

# offices and workstations

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## office culture

The office needs to be designed so that numerous functions can be accommodated within the area. It is a space for interpersonal exchange, efficiency and productivity.

Often the company's corporate identity is translated into the interior space, but it must be an aesthetically pleasing environment to work in. We are not suggesting having red walls or furniture just because the company logo is red - this may result in a very unsettled or stressed-out team of workers!

Some designers claim that the office space should tell a story about the company and the workers. What story does a sterile workspace tell a prospective client or employee? What story does a nurturing, artistic or playful office space tell those same people?

It takes courage to create an inspired workspace whether it is a small office or a corporate space for hundreds of employees.



## quiet reflective or creative stimulating

The office is a space where staff are able to focus on the tasks at hand without stress or interruption. The feeling within the space depends on the needs and preferences of those using it. Some like to work in a private and quiet environment, while others prefer a space that is buzzy and stimulating.

If it is a space where people spend a lot of time on the telephone or interviewing people they may require privacy and quiet, therefore the acoustics and space planning is important.

White noise (the whirring of computers, heaters, air conditioning, etc) is a real problem in many work areas, so some large offices have 'quiet spaces' where staff can go and have 'time out' from the noise.

Designated work areas can be personalised with the employee's selection of art, office accessories, photographs, flowers and pot plants - contented employees are more productive for the company so this should be encouraged.

### space planning

The fast pace of development in communication technology has greatly contributed to changes in office design. Portable phones and computers mean that spaces can be smaller and flexible - gone are the days of large scale furniture. Today it is more common to find bar height workstations where employees plug their laptop in or make phone calls, or coffee stations where people meet to talk rather than sitting around board tables. With less paper used, as people tend to email and text written communications, fewer filing and storage cupboards are needed in office buildings as well.



There is an increasing trend towards sustainability in designing workspaces as evidenced by energy saving equipment and the use of new materials and coatings to maximise energy and environmental conservation.

As well as architects and interior designers, specialists in lighting, acoustics, mechanical and electrical engineering, audio-visual and telecommunications equipment are often involved in office renovation and build projects. Collaboration between all participants makes for the most successful outcome.



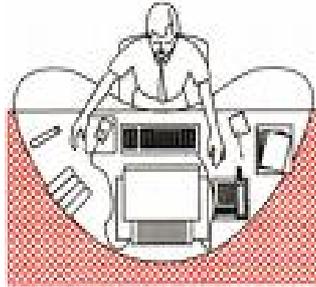
### functions

What functions need to be considered...

- Reception - clients, staff, suppliers.
- Accounts and administration.
- Communications and management.
- Meetings and appointments.
- Creative work or sales/marketing.
- Eating and drinking.
- Staff comfort and welfare.
- Recreation and relaxation.

## What equipment/spaces will be required:

- Desks, workstations, chairs, sofas.
- Telephones and office equipment.
- Computer and AV equipment.
- Filing cabinets, storage shelves.
- Kitchen/dining areas.
- Bathrooms and grooming spaces.
- Ergonomics and health education.
- Break-out rooms and recreation areas.



### space + ergonomics

- How many people will use the space at one time?
- What activities will take place in each of the spaces?
- Does the activity create mess - rubbish removal?
- Is special lighting required for various tasks?
- What soundproofing is necessary for the spaces?
- How much storage will be needed for equipment and supplies?
- Security - does the area need additional security or protection?
- Is there convenient parking for staff/visitors?

Space layout and equipment needs to be ergonomically safe, and equipment within easy reach at workstations



### desks + workstations

Because the desk is usually the work centre of the office, think about this first. If there is a view or outlook from a window you may want to maximise this when positioning desks in the space. Ensure there is easy access to the desk and adequate space around it to move chairs in and out.

The height of the desk depends on the person using it, but they are usually between 620 and 720mm from the ground. If computing, a desk height of around 660mm off the floor is considered ideal for comfortable operation with the screen at eye level when seated. The operator should be able to look at the screen with their head straight, not tilted backward or forward. Likewise, forearms should not be angled up when hands rest on the keyboard.

Adjustable height chairs for computer workstations are also important to ensure the operator is adequately supported. Usually 500mm clearance is needed from the chair seat to the desktop for leg room (knee space). Feet should be flat on the floor, or a footstool used.

The surface material of the desk should be practical and easy to maintain. A highly reflective surface causes eye strain, and some surfaces are more noisy than others. Timber or laminate are always popular, glass tops are better frosted to minimise glare.



