace also is linked to job satisfaction and performance. Employees who describe their work environment positively are more likely to feel good about their jobs and going to work. They are also likely to say they don't mind spending time at work. The study found that wanting to spend time at work was a strong predictor of employee satisfaction.

Most of the participants said they thought their workplace expressed the right image for the company. Nearly half said their office was better than where their friends worked. But management still has a way to go to motivate better-than-average performance. Slightly more than a quarter of the respondents agreed with the statement that their current workplace feels like home. Of those, more than half said it took some time before they felt fully comfortable. When employees feel uncomfortable in the workplace, performance can suffer.

“Employers often fail to consider the value employees place on the physical work environment,” said Janice Linster, ASID, principal, director of interior design with Ellerbe Becket. **“Those who recognize its importance as a contributor to performance, as well as a recruiting and retention benefit, gain a critical advantage over their competition.”**

How the Workplace Feels



* Indicates a statement that is a predictor of employee satisfaction by comparing the difference between how satisfied and dissatisfied employees answer the question

Control

While most employees feel they have some control over how they would like their workplace to be and how they prefer to work, only about a fourth, 26 percent, said they truly felt in control. About three-fourths, 78 percent, said they couldn't be as efficient as they would like. More than half, 59 percent, said their current workplace does not allow them to work as they would like, which is another predictor of job satisfaction. While some of these issues pertain in part to management styles and corporate culture, respondents also cited environmental constraints, inadequate workspace, lack of rooms for meetings or collaborative tasks, inability to access needed equipment, messy or disorganized open work areas and poor ergonomics.

Employees in each company type or size frequently mentioned communication as an important issue, but those in technology and e-commerce businesses cited it first and most often. This may be due to the rapid pace of such businesses requiring immediate access to information and quick decision-making. Participants who worked in small to mid-size businesses were more likely to raise the issues of function and efficiency than were those in Fortune 500 companies. This suggests that smaller firms, which are likely to have less space and fewer resources, need to be especially design-conscious in order to get the most from their employees.

Company Size and Type

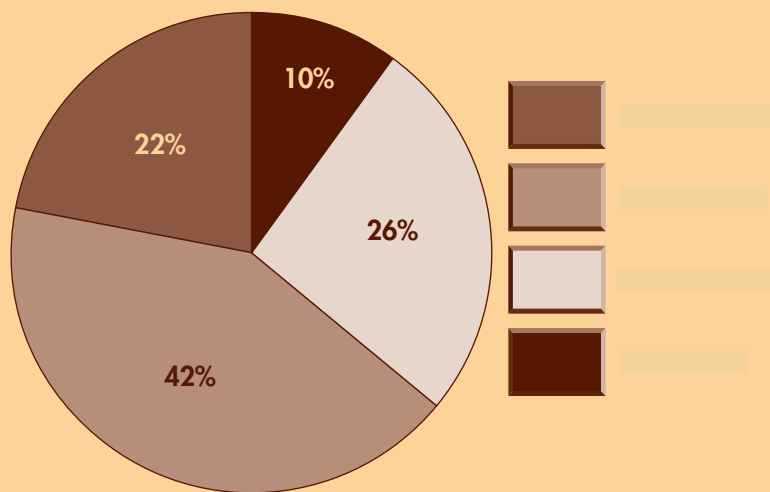
The study also found that what makes a successful workspace depends, in part, on the size and type of company or business the employee works for. Those who identified themselves as working in a small business preferred the privacy of a fully enclosed office. In contrast, those who worked for a Fortune 500 company placed a higher value on the flexibility and access than semi-private workstations can provide. In general, employees who currently work in open-space environments tended to cite access as an important issue.

