Designing for Mindfulness and Neurodiversity in the Modern Workplace

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MINDFULNESS and NEURODIVERSITY
In the COVID-19 era
1. What ultimately triggered you to close the office?

2. Were employees given a choice prior to the official decision to closing?

3. Did you have a distributed work program prior to this year?
   a. If so, how did that aid business continuity while the office was closed?
   b. What worked and what didn’t?
   c. If no, how did you ramp up for having to close the office?
   d. What worked and what didn’t? Given what you know now, if you could go back a few weeks, what would you tell yourself and what would you do differently?

Our world, and our work, will change going forward.
And this virus has had a BIG impact.
Now everyone has a heightened sensitivity to their surroundings.
But we have learned a lot that can be applied in this new era.
Productivity loss due to cognitive overload
Technostress = the need to be connected 24/7 has been dubbed by the World Health Organization to be “health epidemic of the 21st century”

It is costing U.S. businesses up to $300 billion / year
Figure 1. Lifestyle risk factors that are a workforce issue in the U.S.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factor</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obesity</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of physical activity</td>
<td>73%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poor nutrition</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tobacco use</td>
<td>32%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presenteeism</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substance abuse</td>
<td>13%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Figure 2. Top priorities of health and productivity programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop a workplace culture where employees are responsible for their health and understand its importance</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve employee engagement in health and productivity programs</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate employees to be more informed consumers of health care</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve employee awareness of health and risks</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improve the physical health of employees</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve the emotional/mental health of employees (e.g., lessen stress and anxiety)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TRAIN YOUR BRAINS

TRAIN YOUR BRAIN
ENGAGE YOUR HEART
TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE

A Two Step Program to Enhance Attention;
Decrease Stress; Cultivate Peace, Joy and
Resilience; and Practice Presence with Love

A Course in Attention & Interpretation Therapy (AIT)

AMIT SOOD, MD MSc
Director of Research & Practice
Complementary and Integrative Medicine Program
Chair, Mayo Mind Body Initiative
Associate Professor of Medicine
Mayo Clinic Rochester, MN
A chemical plant based in Detroit found that after just three years of implementing meditation:

✓ Productivity rose by 120%,
✓ profits by 52%, and
✓ absenteeism dropped by 70%.

A 15-minute mindfulness meditation on divergent thinking performance among 92 engineering students at Stanford University showed that a single meditation can improve idea generation.
Deep meaningful concentration, focus, inner reflection and meditation.
Intentionally paying attention with openness, kindness and curiosity.
“A mind is like a parachute, it doesn’t work if it isn’t open.”

– Frank Zappa
Convergent thinking is linear, involving going through a list of steps to get to a single answer.

Divergent thinking is exploring thinking is exploring different directions from an initial problem statement to generate many possible ideas and identify a wide range of potential solutions.
DIVERSITY & INCLUSION & NEURODIVERSITY
We are living in a time of increased diagnosis and awareness of neurodivergent conditions including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Tourettes, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia and Parkinson’s.

People who are neurodiverse are wired differently and often their differences can be an extraordinary strength in the workplace.
1 in 8 people are considered neurodiverse... but fewer than 50% know it.
85 - 90% of adults with ADHD don’t know they have it.

Untreated adults with ADHD **lost an average of 22 days of productivity** per year.

Adults with ADHD are **18 times more** likely to be disciplined at work for perceived “behavior problems” and are **60%** more likely to lose their jobs.

Depression impacts **14.8** million adults in the US and affects a high percent of neurodivergents.

**8 million** adults have ADHD

65% of the 1.2 million American adults on the neurodiverse spectrum have above average intelligence, yet **85%** of them remain unemployed or under-employed.

NEURODIVERSITY CHALLENGES
Exhibit extreme brilliance, while challenged in other regards.

Hyper focused when the topic or task is stimulating

Being able to see the bigger picture while still able to problem solve a complex issue

Willing to stretch boundaries despite potential for disruption

Enquiring and challenging of the status quo and think outside the box

Thrive under pressure
“We are freshwater fish in salt water. Put us in fresh water and we function just fine. Put us in salt water and we struggle to survive.”

- An Autistic student
**HYPERSENSITIVE**

- Process the details of sensory stimuli to a degree that is too magnified
- Prefer environments with controlled stimuli and dislike environments with excessive stimuli such as bright lights, crowds, unfamiliar scents, textures, or temperature fluctuations

**NEUROTYPICAL**

**HYPOSENSITIVE**

- Difficulty seeing, hearing, or feeling the acute sensory details in a given environment
- Prefer to be over-stimulated
- Need more sensory stimuli to successfully process sensory information
AUDITORY  VISUAL  TACTILE  OLFACTORY  PROPRIOCEPTIVE

DESIGN CHALLENGES
Diversity of Space Types

HYPOSENSITIVE

HYPERSENSITIVE

AUDITORY

VISUAL

TACTILE

OLFACTORY

PROPRIOCEPTIVE
HYPERSENSITIVE
For the over-stimulated
HYPOSENSITIVE
For the under-stimulated
We can design a variety of options.