### seating

The task chair is probably the most important piece of furniture in this space - it must ergonomically support the person seated upon it. Like the bed where we spend 8 hours a day, the office chair is often used for long periods of time so one that is suited to the specific needs of the occupant is critical.

Most office chairs have adjustable seat heights and back supports, and are on wheels so they can be moved around.

If more than one person is using the space, individual task chairs may need to be provided as not many of us are disciplined enough to adjust the chair each time we sit in it.

Visitor seating is normally needed as well, small tub chairs or sofas are ideal, with a coffee or side table nearby.



## storage

Make a list of the items regularly used when working at the desk - apart from the computer it will usually include pens, paper, telephone, lamp, calculator, files, waste-paper bin, reference books, stapler, holepunch, etc.

Design a storage system to suit - each item should be easy to reach from your chair as well as being kept in order. File trays, baskets and tins keep things contained on the desk. Do not cover the desk with items - leave plenty of room to work as well.

Filing cabinets, floor to ceiling cupboards or shelves and free standing units can accommodate things used less often such as stationery supplies, file boxes, books etc.



## lighting

Good lighting is needed for overall safety when moving about the office, and a good level of task lighting is very important to reduce eye strain and retain good posture when seated at a work station.

Overall lighting can be achieved by down lights, while task lighting is usually achieved with a desk lamp, and accent lights may be used to display art or plants.

Larger windows with translucent glass allow more natural light into the space, as well as provide better ventilation. Glass, metal or timber louvers provide good air flow and ventilation.

Ensure that the lighting is not directly hitting the screen of a monitor, or creating shadows on the work surface of the desk. A desk lamp with adjustable arm is useful to direct the light exactly where you need it at the work station. Fluorescent lights with daylight tubes give the closest to natural light if working with colour and fine details.



## ventilation + heating

Good ventilation is always important for health and wellbeing, to energise us when working long hours as the brain needs oxygen to function effectively. Keeping the space warm in winter is also imperative for comfort, but if overheated a work space becomes stuffy and those within it will become drowsy and less alert. Generally a room temperature of 18-20°C is considered ideal for learning/working.

Air conditioning units are usually installed in larger office buildings to control temperature.

Natural fragrances enhance a work space, and plants help to balance the air especially in a room with lots of computing and electrical equipment.

The correct environment supports brain function.



## floors + walls + ceilings

Flooring materials most often used are carpet or carpet tiles as they help to minimise noise. Timber, cork or vinyl are easy to clean if messy tasks are being undertaken. Industrial rubber flooring or polished concrete are other options for a modern treatment.

The walls and ceilings are normally best painted in a low sheen finish, such as Resene SpaceCote Low Sheen. The colour and style of the room may need to work with the architecture and style of the building.

As most offices are busy places, soft neutral colours generally provide a good backdrop to the computers and equipment. Beiges, warm greys, oxidised pastels, warmed or colour infused whites are ideal.

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**Resene**

the paint the professionals use



### **colours + materials**

Stark white can be too reflective and cause glare if there is lots of light in the space, and strong colours such as red and orange are best avoided in work space as they are too confrontational. Yellow is supposed to help us retain information, but again this should be pale or oxidised if used in working areas.

Lighter colours also keep the space light and airy, open and clean, especially if there are not a lot of windows.

Timber surfaces provide warmth, and wool upholstery provides texture and being a natural product also breathes and is less harsh on clothing than many synthetic fabrics. The office seating may be the best place to use stronger accent colours.

The colour in this office is created by coloured lighting washing over the walls, so the strength of colour can be managed according to the use of the space at the time.



### **nurturing**

A nurturing workspace is where staff feel cocooned, comfortable and connected, valued and cared about by their employer.

A business culture that encourages employees to take time out when needed and maximises staff wellbeing within the office, usually results in a more successful outcome for the company in the longer term. Employees can unwind and rest, then gather the energy needed to regroup in a creative collaboration. A stressed or anxious state of mind saps employees of their energy which results in lower productivity.

The 'comforts of home' are being incorporated into offices and working spaces today, from well stocked kitchens and cafes for good nourishment, to pods for a power-nap to revive weary staff.



### **team building**

Recent studies showed that animals inspire creativity, and having pets in the workplace helps to relax employees. It has also reduced absenteeism, and more staff are willing to work overtime.

Co-workers who breakfast or lunch together, stay together. Sharing a meal with co-workers gives a feeling of community and better understanding amongst one another. This may result in longer term commitment to a company and reduce staff turnover.

Companies that provide recreation areas such as table tennis, a basketball hoop, or even a swimming pool, also find stronger bonds are built among staff members.

#### **compiled by**

- Colourwaves - Jill Carroll