What makes an ideal workplace?

Workplace design, as a concept, is more than a hundred years old. Traditionally, office layouts were created on a strict hierarchical system, which led to social barriers and a lack of communication. This delineated the culture of the organization, whilst also hampering work productivity and well-being. With an average of 45-50 hours across a work week, employees today are spending an overwhelmingly large amount of their time in their workplaces. This emphasizes the significance of designing workspaces with sufficient thought and consideration as it directly affects employee health. It is, therefore, imperative that office designs are set up to create conducive, healthy work environments in order to enhance employee efficiency.

As pioneering entrepreneurs seek out large flexible workspaces within the evolving fabric of the city, it is crucial, for architects and designers, to conceptualize innovative workspaces that create a unique identity, giving users the requisite comfort and ease within work environments. As Indian and global economies evolve and boundaries disappear, contemporary practices are keen on employing transparent and adaptable environments to promote constructive dialogue and collaboration amidst employees while keeping pace with shifting trends in office design and reflecting the company's ethos. Every workplace has its own needs and requirements, that standardized sizes and pre-conceived patterns cannot accommodate. Modern office spaces vary in size and layout, and often, the availability of furniture dictates the office design, when it really should be the other way around.

In a world full of static workplaces, recognizing the need for more interpersonal relationships, an environment of free discourse and communication of ideas is vital. Dissolving hierarchical segregations to accommodate socially and physically transparent infrastructure is an integral factor in the design of these spaces. Disregarding traditional notions of professional hierarchy and encouraging democratic engagement within the workforce reinforces work culture in an informal extent and instigates productive discussions. Responsive workspace designs that balance the physical and social infrastructure not only instill a sense of place, but also nurture community building and teamwork.

Contemporary workspaces are about efficiency, mobility and flexibility. Open plans are economically efficient and flexible and boost teamwork and coordination. Ditching closed cabins in favor of open plans, not only reflects an egalitarian structure but also supersedes conservative hierarchal structures and overcomes physical metaphors of authoritarianism, thereby, fostering collaboration and conversation. The relaxed environment of such arrangements results in an engaging workplace that channels an exchange of ideas by driving healthy dialogues.

In an environmentally progressive world, designers must focus on crafting working spaces that promote good health and well-being of the users. This can be achieved through 'biophilic' design strategies. The biophilia theory implies that humans possess an innate tendency to seek connections with nature and other life forms. These deep affiliations are rooted in our biology. A biophilic design tries to keep human beings, their relationships with the environment at the heart. Designing spaces that suit human biology enhances occupant health, happiness, and overall well-being. Integrating the outdoors with the built form and bringing air, light and greens inside facilitates human interaction with the outside environment. The addition of indoor plants enables breathing spaces and ensures engagement with nature while connecting the inside with the outside.

In the midst of planning and designing an office layout, tangential components of design – such as lighting schemes – are often overlooked. A good illumination scheme is a crucial player in sustaining personal health, ultimately steering motivation and production. Lighting structures a vital part of visual ergonomics and perceptions, thereby shaping workplace productivity.

Natural light protects vision, boosts concentration and creates healthy working conditions. Poor and misplaced lighting can cause visual discomfort, fatigue, and gloominess, taking a toll on employee efficiency. Combining effective daylight harvesting with efficient artificial lighting constructs an optimal illumination system. Natural light, if supplemented with strategically placed and adequately numbered table lights, floor lamps and ceiling fixtures can uplift aesthetics and yield positive outcomes. A well-lit, illuminated office, deployed with adequate lighting levels, that are strategically calculated and arranged, enhances the visual appeal of a space, whilst augmenting optimal efficiency of the employees. Materiality, arrangement, and treatment of surfaces also influence the lighting level of a space.

Workplace Design as a concept is constantly and consistently evolving with the onset of the startup and dot.com era. There is a paradigm shift in the composition of workplaces, especially for the younger generation with regards to the spaces representing an ideology, social status, work ethic, and lifestyle choices. This emphasizes the significance of treating social spaces as premeditated design standards than just an extension of spare areas. These ideologies, if deployed effectively, compose inclusive designs that tend to the well being and productivity of its employees. Interactive spaces, such as recreation rooms, cafeterias, discussion booths, etc. function as breathable social spaces, thereby tending to the comfort of the employees and promoting healthy communication.