

OFFICE DESIGN POST COVID-19

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Abstract : This research paper relies on planning and designing of an office space, specifically an architectural design studio. The objective is to create a safe, hygienic and productive workspace post COVID 19 pandemic by following the guidelines provided by WHO and native government in terms of architecture and interior design. The planning and designing is directly as well as indirectly related to the efficiency of the task and employee's productivity. So, it is necessary to have a safe and efficient working environment. The main focus of this paper is to create an office environment, specifically an architectural design studio which is safer in terms of dealing with COVID-19 pandemic by using the minimalistic interior design theme.

Keywords – Post COVID Design, Office Interior Design, Design Studio, Interior Design.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world is currently dealing with COVID-19 and more than 213 countries have been affected by the Coronavirus, and India has currently 8.59 million cases reported till date (10 November 2020). The economy of India has been largely disruptive due to COVID-19. Employment has decreased to 26% after the lockdown in March 2020. Although the concept of “work from home” is in trend these days but it is making the employees less productive and mental health problems have been detected as well. So, the prime concern of businesses, industries, etc. is to bring people back to work as swiftly and cautiously as possible. Economies across the world are opened, which clearly means that the employees are expected to return to their offices as per the new normal. Hence, there will be huge demand of office spaces which are hygienic, safe and follows the concept of social distancing. Flexible workspaces are a realistic alternative as businesses rise to meet the new standard. The role of the workplace in a post COVID-19 world is way more important than ever. An employee spends at least 7 to 8, hours a day in the office. So, it is necessary to create a good atmosphere inside out the whole building.

II. TECHNIQUES

The techniques which can be followed in terms of post COVID Interior Design spaces particularly, a design studio are as follows:

1. **Segregating The Areas:** The whole structure can be segregated into three parts- Public, Semi-public and Private Areas to avoid contact between the occupants.

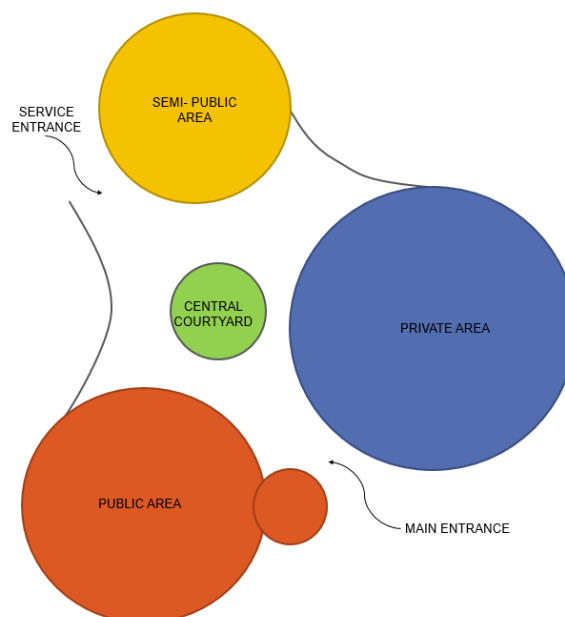


Figure 1 Example for concept of area segregation while planning

2. **Design Considerations:** Three strategies can be followed to overcome the design challenges. They are mentioned below:
 - *Geometry-* Change the furniture layout to increase distance and eliminate near face-to-face orientation.
 - *Density-* Reduce the number of people accommodated inside a room to meet 6ft/2m physical distance specifications.
 - *Division-* Add screens or panels to create obstructions and walls between individuals, spaces and pathways.