People's Workspace by Type of Company

	<u>Enclosed</u>	<u>Cubicle</u>
✓ Small Business	47%*	13%
✓ E-commerce/technology	35%	21%
✓ Fortune 500	22%	34%*

* Significantly higher percentage than all other types

Control Over Workplace





Design Insights

Design Insights

Survey Findings

In addition to the employee survey, this study also included in-depth interviews with 26 professional commercial interior designers and other business environment experts to gain insights on effective workplace solutions. Their comments support the research findings. Through an extensive literature search, additional information has been included to help verify the importance of the four most important issues mentioned in the employee interviews.

In many cases, office design has not kept pace with companies' efforts to reorganize the workforce to foster teamwork, communication and collaboration. Often the first recommendation to corporate decision-makers is to conduct an analysis of how employees actually perform their work before exploring design solutions.

The basis for creating a workplace that allows people to work as they would like requires an understanding of the four main issues: comfort, communication, access and functional efficiency. The interior designer plays a critical role in bringing all of these elements of the workplace together. This can be accomplished by recognizing the concerns of management while counseling the decision-maker on what is important to the employees.

Interior designers consistently speak about performing an analysis to fully understand what each of these dimensions means to a specific client.

"Nowhere else but in the interior workplace environment will you find so many materials and issues joining within the same space," says Phil Melcher, principal at Woodbury Design Group in Detroit. "You must consider the tactile and visual feel of all of the materials. Plus you must analyze management and worker needs and values, consider a multitude of opinions and personalities, investigate technology usage, interpret corporate culture to produce a desired image, and attend to numerous other details. This presents a complex challenge to the designer."

COMFORT

Clearly, a comfortable work environment impacts employee performance, psychosocial well-being and health in positive ways. To be comfortable and feel at ease in a workplace is connected to basic human needs—both physical and psychological factors that effect employees. Judith Heerwagen, Ph.D., an environmental psychologist, distinguishes between survival needs and well-being needs by citing the work of biologist, Stephen Boyden. Survival relates to those environmental aspects that directly affect human health: clean air and water and opportunity to rest and restore. Well-being needs are more indirect and tend to affect overall health by a relationship to our quality of life, fulfillment and emotional health.⁵

"The idea of what is comfortable in a work environment is subjective and individual. And this can change on a daily basis due to external conditions," Melcher commented. "What renders comfort to law firm employees is not likely to be the same for employees of an advertising agency. It is best to set your definitions (comfort, communication, access, functional efficiency) and to know your limitations in advance of creating an effective work environment."

Comfortable workplace settings should provide six essential elements according to Fritz Steele, Ph.D., consultant, workplace ecologist and author.

- shelter and security – basic survival
- social contact – identifies with and communicates with others
- task accomplishment – process and place for work to be done
- symbolic identification – visual signs/messages to people, about people
- pleasure – like to be in the workplace
- growth – a place to learn

Lighting

If the lighting in an office environment is not comfortable, it will eventually affect worker performance. Lighting researchers know that people dislike gloomy spaces that are dimly lighted at the edges. The perception of gloom activates a non-conscious warning system to alert us visual conditions are declining. We seek out and prefer to be in lighted conditions. We are diurnal creatures after all.⁶

The article, “A Lighter Load,” in *Facilities Design & Management* magazine, states that lighting accounts for 25 to 30 percent of a typical office building’s energy load.⁷ According to Ecophon, “Light reflection and light diffusion are important design elements to consider. Ceilings with a high light-reflectance help to reduce costs, particularly when combined with indirect lighting. Light diffusion has great significance for eliminating glare from different surfaces and materials in the environment. The more diffusely and evenly the light is spread, the better.”

Mark Zimmerman, ASID, vice president at Minoru Yamaski Associates in Michigan, said their firm considers lighting a key comfort factor when designing workspaces. “We use the psychology of lighting and a systemic approach to create a variety of light levels to evoke different ‘feelings’ or ‘moods’ as appropriate throughout the environment.” Zimmerman went on to say, “Lighting is intensified where visual tasks are performed, lowered in communal spaces, and used as a focal point to reinforce ideas and areas of interest. We use light in interiors like an artist using pigment and explore what the possibilities are. A more residential approach and mixture of lighting products and solutions is best: ambient, task and natural light.”

