

sp

spotlight/construction management

Applying reason to interior design

There is a reason for everything - part 1

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If you own or manage property, how can you add value to your investment? There are certainly many answers to this question – signage, landscaping, upgrade of building systems. But let's look at how the experience and knowledge of an interior designer can influence your bottom line.

While interior designers participate in the development of all types of spaces, this article will address

the benefits of including an interior designer on the team assembled for workplace design.

Employers all agree that employee productivity is vital to their success. What can be done to attract and retain talented employees? How can employee productivity be improved? Studies have shown that effective workplace design directly correlates to improved business performance¹. Surveys reveal that between 50% and 60% of work spaces do not support job function or creativity. A supportive workspace has the potential of increasing productivity by 19% which can translate into millions of dollars

¹ Gensler's 2008 U.S. Workplace Survey

in overall profits each year². This increase translates into huge gains in profits.

Involving an interior designer in the initial phase of a project ensures comprehensive programming. This phase is the information gathering portion for workplace design and can be as simple as understanding the interrelationships and space needs of a small office, or as complex as the reorganization of departments, divisions, and even buildings within a company campus. The designer asks management key questions to identify corporate philosophy, mission, future growth and business goals and asks employees to quantify communication require-

² Gensler's 2005 U.K. Workplace Survey

ments, work space configuration, and storage needs. By gathering and analyzing information specific to the client, the interior designer can identify adjacencies and prepare a phasing plan that minimizes construction and workday disruption. The designer will develop solutions that address functional, spatial, and visual requirements that will result in an effective, efficient and beautiful space. Opting to hastily address each issue as it arises instead of utilizing the careful analysis and planning of the programming phase can result in a confusing and inefficient hodgepodge of layout, eventually requiring an expensive reconfiguration of the entire workplace. Programming lays the foundation for solid design solutions and reduces the need for multiple schematic revisions.

Large complicated projects may require major relocation of people and equipment. The most cost effective way to approach this type of reorganization is preparation of a master plan. Master planning is detailed programming focusing on a client's anticipated corporate direction and growth and how that impacts the existing workplace. Interview analysis, adjacency charts, office and workstation sizes, plans, phasing steps, and other data are compiled and presented to the client as a standard for all future corporate workplace development.

One of the most important concerns of owners and managers is also the designer's primary focus in workplace design—the safety, health and comfort of the people who work there. An interior designer's knowledge of and adherence to life safety and fire codes is essential. Egress doors, wall and door construction, and clearances for stairs and corridors are some of the obvious areas of attention. However, flooring material, wall, ceiling, window treatments, furniture, and fabrics must all meet numerous fire and safety standards. Interior designers are well versed in these regulations and through relationships with vendors and manufacturer's reps, industry seminars, and continued research interior designers stay current with product. All specification of product must meet the national, state, and local safety guidelines for its intended use. Only finishes and furniture that pass rigorous tests for fire, smoke, slip resistance, wear, and more will be considered. "Do-it-yourself" interior finishes can result in tragedy as evidenced by the infamous Rhode Island night club fire.

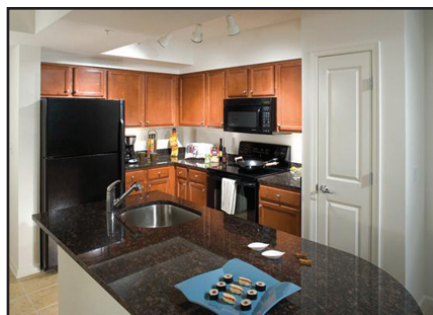
An effective workplace affords people the opportunity to focus on individual tasks as well as collaborate and even socialize with fellow workers. Interior designers have extensive knowledge about lighting, acoustics, ergonomics and indoor air quality, all factors that affect health and comfort. Failure to address any one of these can undermine employee performance and result in health issues.

