



DEFINING SPACES

Amogh Sule, Director, Sankalpan Infrastructure Pvt Ltd, discusses on space planning and management at workplace

'Home away from home' is what a workplace means to most of the office-going juntas. It is essential to recognise various special needs of the employees such as communication needs, future expansion plans, psychological needs and so on. Organisations these days occupy huge space to house their entire workforce, hence it is pivotal to diligently plan and utilise the available space. Here is where the space planner comes into picture.

It's critical for the space planner and the design team to work in tandem to effectively utilise space to create a high performance work set-up. A well-planned work set-up should be in line with the organisation's expansion plans. Office design also communicates company values and corporate culture.

There should be a clear link between the office environment and its final product. There is nothing like the use of office space to communicate to workers that they are significant. If you provide the infrastructure for creativity, you release creativity, read productivity.

In today's ever rising real estate costs, one has to utilise space judiciously. Developers often place more emphasis on making space cost-effective than on creating offices geared for interaction, resulting in more productive staff.

Space planning, as a discipline, forms a major part of the Facilities Manager's responsibilities. Whether it is a brand new operation, full-scale office relocation or a partial re-organisation, a carefully planned and implemented workplace can have a profound impact on the performance of an organisation.

The boundaries that have traditionally separated work, family and leisure time are becoming increasingly blurred - driven by advances in technology, the global economy means that 24/7 has largely replaced the normal 9-5 cycle. It naturally follows that the design of the physical workspace and infrastructure must also evolve to successfully accommodate this changing approach to work.

According to research carried out by the American Society of Interior Designers, the physical workplace is one of the top three factors employees take into account when deciding to accept or leave a job. So this clearly has a massive effect on employee productivity, meaning that employers have to give serious thought to issues such as employee comfort, access to people and equipment, privacy and flexibility.

Managers will find the following checklist of the attributes of 'high-performance' buildings useful in assessing an existing building's suitability for their specific workplace needs:

- ▶ Integrated building
- ▶ Flexibility
- ▶ Technological innovations
- ▶ Safety, health and comfort
- ▶ Energy efficiency
- ▶ Cost-effectiveness
- ▶ Sound construction and maintenance
- ▶ Designing a workstation

In most offices, the workstation consists primarily of a chair and a work surface. Three primary factors, which play important roles, are the specific job tasks, body size and equipment. An employee should have adequate workspace to perform each of the tasks required by the job. Hence it is vital to consider individual body size in the design of the workstation. These days, interior designers and space planners are putting a lot of emphasis on the design and size of the chair and the height and design of the workstation. The type of equipment used by the employee will largely affect the design.

Today most of the organisations have an IT set up. Sitting for long hours in front of the computer can cause a lot of health issues mainly related to vision, sitting postures, muscles, blood circulation among others. Hence it is important to design a well-suited workstation according to the requirements of the employees. Some are as follows: Vision adjustability: A portable or local lamp can offer the advantage of allowing each worker to adjust the lighting level to her/his own personal preference. Sunlight or inappropriate lighting levels can often cause glare on the computer screen. Windows can be covered with blinds, drapes, shades or filters. In many cases, reorientation of workstation may be all that is necessary to move sources of glare out of the line of sight.

About Sankalpan

Sankalpan is one of India's foremost and fastest growing integrated, commercial realty and infrastructure services provider having interests in architectural design consultancy, infrastructure turnkey fit-outs and real estate development. Headquartered in Mumbai, India, Sankalpan Group and its operating subsidiaries currently employ more than 200 staff across offices in Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore, New Delhi, Pune and overseas offices in Dubai and Singapore.

Sankalpan group has executed over 600 projects worth , US\$ 200 million over the past 10 years and developed over six million square feet of premium commercial real estate. For more details please visit www.sankalpan.com

Chair design/adjustability: Chair is the crucial factor in comfort and performance in office work as a majority of office workers spend most of their time sitting. While the choice of chair depends upon the fit between the worker and the job, proper adjustment of an office chair will improve body position and blood circulation, reduce muscular effort and decrease stress on the user's back. Chairs should swivel, have a breathable fabric on the seat and have a rounded front edge.

Ergonomic studies done years ago indicate that screen positioning and keyboard adjustability are some of the most important factors in providing a comfortable work environment and preventing a broad range of muscular diseases associated with computer use. Disorders such as eye, neck and back strain, fatigue, headaches and wrist, hand, elbow and shoulder diseases can all be dramatically improved through use of good ergonomic design.

However not all workstations are like this. Computers on the factory floor, in warehouses and in hospital rooms are some examples of non-office computer workstations that have become quite common over the last several years. Each industry has its own requirements and in each case good ergonomic design principles must be applied to give the operator or a range of operators the optimum man-machine interface and the adjustability required to prevent discomfort and prevent workplace injuries.

A workplace that gives an individual enough space to perform his duties with least discomfort by virtue of its design is in essence and spirit a good workstation.