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GIVING VOICE TO THOSE WHO CREATE WORKPLACE DESIGN & FURNISHINGS

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Employees find that basic interiors are no longer suitable. For the Kering headquarters in New Jersey, the team at HLW designed a range of inviting spaces. Photo courtesy of HLW

Happiness in the Post-Pandemic Workplace

by Anna Zappia

As we experiment with hybrid schedules and new ways of working, the immediate focus is no longer on keeping staff healthy. Architects are looking for solutions that foster greater connection, authenticity, and happiness in the workplace. Layout and design can help staff feel more motivated, yet industry leaders are taking a holistic approach so that they can provide opportunities that enhance the experiences at the office.

Our definitions of happiness at work have certainly changed. “I think there’s a lot that comes into play in terms

of people’s happiness now. Before the pandemic, if you had temperature control, coffee, and clean bathrooms, that was perfectly fine. That’s no longer suitable,” said Melissa Strickland, associate principal at HLW.

Workers are not as worried about the virus as more of their colleagues are vaccinated, but they still want the feeling of security that they have at home. They are no longer solely concerned about their physical safety, but they want a sense of emotional security that can be difficult to replicate in the workplace.

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“We have to make sure that people understand the ways in which we are providing for their emotional safety, whether it’s the orientation of the furniture, or detailing a set of protocols that we have put into place. Making people feel safe rather than just meeting project requirements, that’s the next step. A certain level of emotional security will be woven into the new designs that we create,” noted Michelle Beganskas, senior manager of workplace strategy at Ted Moudis Associates.

Samantha McCormack, creative director at TPG Architecture, agreed that keeping staff informed of changes is critical, and said that updates coming from top management help to reduce stress of staff members. “As



TPG Architecture made sure to include different zones within the LiveOnNY office to give employees more options. Photo courtesy of Veronica Bean



In the LiveOnNY office, there are quiet areas for more focused work. Photo courtesy of Veronica Bean

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teams explore different interventions, from furniture modifications to less time at the work site, I think communication of leadership to their employees is going to be important. There should be conversations about why certain decisions were made, and the thought behind upgrades. By listening to employees and addressing any concerns, you can lessen the anxiety about coming back to the office.”

Even though people have adapted to working from home and consider themselves more productive there, interacting with one another is a key component that has been missing during this period of isolation. “Not being able to get together to share ideas, laugh, and socialize has been difficult. Having a physical place where we can connect and be creative adds to our happiness at work,” noted Jodi Williams, global lead of workplace strategy at CallisonRTKL.

Having a range of spaces for different tasks and different personalities will make workers happier, and allow for the flexibility needed as our work lives continue to shift. “Some people like to reset

in a social setting, while others reset in an independent setting or a combination of the two. It’s important that we provide a variety of spaces for everyone,” Beganskas said.

Workplace strategists agree that if employees are given options of where to work, they are more productive. McCormack explained that the

move away from open spaces will continue, with an emphasis on smaller communities — providing choice that people want. “We are looking at breaking down the open plan into more discreet neighborhoods, making sure they have amenities and components to make them almost like small offices within the office.”



An eclectic mix of art enlivens the Manhattan office of Ducera Partners. The designers at Ted Moudis Associates used art, color, and texture to evoke happy memories. Photo courtesy of Ted Moudis Associates.



The designers at HLW are implementing more space, which allows employees to collaborate freely and comfortably. Photo courtesy of HLW



The office of Ducera Partners was designed to create an open feeling. Photo courtesy of Ted Moudis Associates.