Most designers agree that bringing in natural light through the use of windows is most beneficial. Judith Heerwagen writes, “People in windowless offices often feel enclosed and shut off from the larger world outside.” There are four general benefits of windows in a workplace: access to environmental information, access to sensory change, connection with the outside world, and restoration and recovery.⁸ The effective use of windows and natural light enhances comfort and well-being.

Air Quality

Along with lighting, the employees cited that air quality was a workplace comfort issue. HVAC systems are a part of a building’s infrastructure and have generally provided overall ambient air conditions. Workplace stress is often affected by a person’s inability to control

their individual office environment.⁹ New research and available technology are making individual controls for the quality of air a possibility. Sue Mosby, principal of CDFM2 Architecture in Kansas City, Missouri, said, “We try to provide more comfort per individual and suggest using an ‘in-floor air’ system. While this system does not allow for an individual temperature adjustment, it does provide control over how much air flows into an immediate workspace. This amount of control gives the user some real physical comfort in addition to more psychological comfort because of the control. The in-floor air system has the added benefit of energy efficiency.”

Ergonomics

At the First Union National Bank in Charlotte, North Carolina, Jeff Austin, vice president of the Innovation TeamCorporate Real Estate said, “We create a baseline comfort standard by providing a safe and clean environment that is well lit, well ventilated and responds to the external elements. We have then focused on ergonomics in the workplace. Employees are provided an ergonomic chair and we have spent time understanding the interface between the user and the PC.” Sue Mosby said, “We start with an ergonomic chair, then we analyze the keyboarding activity and the reach range (how far and over) of the seated workers. Eliminating glare on the computer screen is accomplished with the use of indirect lighting solutions. All of these steps help to resolve the ergonomic concerns of our clients.”

Designers seek to address how workers relate to their immediate workspace and how they use technology equipment. Being able to view the screen at the proper distance, having the correct support for the wrists, arms and upper-body, and providing lower-body support including the lumbar region are the basic elements of concern. Equally important, designers suggest, is to educate the employee about the ergonomic adjustments that are designed into their workspace, especially the work chair adjustments.

Jeff Reuschel, manager of Ideation & Design at Haworth, agrees that ergonomic comfort is first associated with the seat. “Provide the worker with a comfortable place to sit but to what degree of comfortableness should that really be? This is an intriguing question. The more comfortable we are, the more we are less likely to move. And in fact it may be better to move. Movement is healthy, it keeps our blood circulating and gives us serendipitous chances to interact with coworkers.”

Acoustics

Being sensitive to acoustics in the workplace is another area of concern for designers. Active workplaces create noise and when noise is excessive it is distracting and effects comfort and productivity. Phones are constantly ringing, increasing voice levels and collaboration in open spaces is adding to stress in the workplace.

Being distracted by the conversations of others is often the main culprit. Adding additional enclosed meeting spaces helps to get some of the conversation out of the aisles near individual workspaces. Designers can also plan sound buffering areas to reduce audibility of speech and attempt to separate the noise source from the receivers of the noise. Other solutions that address noise and acoustical concerns such as partial walls, sound absorption tiles, acoustic ceilings and use of carpeting, can also be a part of workplace design.

To help reduce the unwanted noise in the workplace, use products that can absorb the most amount of noise. Acoustical ratings of products and materials are important:

NRC – Noise Reduction Coefficient

AC – Articulation Class

CAC – Ceiling Attenuation Class

STC – Sound Transmission Class

The largest uninterrupted space in the workplace can be the ceiling. Testing has shown that the ceiling is one of the best spaces to reduce noise. Use a ceiling product with a high NRC rating of .85 or above and an AC rating of 190 or greater to achieve the best acoustical results. The design intent is not to eliminate all workplace sounds but rather to eliminate the offending noise that disturbs or disrupts the work process.

