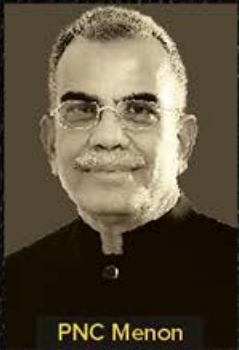


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Effective spatial layout is key to fostering productivity in any workspace. It's about balancing functionality with flow. Open spaces encourage collaboration, while quiet zones provide focus. By incorporating natural elements, access to outdoor views, and providing ergonomic and flexible workstations, the offices can reduce stress, promote physical well-being, and allow employees to work comfortably and efficiently.

Lalit Nagrani, Co-Founder, Phi Designs shares that integrating flexible seating arrangements allow employees to choose their environment based on the task at hand. "High desks are often preferred by people for an environmental change. Circulation paths should be clear, preventing bottlenecks, while breakout spaces for informal interaction can spur creativity. Thoughtful placement of amenities, like coffee stations or collaborative hubs, within easy reach can energize teams and promote movement, which is crucial for maintaining productivity throughout the day. Integrating open scrum areas with coffee areas

which promote creativity is our go to strategy."

According to **Mitu Mathur, Director, GPM Architects and Planners**, a thoughtfully designed layout can enhance productivity by balancing functionality with comfort. "Strategically placing various meeting zones can encourage seamless communication without interruption in general work areas. Locating social areas, like cafeterias, away from primary work zones helps keep distractions to a minimum. Open-sight lines and fluid layouts can create an inviting and expansive feel, making connecting with colleagues easier by encouraging effective communication. Altogether, this approach can foster a harmonious work environment that supports productivity and satisfaction."

Ujwal Bhole, Principal Architect, UB Architects elaborates, "Open-plan layouts can really help foster communication and collaboration by removing physical barriers, but it's equally important to balance that with zoning. Creating specific areas for focused work and others for brainstorming or teamwork allows people to



WORKPLACE DESIGN TO ATTRACT & RETAIN EMPLOYEES

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A well-thought-out space can help employees feel valued, reduce stress and improve overall job satisfaction. Architects share some specific design elements that can be the key factors in attracting and retaining top talent.

By: Realty+ Bureau

move between tasks more easily. Sound management is another big one—using materials that absorb noise can cut down on distractions and make it easier for everyone to concentrate. Breakout areas are also a great addition, giving employees a place to take short breaks and recharge, which can make a big difference in maintaining energy levels. And, of course, natural light is a must—it helps boost mood and keep fatigue at bay, making the whole workspace feel more uplifting and productive.”

HEALTHY WORKPLACE FOR EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Natural light and ventilation are fundamental to creating a healthy, vibrant workspace. In India, the climate varies greatly across regions, so incorporating natural light and ventilation requires a localized approach.

“An effective approach is to maximize window areas, especially in frequently used zones like workstations and meeting rooms, and use glass partitions to allow light to permeate deeper into the office. Skylights and

ceiling sunroofs are also valuable additions, particularly in enclosed areas, as they can introduce soft overhead lighting that reduces dependence on artificial lighting. Open floor plans and fewer interior walls can improve air and light flow across the office. By incorporating elements like open balconies and green terraces, em-

Centralized common areas branching into respective zones for quiet work, collaboration and relaxation, as well as flexible seating arrangements, can streamline navigation within the office so that employees select the best space for their tasks and work styles, increasing productivity of the workforce.



employees can be given access to outdoor areas, enriching the office environment with natural light and ventilation. These thoughtful choices can reduce energy costs, create dynamism, and contribute to a healthier workplace," stated **Mitu Mathur**

"Overall, the goal is to create a comfortable environment that leverages natural elements while being mindful of local climate conditions," emphasized **Lalit Nagrani**. He added, "In areas with high temperatures, it's important to bring in daylight without overheating the space. Using operable windows ensures a constant flow of fresh air, but that goes on the building planning level. On an interior level, we make sure the windows are not blocked by any enclosed space, ensuring complete flow of natural light into the space. Integrating mechanical systems like Treated Fresh Air units enhance cross-ventilation and help bringing fresh air into the space. Courtyards, a common feature in Indian design, can also be reimagined for modern workspaces, letting in natural light and fresh air. In coastal regions, where humidity can be high, dehumidifiers or specialized ventilation systems may be necessary."

