

# Productivity and Workspace Design

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*'Work plays an influential role on our lives, and the quality of working environments can have considerable impact on our health and wellbeing'*

*(Paradise, Hynes, Proulx, de Sousa, Jicol, Esenkaya 2018).*

WFA (working from anywhere) and WFH (working from home) are both the new norm for our global workforce. Prior to the pandemic some companies had already allowed their staff to work from home, but since the effects from COVID-19 and lockdowns which began in March 2020, offsite working has increased substantially - and much remains the same since lockdowns have eased.

In an analysis of data issued by the US Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics showed that 4.7 million people, which make about 3.4% of the US workforce, were already working remotely before the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) took the world by storm. This was up by 1% or 0.8 million from 2015 (Marinova 2022).

Marinova also says: Gartner, Inc. (research) found that 88% of business organizations all over the world mandated or encouraged all their employees to work from home as the virus started to spread at exponential rates.

The research also indicates some interesting facts given in USD - such as; on average a company can save \$11,000 annually for each employee that works remotely half-time, and that people who work remotely retain \$4,000 more per year generally (saving on travel, food and the like). Surveys have indicated that 99% of remote workers want to continue telecommuting in the future, and that 90% of remote workers would recommend working remotely to a friend.

## Setting Up Your Workspace Correctly

Careful thought and planning must be considered when working in any environment, whether it be an office space within the business's location, from your home office space or working remotely, e.g. a coffee shop, hotel room - anywhere for that matter. The aura of one's surroundings is critical to well-focused productivity, as the human perception of space, environment and the feel factor are critical to achieving the most productive outcomes.

In the last 20 years, the modern office has gone through numerous evolutions. The early 2000s saw the death of cubicle farms and the rise of open floorplans, and 2015 brought waves of ping pong and foosball tables to some offices. While office trends come and go, one thing that does not change is the impact that the office environment has on employee health and wellbeing (Kohll 2019).

Kohll further states: a quality workspace design leads to a less stressful and more productive atmosphere. It's essential that employers take the physical work environment of their employees into consideration. Employees need to feel comfortable and calm in their physical work settings to produce their best work.

I argue that we shouldn't just leave this up to the worker themselves to design the space for their work environment, where I strongly suggest that business organizations take this onboard and create a '*working offsite handbook*', a guide to aid in how to set up the most effective workplace design for your available space and for the organization to provide stipends to help create the most ideal environment possible for their workers offsite.

To my knowledge, most businesses leave this up to each individual when it comes to the importance of office space design. Whilst it is acknowledged that most companies do supply the communication means for their employees, such as laptop computers, applications for remote use, mobile phones, and various accessories - however not many companies offer assistance nor stipends to design an effective office environment for their employees offsite.

If you want your employees to improve their productivity, it could come down to the structure and setting of their office. Not just the location, either, but the layout of office furniture and equipment, the flow between employee workspace (and home disruptive spaces), and the overall vibe and atmosphere of their office (Post 2022).

I again argue that a comfortable and compelling workplace design is a necessary aspect to ensure employee productivity, so why not write a company '**WFH / WFA Handbook**'?

As BOS, Inspiring Workspace Furnishings (2022) states: spatial shapes and layouts have an emotional and behavioral effect on employees within the workspace. These emotions are deeply psychological and rarely have any conscious effect. The goal of any office, in-house or offsite, is for the entire staff to work in harmony. It might be helpful to think of the designing of these layouts as tuning piano strings.

Like colors, shapes have deep psychological effects on workers in the workspace. Using these tools together can create significant change in the workplace and in their personal moods and emotions.

### **The Shape of Circles**

Circles have freedom of movement. They're associated with comfort, safety, and warmth. Due to the movement and completeness of a circular shape, power, electricity, harmony, and infinity are all associated emotionally. With all elements of the shape considered, like the movement, structure, and how it's represented culturally, it's often associated with protection, integrity, infinity, perfection, and harmony. Due to its geometry, it provides emphasis on improving concentration.

Circles are a very collaborative space. They create a rounded area where everyone has an equal place at the table. It removes the workers away from their other workstations and puts them in a neutral room to focus on the meeting at hand. Because of the warmth circles bring, the staff working in a circular room actually began to care more about their work.

