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The Impact of COVID-19 on the Interior Design of Workspaces

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The Impact of COVID-19 on the Interior Design of Workspaces

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected millions of people's lives globally in diverse ways. The authorities are enforcing physical distance by limiting travel, ordering to stay at home, and shutting down unnecessary companies to optimize global health in the COVID-19 outbreak. Due to the pandemic, working remotely is becoming more and more common, which has changed how community members interact with one another. Everyone strives to put their health first and maintain physical seclusion by remaining at home. Office design concepts created the open work area that enabled the collaborative effort concept before the disease's outbreak.

The idea of co-working spaces is considered to provide a significant amount of flexibility toward workforce mobility, significantly improving a business's efficiency and productivity. The cubicle workplace, which substantially restricts the space with excellent privacy, has been replaced with a huge table in an open field. A sustainable environmental approach, such as the utilization of sustainable materials, is used. Particular interior design components and ideas are considered to be a group of unwritten 'rules' that experienced interior designers typically follow. An aesthetically beautiful interior can be designed by integrating such aspects, which include space, line, forms, light, color, texture, and pattern. COVID-19 pandemic brought numerous impacts not only to the health status of individuals but also to areas such as workspaces.

The Interior Design of Workspaces Before the Pandemic

At the start of 2010, the compression of post-recession budgets greatly influenced interior design. Low-cost materials and furnishings, such as plywood, Ikea cupboards, raw brass, and paint accents, mirrored this philosophy of accomplishing more with fewer resources (Budds). Mainstream merchants hedged their chances by sticking to safe hues, patterns, and materials —

nothing too daring or outlandish. For example, according to Budds, ascetic colors such as blue, beige, and gray appealed to cautious buyers who wanted to keep their workplaces in balance and maintain the unity of style. Simple and stiff silhouettes and proportions gave the impression that they were meant to shield viewers from the tumult of the moment.

In the middle of the 2010s, as more goods appeared on the market, design started to sag due to unlimited variety. It was at this point that 'contextualized e-commerce,' the term used to describe stories in which many of the popular products could be quickly purchased via relevant links, reached its peak (Budds). When Domino, a cult interior architecture magazine that ceased working in 2009, reopened as an online store in 2013, its cover featured a soft Moroccan rug next to a velvety perennial herbaceous sofa with curved contours (Petermans 64). Noticeably, even workplace interior designs were marked with the appearance of the chevron pattern on rugs, curtains, and pillows, and emphasis was usually placed on bolder and more contrasting colors.

Along with that, trend lines in interior decoration grew and spread more widely. In 2013, Instagram hit 100 million active users, and in 2015, Pinterest did the same (Murray 99). Social media assisted individuals in realizing how they could integrate design into their life by making the picture-perfect environment a desirable commodity (Budds). Start-up companies in interior design attempted to profit from this. In 2016, \$20 million was raised in fundraising for home polish, a website offering inexpensive interior design service providers started in 2011 (Murray 100). Both the textures of the materials and the boldness of the silhouettes evolved. Design teams from the 1970s and 1980s, including Ward Bennett, Milo Baughman, Jean Royere, and Memphis, served as the season's gurus as hipsterism reached its peak (Budds). This fashion synthesis of designs was a reaction to the Aviation of the mid-2010s, which drew inspiration from the 1950s. It served as an illustration of a more significant trend of increased self-

expression through architecture (Budds). Shapes became more disproportionate, and some designers were reviving trends formerly derided as unattractive, as seen in Grand Millennial furnishings and Freakebana floral displays.

While the mid- and early decades of the 2010s strongly influenced modernity, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of postmodernism, which welcomed eclecticism, post-structuralism, and heterogeneity. Brands were interpreting eclecticism through compilations that featured hand-worn surfaces, organic and synthetic materials, and foreign influences (Budds). As a result, it is possible to say that pre-COVID interior design included quite varying elements and put an emphasis on different elements like bolder or calm colors, balanced or brave patterns, and other features.

The Interior Design of Workspaces Once the Pandemic First Hit

Soon after the pandemic's break, the significance of physical existence for organizations emerged as a contentious issue, but this was probably the only immediate effect of the coronavirus on workplaces' interior design. In 2019, a person could perhaps walk into several offices and expect to see sharable desk spaces because they worked for a variety of businesses. Meanwhile, in 2020, a primary emphasis was placed on individual desks and working spaces ("How Has Covid-19 Affected the Interior Design Industry at Large?"). To comply with social distancing and government regulations, more workplaces started providing individually designed and bigger bench desks with partitions and screens to create safer workplaces (Richtel). Therefore, as noticed by Ulusoy and Aslanoglu, companies and individuals started saying goodbye to cluttered and cramped tables and greeting flexible working and unique workstation configurations (85). Consequently, it is possible to indicate that one primary change the COVID-19 pandemic introduced to workspaces is the shift from balance and design patterns to a specific

rhythm of individual desks with protective screens.