"There are several effective approaches that can be taken into consideration," said **Ujwal Bhole**. "Open layouts allow light and air to circulate more freely throughout the space. Large windows are a great way to let daylight flood into the office, making the space feel open and energized. On the ventilation side, integrating advanced ventilation systems, like HVAC units with fresh air intake, is key for maintaining indoor air quality while circulating clean air throughout the workspace. Using glass partitions instead of solid walls is another smart move—they provide privacy while still letting light pass through. Light shelves can also be installed above windows to reflect sunlight deeper into the room, ensuring more even lighting. Together, these strategies create a well-lit, well-ventilated environment that supports both comfort and productivity."

BIOPHILIC DESIGN & JOB SATISFACTION

"Biophilic design really taps into our natural connection with the environment, and it can make a big difference in workspaces," stated **Ujwal Bhole**. "Bringing in natural elements like plants or organic materials helps reduce stress and creates a more calming atmosphere."

Open floor plans and fewer interior walls can improve air and light flow across the office. Courtyards, a common feature in Indian design, can be reimagined for modern workspaces, letting in natural light and fresh air. Light shelves can also be installed above windows to reflect sunlight deeper into the room, ensuring more even lighting.

When you have nature-inspired features like natural light or outdoor views, it also boosts creativity and helps people think more clearly. Plus, spaces that mimic nature tend to foster more social interactions, creating a stronger sense of community among employees."

Lalit Nagrani agreed, "Biophilic design isn't just a trend; it's a proven strategy to create healthier, happier environments. However, it is bit of a luxury as of now due to its high maintenance nature. It can be applied cost-effectively by focusing on simple yet impactful elements. Adding low-maintenance indoor plants like spider plants or peace lilies is a budget-friendly way to introduce greenery into the workspace, which improves air quality and enhances well-being. Using natural colors and textures, such as wood finishes or stone-look laminates, can evoke a sense of connection to nature without the high costs of real materials. Even artwork or graphics depicting natural scenes can provide a biophilic effect, offering a refreshing visual break for employees at a minimal cost."

Mitu Mathur added, "Biophilic design enhances physical and psychological wellness for a modern, environmentally-conscious workforce. Natural materials like wood, stone, and natural fibres help reduce stress and improve focus. Indoor plants and vertical gardens can purify the air and water features and textures that mimic natural forms provide some sensory diversity, which can be mentally and physically soothing."



ROLE OF DESIGN IN 'RETURN TO OFFICE'

Almost all organizations now require employees to return to the office. Amid growing return-to-office calls, effective workplace design can encourage employees to return without feeling confined to a rigid structure.

"In the 'Back to Work' era, the office needs to offer more than just a desk; it should be a hub of collaboration and creativity expressed," **Lalit Nagrani**. "Designing spaces that promote interaction—whether through communal lounges, breakout zones, or project-based hubs—creates a more engaging experience for employees. Incorporating technology seamlessly into these collaborative spaces, such as interactive screens or video conferencing setups, supports both in-person and hybrid meetings. The goal is to foster a sense of belonging and purpose, where the office becomes a space for brainstorming, team bonding, and idea generation—things that remote work can't fully replicate. We've noticed a growing trend where clients are requesting a significant portion of flexible spaces in their office designs—close to 40% in many cases. And it's not just a passing trend. Well-designed open areas, booth seating, and cafeterias have become essential components of modern workspaces. Amenities like gyms are no longer added for

the sake of appearance; clients are investing substantial time in selecting the right equipment. One client even requested a dedicated space for Vipassana, reflecting their strong commitment to mental health. It's clear that companies are prioritizing holistic employee well-being, going beyond the occasional seminar to incorporate wellness practices into the daily office environment."