There are two basic elements to good workplace acoustics, write Horral and Milligan in the article, *“Office Acoustics & Sound Masking.”* Both adequate speech privacy and appropriate background sound levels should be in place.¹⁰ “There is no way to completely block out the noise in a workplace,” said Phil Melcher. “It is a balance of sound transmission, taking a look at the source of the sound, and who in the workplace will be distracted by the noise.”

Privacy

During the past few years many businesses have wanted to create more opportunities for collaboration in more open office environments. In the article, *“The Business Impacts of Workplace Design,”* John Olson writes about BOSTI research, “The workplace quality with the greatest effect on performance and satisfaction...is providing the ability to concentrate in one’s own workspace...solo work occupies by far the greatest amount of everyone’s workday.” When employees are engaged in highly complex work, they need a private place away from distractions. The need for privacy has not gone away or been replaced by the need for collaboration. Jeff Austin suggests, “This is a social solution, the ability to be seen and heard when you want and not be seen or heard when you don’t want to be. Social protocols can be established to signal coworkers when you are open to communicate or you want privacy.” The effective workplace must support the variety of work behaviors.

Jeff Reuschel offers a different twist on privacy as it relates to cognitive tasks. He said, “Workers tend to think they need privacy but some evidence indicates that while performing certain cognitive tasks, stimulation is better. It is difficult to get past the idea that cognitive tasks can be done better in isolation. It might be best to tolerate as much openness and stimulation in the workplace setting as possible so you can be open to new information and ideas.”

COMMUNICATION

The designers and other workplace experts surveyed suggested that all modes of communication be examined in the environment: vocal, visual, printed and electronic. Franklin Becker and Fritz Steele, in *Workplace by Design*, stated, “Not being able to communicate with a colleague when you need to either delays the project or means pressing on without the necessary input.” The employees surveyed indicated that barriers to communication raises their frustration levels and impedes productivity. In one area of First Union Bank, Jeff Austin said they were experimenting with radio-frequency phones and cell phones so employees can take communication technology with them and are reachable throughout the day.

Martha O’Mara in the book *Strategy and Place* writes, “...research in the social sciences has shown that people require the presence of others to interpret complex information...people need to be in the same place at the same time to aid the speed and quality of transforming information into knowledge.” The interpersonal contact helps to build trust between employees and remains the preferred way to communicate.

Sue Mosby suggests, "Communication in the workplace can be enhanced by creating 'magnet' spaces that give a sense of community to the environment. Such areas become places of choice, eating spaces, comfortable meeting places and resource areas that are easily accessed throughout the day, and are center points."

Fritz Steele, in his article "Looking for the Center," indicates the best way to test whether a center exists in an office setting is to ask workers where they go to find out who's around and what's currently happening in the organization. When the center area is a good magnet, informal contacts will be greatly increased, a good deal of communication will occur quickly and often without having to make formal appointments or send formal messages over the internal network. A well-used center enhances employees' awareness and identification with each other and the company – a bonding takes place. An "energy contagion" takes place that multiplies the total energy...people stimulate each other in ways that would not happen if they are all isolated from each other in workstations or private offices.¹¹

"We design teaming and conference rooms without the formal hierarchy of meeting spaces. We think about the flexibility of the space, the use of full wall writing surfaces and sliding wall panels, comfortable lounge seating, and the use of organic forms and shapes," said Mosby. "At times we suggest the use of eclectic arrangements using benches, unusual seating and stand-up counters to lean on. All of these ideas benefit brainstorming and complex problem solving activities that our clients engage in." She also stated that the strategic design of pathways that provide more interesting routes from place to place helps to break down communication barriers. "This is like meandering down a country road instead of driving down I-70," said Mosby. Non-linear corridors increase the possibility of interpersonal interactions.



Designers also suggest that creating visual sight lines helps to break down barriers to communication. This is achieved by strategic placement of taller walls or panels in relationship to lower walls or panels. Mosby mentioned creating a visual vertical connection between floors, such as an atrium space that opens the sight lines to different departments. "The more you see people, the more chance for communication," said Mosby.