Concentrate - Focus
Commune - Process
Create
Congregate / Meet / Learn
Contemplate / Refresh
Convivial / Socialize
Inclusive Spaces

When designing a workplace to be inclusive for all, it’s important to provide a variety of options to enable users to find a space that fits their specific needs for the task at hand.

All aspects of the space—color, lighting, materiality, elements in the field of view and sensory stimuli—need to be designed with purpose and intent.
How can we design space in a time of heightened sensory awareness to help people feel safe when they return to work?
Enabling good physical distancing doesn’t have to equal social isolation.

We can still design spaces that bring us together while keeping us apart.
Strong contrast coupled with natural materials in Stryker’s office in Burlington, Ontario, ground people in a sophisticated yet calming environment that feels secure. The styling and use of hospitality elements help people feel welcome. And access to water for drinking and handwashing is provided.
Prospect and refuge - The Savanna effect: As humans we instinctively seek safety, access to the essentials and comfort—in that order, knowingly or not. It can be unsettling when we can’t get our bearings in a space. To feel secure, we need to have a line of sight within our environment—to be able to look around and feel a sense of safety and comfort.
Now more than ever we need to create environments that enable mindfulness, relief from stress and are comforting. The crisp white furniture, dropped ceiling, soft materials, and saturated colors make this area of Convene's coworking space in Los Angeles an oasis from the workspace—a place where people can go to refresh.
All aspects of the space—color, lighting, materiality, need to be designed with purpose and intent. Strong contrast coupled with natural materials ground people in a sophisticated yet calming environment that feels secure. Styling and the use of hospitality elements help people feel welcome.
IQ AND EQ & SENSORY INTELLIGENCE
There is a compelling human and business case to be made for ensuring we approach the design of work places to help address mindfulness, health, safety, wellbeing and inclusivity.
We can create spaces that help people feel **safe** when they return to work.
Each company has to make their own decision about when they are ready and prepared to return to the workplace.
But maybe even more important, every individual has to make their own decision about when they are ready for reentry.
NEURODIVERSITY

Designing a NEURODIVERSE WORKPLACE
An investigation into how organizations can rethink their space to be more inclusive and to help an increasingly neurodiverse workforce thrive—and in the process gain a competitive advantage.

Trends Affecting NEURODIVERSITY TOWARD 2030
“We need to ensure that our best asset, and the true currency of business — people — are in spaces where they can ALL thrive.”

W e are living in a time of increased neurodiversity and awareness about ADHD, Dyslexia, Autism, and other neurological states. In fact, one in eight people are considered neurodiverse but fewer than 50 percent know it. Neurodivergents tend to be high achievers, excel in crises, and do both problem solvers, but navigating the modern workplace can be a challenge. Not only is there a need for more social inclusion, but it’s also important to consider the right tools to do their job. In a compelling business case for it as well.

Space today needs to reflect the diverse makeup of organizations one can end all up for success.

https://tinyurl.com/hok-neuro

https://tinyurl.com/hok-neuro-trends

https://www.workdesign.com/2019/12/designing-for-neurodiversity-and-inclusion/
The HOK WorkPlace team has developed a series to help our clients address the current situation and consider the path forward. Below are the links to these posts to date:

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #1 (Tom Polucci)
This Is No Ordinary Time for Remote Working
https://www.hok.com/news/2020-03/this-is-no-ordinary-time-for-remote-working-lets-remember-that/

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #2: (Adam Stoltz)
What Will Be the COVID-19 Takeaways for the Workplace?

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #3: (Gordon Wright)
Lessons Learned From Construction Markets First Hit by Coronavirus

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #4: (Kay Sargent)
COVID-19 and the Case for a Hands-Free Workplace

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #5: (Brad Liebman)
Design Strategies for Work and Life Following COVID-19

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #6: (Betsy Nurse)
Will Social Distancing Make Way for Workplace Distancing?

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #7: (Gordon Wright)
Amid COVID-19, Lessons in Workplace Readiness From a Corporate Real Estate Director

COVID-19 Chronicles Entry #8: (Adam Stoltz and Kay Sargent)
Remote Work Programs: Just Because You Can Doesn’t Mean You Should
“Designing spaces that bring us together while keeping us apart.”