"With the shift back to in-office work, designing spaces promoting collaboration can make the workplace more inviting and engaging for employees," shared **Mitu Mathur**. "Dedicated collaboration zones and open lounges encourage casual discussions and teamwork, contrasting with the isolation of remote work. Flexible, open layouts with movable furniture empower teams to adapt spaces to their needs, promoting a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere. Moreover, integrating technology, such as interactive screens, video conferencing tools, and wireless sharing systems, into these spaces enables hybrid collaboration and makes team interactions more efficient and accessible. By combining design elements that promote comfort and adaptability, these collaborative spaces attract employees, fostering a sense of community and revitalizing the in-office experience with opportunities for innovation."

Studies have shown that biophilic elements can reduce stress and improve mood, contributing to a more positive work environment increasing employees job satisfaction. Balancing both lighting and acoustics too is crucial for maintaining a productive and focused work atmosphere.

Architects believe that selecting natural materials like stone, wood, and even traditional elements like bricks and Mangalore tiles not only promote healthier living spaces but also support sustainable, climate-appropriate design. Wellness-focused offices lead to happier and healthier employees who are more likely to stay long-term.





"I believe that designing spaces to encourage collaboration is essential for creating an attractive and engaging office environment," said **Ujwal Bhole**. "One effective strategy is to create open collaboration zones with comfortable seating, allowing employees to gather for spontaneous meetings and brainstorming sessions. These areas foster a sense of community and make it easier for teams to connect. Incorporating creative spaces is also crucial. These areas, equipped with whiteboards, movable furniture, and inspiring decor, can stimulate innovation and allow for more dynamic thinking. Additionally, utilizing outdoor spaces for meetings or breaks can have a significant positive impact on creativity and well-being, as fresh air and natural surroundings can invigorate the mind. Lastly, allowing employees to personalize their workspaces is vital. When individuals can add personal touches, the office feels more welcoming and comfortable, making it a space they want to return to. By integrating these elements, organizations can create a dynamic office that encourages collaboration and enhances overall employee satisfaction."

With fluctuating office attendance, designing adaptable spaces that suit different activities—focus work, collaboration, or informal gatherings, allows employees to choose how they work best. Flexible spaces can also easily accommodate varying headcounts, making them ideal for a more fluid 'Return To Office' environment.

CLEAN AIR QUALITY

- Low- or zero-VOC paints, sealants, and adhesives minimize the release of harmful chemicals into the air.
- Clay or lime plasters are practical VOC-free choices for ceilings and walls and even help regulate humidity.
- Natural insulation materials like wool or cellulose are also excellent choices for regulating temperature without introducing toxins.
- Natural materials such as untreated wood, wool carpets, bamboo, and cork for flooring and furnishings are typically non-toxic and breathable,
- Flooring materials like polished concrete can be easier to clean, reducing dust and allergens.
- Bricks, in particular, are breathable and durable, while Mangalore tiles provide natural ventilation, keeping spaces cooler.
- Air-purifying paints and finishes that actively improve air quality are gaining traction.
- Using moisture-resistant materials is crucial in coastal cities and areas, where humidity can lead to mold growth and poor air quality.

WHOLESOME LIGHTING

- Adequate illumination is crucial for reducing eye strain and fatigue, which in turn boosts productivity.
- Layered lighting that adjusts to different needs—ambient for general use, task lighting for focused work—ensures comfort throughout the day.
- Natural light has a remarkable impact on mood and overall health, positively influencing circadian rhythms and leading to better sleep patterns.
- A balanced lighting scheme combines natural and adjustable artificial sources to reduce eye strain and enhance concentration.

THOUGHTFUL ACOUSTICS

- Open-plan offices are notorious for noise distractions, so incorporating acoustic panels, ceiling baffles, or sound-absorbing flooring is essential to reduce noise levels and create quiet zones.
- Proper acoustic design that minimizes distractions from ambient noise, good sound management and reducing noise levels contributes to a more comfortable work environment allowing employees to work more efficiently.
- Carpeted flooring helps minimize echo and dampen noise.
- Zoning for specific activities also improves sound control.