All of these ideas can be designed into workplace settings that help to open communication across all levels, providing that they are supported and utilized by the entire organization, both management and the employees.

ACCESS

When workers don't have "it," can't find "it," or can't get "it," productivity is severely reduced. The designers, as did the employees, spoke about the issue of access being one of proximity to resources within a work environment – spaces, equipment and other people. According to Phil Melcher, access deals with the question, "How far away is the needed information? Is it a mouse click away, a reach away or a walk away? What once was a matter of physical adjacency may now be a matter of accessing greater bandwidth. If technology tools are used as a primary means of access, physical adjacencies may not be as important. Access to space might also be access to cyberspace, and it too can be crowded!" However, Melcher continues, "In designing a corporate physical environment, common sense space-planning adjacency guidelines and parameters apply. You link together people and things for as much convenience as possible."

Jay Brand, Ph.D., in the article "Physical Space and Social Interaction," states, "...physical distance represents a major determinant...there is little doubt that proximity, ease and availability of social exchange can be affected by the structure of the environment; open spaces, particularly open spaces incorporating symbolic focus points or other directing elements, can facilitate and coordinate the communication..."¹² Jeff Austin recalls, "In the past resources were centrally located. As we evolved into 'distributed work,' we now have distributed printers and equipment, and other resources in more locations. In most of our facilities we maintain a centralized food and coffee area and in our suburban Charlotte location we have developed a 'food court' providing a variety of choices from community vendors. Access to more people is supported in these centralized common areas."

Workplaces need to accommodate space for both alone work and group interaction. Access to a variety of spaces becomes important. Is there a space where workers can retreat, reflect and recover from stress? Are there enough conference spaces and project rooms to accommodate six to 12 people? Are there spaces for spontaneous interactions? Zimmerman suggests that while designers analyze the worker needs, there will still be a lot that is not known. He said, "We provide a flexible design platform for workers that sometimes means not providing anything but including several spaces for 'becoming' when they are needed. These spaces are protected from a defined purpose and are sometimes called future spaces for impromptu necessity."

FUNCTIONAL EFFICIENCY

Functional efficiency is a concept that often incorporates the other three issues that have been ranked as having the most value in the workplace: comfort, communication and access. Workers need an office environment that works! A functional workplace is designed to support efficient work processes and has effective utilization of space. Frederick Harmon in the book, *Playing for Keeps*, indicates the importance of "...maximum use of time and effective use of space...linking [work] activities and functions across an organization."¹³ Phil Melcher considers functional efficiency to be a continuing experiment because work processes are constantly changing. "Provide choices within a certain set of standards and allow some degree of flexibility to accommodate change in addition to supporting the current work functions. Consider the concrete ideas from the past and the 'bedlam' that is likely to occur in the future!"

Mark Zimmerman said, "Most workers are not convinced that it is functional or efficient to have people work in open spaces most of the time. It may be a financial savings to eliminate private offices, but it may not save space. Places that can be used in many different ways will be necessary. An environmental efficiency is to do the most with the available space."

Many designers focus on individual workspaces when the focus is on functional efficiency. For example, Melcher said, "Sometimes workers perceive even a few additional letter trays will help them be more efficient." Jeff Austin indicated that five years ago workspace standards, according to job level, were utilized at First Union Bank. "Now we try to match the job that is done and allow for each worker to have some choices within a 'kit of parts'—not everyone ends up with the same exact workspace. This allows more management of the work

process at the individual level—individual effectiveness becomes the worker's responsibility. Engaging the worker in the decision of what functional tools go into their individual space is a benefit. This is a menu-based solution that works well."

