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## Healthy workplace design spurs productivity



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Communal workspace is not only a great way for work teams to better collaborate and share ideas, but can save organizations money when it comes time to evaluating their space requirements and overall square footage needs.

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The demand to accommodate an increasingly mobile workforce, sharing work across geographies, and the explosion of workplace wellness programs lead this year's trends in workplace design, according to Joan Blumenfeld, principal and global interior design director for the New York-based architectural and design firm Perkins + Will.

Blumenfeld said the company has offices across the world that survey clients annual on workplace design trends.

"There is a remarkable amount of consistency across borders, and that in itself is part of a growing trend in the globalization of the workforce and needing to design work space to accommodate sharing communication and information across geographic boundaries," he said.

### Not all space needs are created equal

Engineering workplace design to ensure employers get the best from their associates is a top priority for Perkins + Will and its clients.

Before the first plans are ever drawn up for a small office remodel or a new global headquarters, it's critical that those designing the space have a good understanding of the work to be performed and the requirements of those that do the work.

Not all employee space needs are created equal. Some work teams may wish to cluster in open "pods" with limited private space and communal desks or tables and lots of open space for easy conversing with teammates.

Some need quiet space and the ability to focus. This may necessitate the design of such quiet rooms or "one-on-one" rooms where private conversations can be held in an otherwise open-space design.

"There have been some dramatic shifts in how work is being performed that we've seen in the past few years," said Blumenfeld. "One area of note is the shift to accommodating a mobile workforce. Though it varies by client need, it is not uncommon for us use a ratio of five work stations for six personnel in open space plans that accommodate occasional rather than permanent occupants."

As workers collaborate in different and more global ways, meeting space design is shifting to accommodate these needs.

Blumenfeld indicated that more medium-sized "scrum rooms" or "war rooms" are being designed with flexible seating and desk or table arrangements. Technology such as video conferencing, smart white boards, and complete wireless access are being incorporated across the board into these areas as opposed to being centrally located in only a handful of large conference areas.

### Wellness explosion

Perhaps the most dominant trend in workplace design of late is the explosion in the demand for workspace that promotes wellness.

"Ergonomics, wellness and an emphasis on being less sedentary at work is driving new workplace design concepts in order for employees to do their best," said Blumenfeld.

Blumenfeld says there are many ways to achieve these goals, including establishing "walking stations," such as out-of-the-way treadmills where workers can walk while working. Some companies also have designed attractive, centralized stairwells that promote stair climbing as opposed to taking elevators between floors, plus remotely-located printers and copiers that require employees get up and away from their desk to use the services.

Another area of focus is adjustability in chair and desk heights to address body mechanics or ergonomics. These are popular features when acquiring office furniture, according to Blumenfeld.

Space planners need pay careful attention to the importance that daylight plays in the overall wellbeing of their workforce. Plenty of sunshine and large accessible windows allow for more natural light in the workplace — a definite mood lifter.

What kind of a difference can this make? A 2012 Perkins + Will study shows that 68 percent of employees who say they are in "excellent" health report they are "not at all likely" to leave their job — compared to 45 percent in "poor health."

Now there is an ounce of prevention.

Michael Solender is a journalist from the Charlotte, N.C., area.