Part 2 will discuss such physical properties in the workplace and the role that the interior designer plays in enhancing the work environment and improving employee productivity.

Linda Works, LEED AP, is an interior designer with Wessling Architects Inc., Quincy, Mass. Cheryl LaFond-Lewis co-authored this article.



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Applying reason to interior design There is a reason for everything - part 2



Linda Works

A previous article addressed the benefits of programming, the interior designer's focus on life safety, and the potential savings generated. This article will discuss the physical properties of the workplace, how they affect the health and comfort of the occupants, and how the interior designer is equipped to specify product that enhances the work environment and improves employee productivity.

Inappropriate or poorly placed lighting causes shadows and glare that can result in eye fatigue. Designers are well-versed in appropriate light levels for particular tasks and are able to specify fixtures that provide a comfortable amount of light. In addition to its scientific component, lighting is also an art and plays a key role in the perception of color and creation of ambience.

Inferior acoustics can usually be blamed for an environment that is noisy, making it difficult to concentrate or one that is absorbent or reverberant, making it difficult to hear. Awareness of the acoustical properties of ceiling, wall, and floor finishes and understanding the effect that various kinds of wall construction can have on acoustics, allows the designer to successfully control this aspect of an interior space.

Inadequate workstation design can cause many physical problems, including Carpal-tunnel syndrome, back, neck, and shoulder pain. These widespread but preventable symptoms are the cause of lost work time and costly repurchase of furniture. A well-designed workstation where keyboard height, monitor placement and chair position are carefully considered will help alleviate these complaints. Designers are familiar with anthropometrics (the size, proportions, and range of motion of the human body) and ergonomics (the relationship between human physiology and the physical environment). Interior designers regularly apply this knowledge to workstation and office design.

Poor indoor air quality caused by finishes containing high levels of volatile organic compounds (VOC's), new carpet and furniture that emit noxious chemicals, and improperly

placed copiers are some of the reasons people suffer from respiratory symptoms and headaches in the workplace. The design industry has eliminated many of these chemicals from their manufacturing process and continues to improve the options for "greener" finishes and furniture. Designers who are LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, can guide their clients through the process of attaining LEED certification for their interiors project. Attaining certification improves working conditions for employees, realizes reduced energy costs, strengthens a building's image in an increasingly competitive market, and enhances a company's public image as a responsible environmental steward in the community.

Interior designers encourage recycling of building materials, look to the use of product that is manufactured locally and responsibly, and develop layouts that maximize the advantages of natural light. Including sustainable principles within workplace design not only improves working conditions, it offers options for staying within budget. For example: during construction many items within a building can be stored and reused; often acoustical ceiling tiles and carpet can be returned to manufacturers for recycling; the number of light fixtures can be reduced by using high performance fixtures. Fitting out spaces with demountable wall systems reduces the amount of hardwall construction that eventually finds its way to a land fill. This eliminates the required land fill tip and reduces construction time, labor, and material costs. Designated as furniture, demountable walls initial cost is offset by their depreciation value.

Color is a significant element in workplace design. It can influence mood, physical movement, even be responsible for loss of productivity. Color can be used to support corporate branding, to provide areas of focus, to create energy in areas of collaboration and induce calm in areas requiring concentration. It can separate areas by office function, be a directional tool that defines paths of travel, and act as a safety aid when applied along the edge of stair treads.

Just as there are benefits when color is used appropriately, there are negatives when it is applied without thought. Because the human eye needs stimulation, monochromatic areas can cause eye fatigue and headaches, possibly resulting in time loss. Conversely, too much contrast can result in overstimulation. Frequent dilation and contraction of the eye's pupil can produce similar results. Interior designers understand the significance of color and have the skill to apply it appropriately.

Using the principles and elements of design as a foundation, a good interior designer's primary goals are beauty, function, safety, and economy. A truly well designed space requires the thought, analysis, and collaboration of trained and experienced professionals. The benefits will be realized by all who are involved.

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