Both techniques can be used in tandem – combined with efficiency principles – to solve the architecture complexities of building public environments where individuals can work together more safely to communicate and socialize. [1]

3. **Open Floor Plans:** Open floor plans are much easier to clean and maintain. It also limits the number of surfaces from which the workers will be impacted. [3]
4. **Use of Natural Ventilation and Lights:** Ventilation is important to help minimize the spread of COVID-19. Pathogens can spread rapidly across HVAC systems. Cross ventilation according to the site orientation and wind direction can be provided. Opening windows could also increase the ventilation of the workspace.
5. **Bringing The Nature In The Interiors:** In order to maintain the indoor air quality, indoor plants like snake plant, areca palm etc. can be used in the interiors. Use of large windows which provides with natural light and brings the outer view inside the interiors as well.
6. **Furniture:** Providing furniture like work desk, reception desk, etc. with a barrier like glass to avoid the direct contact between the occupants.
7. **Installation Of Sanitizing Products:** It is must and most obvious step to install the sanitization products like sanitization booths, sanitizer stands, disinfectants and hand wash on every floor and before every space. The more the sanitizing facility the less will be the possibility of spreading the corona virus. Eventually, it will make the employee feel safer as well.
8. **Install Educational And Fun Signs:** By using the floor stickers, emblems, etc. signage could be adopted to educate the occupants to maintain the social distancing and to remind them to sanitize themselves time to time. [4]
9. **Minimalist Theme in The Interiors:** The minimalist theme revolves around simple, open floor plans, monochromatic colour palette and putting elements which are functional and necessary. In this interior design theme, there will be less surfaces as there will be less elements. Hence, there will be less contact between the occupants through the surfaces in the interiors.
10. **Self-Cleaning Surfaces:** A lot of manufacturing companies are selling affordable self-cleaning surfaces for elements like door knobs, handles, elevator buttons, etc.
11. **Contactless Technology:** Installation of Office doors that unlock automatically with the motion sensors and face recognition. [6]
12. **Use of Natural Building Materials to a Feasible Extent:**
 - Metals like copper, bronze, and brass are the common antimicrobial materials that have inherent properties to kill a broad variety of microorganisms. Not only are these metals hygienic, but they are perfect accents to warm up the workspaces.
 - Structure: RCC Structure with plastered brick walls and concrete. Use of artificial cladding materials like ACP or HPL sheets should be avoided because it does not resist the viruses in comparison to bricks and plasters.
 - Flooring: Quartz as it is one of the most sanitary and natural hard stone and Oak wood as it stops the growth of microorganisms.
 - Furniture/Décor: Wooden furniture with anti-coronavirus fabrics, brass framed furniture pieces. Chairs or stools in the common areas can be made up in cork as well. The furniture should be designed in a way that it minimizes the contact and is sustainable at the same time.
 - Door and Window: Glass windows with brass finished framework. [7]

III. RESULT

Realizing the fact that living with the coronavirus is the new normal, people needed to go back to work. People became more and more conscious about their health and their environment as well. Keeping in mind the above mentioned facts, we as designers have this responsibility to create a safe and healthy environment for the people working in an enclosed space. By following the guidelines provided by WHO, maintaining social distancing inside the workspace and providing provisions for sanitization gave us the result of post COVID design of an architectural design studio. By segregating the areas into three parts i.e. public, semi-public and private areas to insure the minimum contact between the occupants of the building which resulted in less chances of virus spread.

IV. DISCUSSION

This research reveals the importance of post COVID design in a workspace, specifically an architectural design studio. Employers must make contributions in a safe environment in a holistic way [2]. The introduction of modern protocols would entail significant investment in technologies and architecture improvements. The ongoing discussion is about keeping a balance between the old and the modern standards. The debate would be between ensuring long-term development and operating on a regular basis. However between technology, accessibility and well-being, anonymity, health and safety will still prevail.

V. CONCLUSION

Well-planned returns to offices will take advantage of this moment to rethink their position and create greater talent experience, boost teamwork and competitiveness, and cut costs. The possible truth is that we will finally return to a collective workplace, even though one that has evolved beyond anything we might have expected before. In the now-transformed future workplace climate, the main issue may not be whether or not patterns are on the rise, but how to reconcile seemingly contradictory requirements. At the end of the day the goal of this re-invention will be what good businesses have always wanted. A healthy workplace where workers will appreciate their jobs, work with their peers and meet the goals of their organizations. COVID-19 has contributed to a dramatic change in many facets of life as we know it and office design is no different.

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