I've performed as a touring musician (guitarist, musical director, and orchestrator) with many acts such as Barry Manilow, The Lettermen, and Demis Roussos working 'in the round', a revolving **circular** stage, with the audience spread all around us. I can share firsthand that the feel of these performances of working in a circle, connected like no other front of house staged performance. The effects of working on the revolving 'theatre-in-the-round' stage, was much more intimate than any other performing method as the audience felt an integral part of the artists performance, where together we connected and communicated like nothing I've ever experienced before. Other artists have quoted the same, and as Stephen Joseph says: 'theatre-in-the-round' demands fast action, movement, and sincere performances from the actors (performers). It is exciting and real. It is theatre in 3D.

BOS promotes 'Inspiring Workspace Furnishings' (2022) from their online website publication, about the important categories to consider:

### **Honesty and Stability**

Those are only a few words used to describe hard edged shapes like squares, rectangles, and pyramids. These shapes are rigid, and therefore represent order, rational, discipline, solidarity, equality, and security. Remember, these straight-edged shapes don't have to be on the same latitude as the office.

Experimenting with the angles of these shapes can help fight off some of the boredom that we're used to seeing in office spaces. But since they stand for discipline, but also peacefulness, it might be a perfect fit for a new-take on an old-fashioned cubicle.

### **Growth and Dynamism**

Triangles are built from the base up, so they have a strong foundation. This means stability and growth. Like circles, they have energy and power because of the way their shape indicates the movement from the ground up and strength because of the direction they are pointing. Because of their sharp points, each represents an idea like progression, direction, and purpose. Triangles are best suited for high-efficiency areas in need of dynamic solutions, accurate results, and dominant energies.

### **Creativity in Spirals**

There's no greater shape for creativity than a spiral. In nature, many growth patterns are indicated in a spiral shape. It takes on the warmth and energy of a circle, while it spirals upwards. Because it does have an end to it, it also represents the cycle of birth and death, as well as evolution, fertility, transformation, and expansion.

A spiral becomes transformative in the journey, letting flexibility and release of energy through the life cycle. Spirals aren't only helpful for creative spaces, but in any field help to unlock another part of the brain.

### **Transition and Balance**

Vertical, horizontal, cross, and curved shapes represent not only transition and balance, but faith, unity, and hope, as well as relationships. They have a need for connecting to each other. Vertical lines and shapes are associated with strength, whereas horizontal are seen as peaceful.

Curved shapes are musical. They represent rhythm and movement, happiness, pleasure, and generosity. Sharp shapes are very youthful and energetic.

### **Feminism and Masculinity**

Rarely considered in the workplace design is the differences that masculinity and femininity associations have in a workspace area. It goes beyond the colour blue or the colour pink. It's said that the triangle's strength makes them masculine, so it's not uncommon to see them in large tech startup companies or sales divisions, in many cases. Like triangles, sharp shapes are also associated with masculinity, whereas curved shapes represent femininity.

## **Tips and Tricks**

A poorly designed workspace can cause mental and physical anxiety which wrecks concentration and performance. Therefore, I suggest these important items to consider:

*Identify the most suitable work location within your home, away from disruption and interferences;*

*Shape of your workspace;*

*Size of room environment;*

*Placement of your desk within the space;*

*Working desk design;*

*Chair comfort;*

*Acoustics;*

*Room colour scheme;*

*Air quality;*

*Use of natural light;*

*Keeping your space clean;*

*Living plants;*

*Keep hydrated;*

*Self-movement awareness and exercises;*

*Conscious use of breaks to achieve the most from your work time;*

*Knowing when to walk away for the moment;*

*The efficient use of time, and use of the trash bin.*

Don't be afraid of the rubbish (trash) bin, as when an idea is not working, don't continue to try and reshape it, as if it is not flowing well it probably will never work naturally.

### ***Keeping it Fresh, Clean and Tidy***

I feel that when a worker continues to spend time on an idea without clear conscious breaks of time, that the task loses its energy and creative magic. Keeping the focus and creative momentum can only exist when the worker is refreshed, clear headed and is aware of positive flowing energy within.

As Jamie Fertsch, director and co-founder of Xdesk, a U.S.-based company that creates customized, ergonomic desks out of environmentally friendly materials, says that the best way that stay focused during a long day of work is to acknowledge when you've hit a productivity wall and to take lots of short, quick breaks to gain a new perspective on what you're working on (Post 2022).

She also said that productivity is not directly correlated with time spent on a task. It's important to make sure that you're recalibrating and refueling your mind and body every so often (Post 2022).

