How the Design of the Work Environment Affects Individual Performance: Honors

Capstone Reflection

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This reflection aims to discuss the findings and limitations of the research project "How the design of the work environment affects individual performance" as well as describe its impact on the researcher and contribution to the field of interior design.

Discussion & Findings

This study examines the environments in which hybrid workers feel they perform best, with a focus on their emotional and psychological responses to these spaces. The design of workplace environments has undergone significant transformation, especially in response to social and economic shifts such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These changes have caused an increase in both hybrid and remote work models and reshaped corporate interiors in many aspects. Additionally, there are trends that are pushing the focus away from overall corporate productivity to individual and team performance. In response, activity-based work (ABW) environments have emerged as a key design strategy, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability to meet diverse needs.

Findings from the study reveal that while ABW environments aim to support various work modes through flexible spaces, workers often seek environments that provide comfort, personalization, and a sense of control. Personalization, through control over elements like lighting, seating, and storage as well as the inclusion of personal items, contributed to individual psychological and physical comfort helping to reduce distractions. This aligns with the idea that a sense of ownership and familiarity contributes positively to workers' performance and well-being. Interestingly, the research highlighted some contrast between how users and designers describe and prioritize workspace effectiveness. While firms who are using the ABW model tend

to emphasize flexibility, collaboration, and multifunctionality in their designs, participants were more focused on the felt experience of the space particularly regarding comfort, focus, and the ability to manage their own needs. This suggests that although ABW environments are designed to offer choice and variety, and may still better support collaborative work, hybrid workers may still choose a more personalized environment to support their individual tasks and performance.

The findings reinforce the importance of a user-centered approach in workplace design. Successful environments are those that balance flexibility with the ability to support individual preferences and tasks. As Samani and Alavi (2020) suggests, both the social-psychological and physical aspects of the work environment play crucial roles in supporting creativity and performance. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on ABW environments and how workplace environments need to offer personal comfort and boundaries in addition to flexibility and efficiency. Soares et al. (2012) touches on how aesthetics and harmony must also be prioritized in addition to ergonomics and organization in order to positively influence users' view of their workplace as well as their personal performance. This research adds an additional layer by addressing that the success of workplace design should be measured not only by its aesthetic and functional qualities but also how well it aligns with users' felt experience and supports their performance.

Critique & Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into how hybrid workers perceive the environments in which they feel they perform best, there are a few key limitations that should be acknowledged.

This study was limited by a low number of participant responses, which restricted the ability to generalize the findings to a wider population. While the analysis of professionally

designed corporate interiors allowed for interesting comparative insights, the small sample size limited the study's ability to capture the full diversity of hybrid work experiences. Findings from this study should be supported by research done with larger sample sizes.

Another important limitation is that it is not understood how participants interpret the term performance. Part of the background of this research is rooted in the trend of productivity versus performance when it comes to workplace design. New trends are shifting the focus away from overall productivity and towards individual and team performance. It is unknown if the participants interpreted performance in this way. As a result, they may have submitted spaces where they feel like their task completion rate is higher, meaning that they are performing better. Providing participants with some background information on this separation of productivity and performance may have produced different data.

Additionally, knowing the occupational background of the participants may have positively contributed to the study, especially if there was a larger data set. This background knowledge could have provided a deeper understanding of why participants submitted the spaces they did. Some occupations may require spaces that support more individual focused work while others may involve more collaborative environments. These factors may have affected the participants choices in where they felt like their work performance was at its best.

In summary, although this study offers important observations about the relationship between hybrid workers and their environments, the small sample size and lack of clarity on some elements limits the strength and generalizations of the findings.

Reflection

Completing this research project has been a rewarding experience, contributing meaningfully to my intellectual and personal growth and professional development.

Intellectually this process has deepened my understanding of the complex relationship between workplace design and human behavior and performance. I have gained a new perspective on how design intent intersects with user experience, recognizing that a successful workspace is not solely defined by aesthetics or functionality but also by how individuals feel, engage, and perform within it.

Beyond the specific findings, the process of conducting a research project from start to finish has been an invaluable learning experience. I have gained skills in developing research questions, designing a study, going through IRB review, collecting and analyzing data, and transforming findings into meaningful insights. This process has required patience, adaptability, discipline, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills as well as reinforcing attention to detail and openness to unexpected outcomes. I will take all of these skills in addition to the knowledge I gained from this study into all my future endeavors whether academic, professional, or personal.

Importantly, when I set out to develop my capstone research project, I wanted it to contribute meaningfully to the field of interior design while also being accessible and understandable to audiences outside the profession. I believe that workplace design is not just a topic for designers; it is something that affects workers and organizations on a daily basis. I hope that my research contributes to the ongoing conversation around creating environments that truly serve the people who use them, fostering well-being, adaptability, and human-centered performance.

Overall, this project has been pivotal in my development as a researcher and designer. I believe these two roles have complemented each other throughout this process, allowing me to make meaningful connections between academic research and the field of interior design. I look

forward to using these insights and skills to carry forward in my career with a more research-informed and user-centered approach.

References

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