Offices that don't work hinder the workers that do work. "An uncomfortable chair, too much glare, not enough meeting spaces, are all things that can hinder the work process," said Sue Mosby. "Our firm tries to develop more flexible work environments with more meandering flows off the 'grid.' Sometimes our clients require 75 percent or more mobility. Sometimes work groups or departments have to rearrange themselves once a month or more. Including furniture with wheels and lots of surfaces and areas to display the work of the group not only benefits that particular group but allows others to also see what is going on. Designing efficiency into conference rooms can be done with small dimension access flooring so workers can tap into LAN connections." Sue went on to say that the method of information storage within the workplace is also an element of functional efficiency. "Less paper storage seems to allow more mobility. Many workers consider individual storage towers with an area to hang a coat to be extremely functional for their work process."



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Tips and Guidelines

The design of an effective workplace begins with a comprehensive needs analysis to clearly understand the importance of comfort, communication, access and functional efficiency for a specific client. Following are some of the tips and suggestions that interior design practitioners mentioned during the research survey process:

- Conduct interviews and focus groups with management and workers to provide insights into the thinking and philosophy within an organization. These sessions should be done in confidence to promote free expression of ideas.
- Interview workers and worker groups on how they work, what their function is, what interactions they have internally as well as with customers and suppliers.
- Observe the workplace activities, interactions, traffic patterns, job tasks, etc.
- Analyze the current workplace layout in terms of what works and what does not. Sometimes the best solution already exists.
- Study the physical and the psychological factors that impact the workplace and the people that work within it.
- A comfortable work environment needs to mitigate the impact of noise as a distraction. Solutions that address noise and acoustic issues may include partial walls, sound dampening tiles, acoustic ceilings, carpeting, etc.
- Clutter and disorganization can result in an uncomfortable environment. Maximize storage space so the workplace can be orderly and well organized.
- Appearance is vital to a good working atmosphere. You need to pay attention to fabrics, color and finishes and how they make people feel.
- Stress the importance of ergonomics in the furniture and equipment used.
- Suggest solutions that avoid segregating groups and departments from each other.
- Find ways to balance between an environment that is open enough to foster communications, yet provides some privacy and protection from noise and distractions.
- Solutions need to accommodate the various modes of communication - vocal, visual, printed, electronic.
- Understand the culture of the company. For example, some of the newer business models place more of an emphasis on teaming and may require more group spaces compared to more traditional companies that operate under more hierarchical models.



Conclusion

“Corporate facilities are not going away, but they need to absolutely change inside and out,” writes Martha O’Mara. Technology has enabled workers to perform tasks remotely and, as a result, many of the traditional office functions have been altered. Employees do have to work somewhere. While working virtually may be convenient for many employees, it may not be the perfect solution all of the time.¹⁴ Today’s workplace must support new needs – individual work as well as collaborative work and group interaction, privacy and retreat without distraction as well as high energy openness and project activity, eight-hour tethered to the office work as well as work done on the fly. The office environment must encourage and enhance the creative process that leads to innovation. Decisions about the workplace are more difficult to make due to the complexity and the many paradoxes needing to be considered.

The office environment expectations of workers are changing. Knowledge workers are now approaching the bargaining table with a new and different set of requirements.¹⁵ The *How People Want to Work* research resulted in the discovery that employees value comfort, communication, access and functional efficiency in the workplace. It makes sense to address these issues for a variety of reasons: (1) previous research has indicated the importance of a physical work environment to attracting and retaining quality workers; (2) there is evidence that workplaces can positively impact productivity, job satisfaction, and employee well-being; (3) effective workplaces can also support business strategy and impact success; and (4) understanding which elements of an office environment have the most powerful effects lets business target their planning, design and facility management investments to enhance performance and worker satisfaction and use the workplace as a business tool.¹⁶

The role of the interior design consultant is critical to the development of an effective environment. “The quintessential office cannot be created without simultaneously designing physical, technical, social and organizational systems that are in harmony.”¹⁷ Using a systemic approach, designers can balance and weave all the workplace elements together, creating a great place for great work to take place.



Appendix

Research Methodology

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) commissioned the *Workplace Values: How Employees Want to Work* study to determine the wants and needs of employees as compared with employers when it comes to creating environments that allow people to work effectively and efficiently. ASID was joined in this research by three of its Industry Partners:

Ecophon CertainTeed, Inc.