If you're sitting in a messy work area you have created a burden both consciously and sub-consciously for yourself, and you're probably not going to get much work completed.

Take time every few hours to keep your workspace tidy, this includes your computer desktop and electronic filing systems in addition to your physical space environment.

### **Air Quality**

There is also a lack of knowledge and awareness about co2 levels and healthy air quality – as the purity of air within an office can have a significant impact on your employees' health

and in turn productivity. Research carried out by the World Green Building Council recorded an 11% increase in productivity as a result of increased fresh air to the workstation and a reduction in pollutants (Kohll 2019).

I consistently keep an eye on the air quality around me by carrying an **Aranet4 Radical Monitor**, made by AviateRX Pty Ltd (2022), an effective co2 handheld portable monitor device sensor that reads carbon dioxide levels to ensure the room and space that I work in is well-ventilated and has healthy oxygen levels.

The level of co2 in outside air is usually between 420 and 500ppm (parts per million). Even though atmospheric co2 levels have increased upward in recent times due to our numerous air pollutants, inside room levels should still ideally be below 600ppm. Anything under 600 indicates a well-ventilated room. Levels above 1000ppm should be strongly avoided.

Aranet's product guide states: less than 600ppm is best, 600ppm ~ 800ppm is acceptable, 800ppm ~ 1000ppm avoid if possible, and greater than 1000ppm avoid at all costs. Visit [www.aranet.com](http://www.aranet.com) for more information.

Richard Corsi, an indoor air quality expert at Portland State University who has been taking carbon dioxide measurements for years with many different instruments, says that when the indoor concentration of carbon dioxide, co2, reaches 800 parts per million and above, then each time you breathe in, one percent of the air you inhale has come from the exhalations of others. During a pandemic that's an alarming thought (Mooney 2021).

Mooney also says, in the new pandemic trend, people are turning to carbon dioxide monitoring devices to help assess ventilation quality.

#### **Article about the Aranet4 c02 reader:**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/health/2021-09-11/covid-transmission-co2-carbon-dioxide-monitor-ventilation-school/100444884>

#### **Video about the Aranet4 c02 reader:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q45TIsyOuvS>

## **Feng Shui**

Feng shui should become a part of the office design plan as it can improve the dynamic of your workspace to increase positive productivity.

The practice of feng shui originated in China more than 3,000 years ago and has been embraced in Asian-Pacific places such as Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Singapore, Philippines, Thailand, and Malaysia. In recent years, the feng shui philosophy has become increasingly popular in Western countries as well.

So, how can we bring feng shui to our workplace? With feng shui, objects in a room are arranged according to the flow of natural energy. The concept also involves using colours, natural materials, and the layout of a space to create a pleasantly favourable ambience.

From incorporating specific colors to placing your furniture in the proper spot, there are many ways to bring feng shui to your office.

Here are some tips from Julie Marks (2019), medically reviewed by Debra Rose Wilson, Ph.D., MSN, R.N., IBCLC, AHN-BC, CHT.

### **Place yourself in a power position within the room**

According to feng shui, you should place your desk so that you are sitting in the power position. This is the furthest spot from the entrance of the room. Arrange your desk so that you can see the door when seated.

### **Create a strong backing**

You can produce strong feng shui backing by positioning your chair so that your back is against a solid wall. If this isn't possible, try placing a row of lush plants behind your seating area.

### **Choose the right chair**

A comfortable chair with a high back is ideal for feng shui. It's believed that a high back creates support and protection.

### **Introduce water and plant elements**

Experts believe incorporating water features and plants into your workspace can create positive energy. Try placing a fountain with moving water in your office. A live plant can also help improve indoor air quality.

### **Hang artwork**

Surround your office with images and objects that are inspiring, such as pictures with mottos or images that symbolize what you want to accomplish.

### **Choose the right colors**

Feng shui office colors should create balance without being overwhelming. Some popular choices for consideration are: soft yellow, sandstone, pale gold, pale orange, pale green, blue green, and white.

### **Natural lighting**

When possible, use natural light from windows. Yellow-tinted and fluorescent lighting can bring about fatigue. If you must use artificial light, opt for incandescent, full-spectrum light bulbs.

### **Conclusion**

Ensure that you have a calm, clean, quiet, well lit, and natural feel workspace. And importantly, keep your homelife space and workplace space completely separate areas if this can be avoided. Don't overdo yourself and burn out, take needed breaks.

The vibrations of a well-constructed office space will benefit your inner self and productivity.

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