Haworth Inc.

Vista Window Film

The primary research was conducted December 2000 through February 2001 by L.C. Williams & Associates (LCWA), an independent research firm based in Chicago. Secondary research included a subsequent literature search and a series of additional in-depth interviews with designers and other work-environment experts conducted at a later date by an independent researcher.

Two research methods were employed:

A national quantitative omnibus survey method through which households representative of the overall population of the U.S. were contacted by telephone. One thousand contacts were made using a Random Digit Dial (RDD) program. From those, 382 qualified and participated as contacts that work in an office-like environment outside the home. The number of interviews yields a statistical accuracy of +/- five percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. This means that the results of the research accurately reflect the opinions of the entire universe of people that work in an office-like environment to within five percent plus or minus.

A qualitative survey in which interior designers and decision-makers in the workplace environment, such as managers and human resource directors, were asked to provide insights on the elements they focus on, the processes they use, and the solutions they implement that lead to a workplace the employees will value. Feedback was obtained by completing a series of in-depth telephone interviews using a structured discussion guide. Answers provided were open-ended and captured the tone and tenor of the respondent's input.

The objectives of the research were to identify:

How people want to work

What makes people productive

What people value in a workplace

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Views on the office in our time

For Additional Information

The following points of contact are available at each organization that participated in this project. Contact the department listed for additional information.

Ecophon CertainTeed, Inc., was founded in 1995 through a joint venture with leading building products manufacturer CertainTeed Corporation. Both Ecophon and CertainTeed are part of Compagnie de Saint Gobain, France, a leading producer of flat glass, containers, reinforcements, insulation, building materials, piping, abrasives and industrial ceramics. One of the top industrial companies in the world, Saint-Gobain had 1999 sales of \$24.5 billion.

Haworth, Inc. is a world-leading designer, manufacturer and marketer of office furniture and seating with 1999 sales of \$1.58 billion, and a global reputation for innovative, high-quality products and services. Based in Holland, Mich., Haworth operates in more than 120 countries worldwide and employs approximately 14,000 members.

The company offers a complete line of systems, desking, seating, casegoods, tables, storage and work tools. It is a world leader in systems sales (approximately 50 percent of its net sales) and in seating (approximately 25 percent of its net sales in 1998). It was 104th on the 1999 Forbes list of 400 largest private companies in the United States.

The company goes to market primarily through a network of approximately 1,200 dealerships worldwide. It operates plants in more than 43 locations and 14 countries worldwide.

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Mission

MISSION

The American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) is the definitive resource for knowledge sharing, advocacy of interior designers' right to practice, professional education and expansion of interior design markets.

ASID

American Society of Interior Designers

About ASID

ASID is the oldest and largest professional organization for interior designers with the largest residential and commercial membership. With more than 31,000 members, ASID establishes a common identity for professionals and businesses in the field of interior design.

Of the Society's 20,000 practicing interior designers, 6,500 practice primarily in the commercial field with 4,000 practicing primarily as residential designers. The remaining 9,500 work in both commercial and residential design.

ASID's Industry Partners include more than 4,000 member firms and individual representatives, uniting the professional designer with manufacturers of design-related products and services. ASID's membership also includes over 7,000 students of interior design.

The association has 48 chapters throughout the United States and more than 450 international members. ASID was founded in 1975, with the consolidation of the American Institute of Decorators (AID) and the National Society of Interior Designers (NSID).

Professional members of ASID must pass rigorous acceptance standards: they must have a combination of accredited design education and/or full-time work experience and pass a two-day accreditation examination (National Council for Interior Design Qualification - NCIDQ).

ASID promotes professionalism in interior design services and products for the workplace and home. To keep up with the unique needs of its members, ASID conducts independent research on topics related to the practice and business of the profession.

ASID designers receive the most current information about appropriate materials, technology, building codes, government regulations, flammability standards, design psychology and product performance.

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