Changes in the Interior Design of Workspaces During the Pandemic

Home Offices with Duty

Since traditional workplaces were and are temporarily closed, many people have to work from home as a requirement of their employers. An interior decorator Jessica Helgerson says that their business has been working on creating small offices “for years,” and now, their customers constantly work in such home offices (Squier). According to Helgerson, in the past, the majority of people searching for a home office thought of it as a much more laid-back area where they could pay their bills or check their messages (Squier). However, nowadays, a variety of elements like large work desks and cozy task chairs, as well as more storage, are emphasized in home offices, allowing for much better usage.

A Fresh Approach to the Foyer

People are becoming more aware of the importance of keeping clean spaces and distinct boundaries between the inside and outside. As a result, entranceways, foyers, and standard structures are receiving more recognition these days (Squier). The foyer and mudroom — those areas where one can come from the outside, remove their shoes, and clean their hands — have received new attention (Ulusoy and Aslanoğlu 84). The foyers were established in diverse workplaces as a government necessity to control the spread of COVID-19 through handwashing.

Biological Design

Design that strengthens people's relationship with the ecosystem is essential for enhancing physical and psychological wellbeing. When individuals work from their homes or ordinary offices, expansive windows and doors allow for better unity with nature. According to a designer, Nina Blair, "a closer relationship with the outdoors during this period has become

crucial, especially for city inhabitants" (Squier). This is especially emphasized in workspace interior design during the pandemic. People tend to choose colors that inspire tranquility, wellbeing, and their linking with nature (Ludwig and Pearlman). In addition, they also require brushstrokes that are less about the exposition and more about easing and sheltering if they want their houses and offices to be havens of safety and sanctuary.

Areas for Outdoor Recreation

Both homes and lawns have evolved into community hubs enabling loved ones to stay together at a reasonable social distance. At the same time, cafes, bars, and other places become challenging to navigate if not closed down totally (Squier). According to researchers, the pandemic's significance on interior design may be best summarized as a deeper focus on clearly defined, adaptable spaces since, as they say, need is the mother of innovation (Squier). Currently, it is possible to identify a great emphasis and crucial relevance of the internal design of workspaces that considers the significance and purpose in addition to the aesthetics.

The Design of Workspaces after People's Coming Out of the Pandemic

It is not new to be able to use Zoom for touring a room or joining a video chat. These innovations have been in use for some time, and architects had already put many of them into practice before COVID-19 set the rules for conducting business (Murray 98). The hybrid workplace has affected how office building is used now that these innovations are more essential for companies (Murray 98; Richtel). To reduce the risk of vulnerability, it is indeed likely that many organizations will divide the number of employees into teams or shifts.

Some expansive workstation layouts have been discouraged by COVID-19 as well. Desks are arranged differently so that employees do not confront each other, and cubicle walls are taller to further divide the workforce (Richtel). It is essential to think about how employees move

around a workspace and whether a one-way furniture arrangement is possible. As for colors and patterns, calming and neutral ones are preferred in order to reduce the stress placed on employees (“How Has Covid-19 Affected the Interior Design Industry at Large?”). More importantly, COVID-19 influences the layout and use of common office areas, including conference rooms, kitchens and break rooms, and comfortable restaurant seats that contribute to a less formal work environment.

A large office has always been desired, especially for bigger workforces, but it is becoming increasingly important around COVID-19. One must ensure that adequate space is provided for acceptable social distancing and that signs are precisely placed to inform and guide employees (“How Will the Interior Design Industry Change After Covid-19?”). Policies are used to exemplify what is expected while also discussing hygiene. With the guide to social distancing in the workplace, staff can see how they can fine-tune and make offices COVID-secure, regardless of their industry.

The Future of the Interior Design of Workspaces

Looking into a crystal ball’s appeal is more about anticipating the future of design than it is about foreseeing it. There is no doubt that offices will change even more drastically in the near and distant future. For example, it is predicted that offices may become more intentional (Miller). This means that most heads-down work will be done at home, and the physical workplace will serve as a place for social interaction, increasing social space, accommodations, and conference rooms. Workplace culture will continue to be a key component of the employee experience for the majority of businesses since the physical office is here to stay (Miller). There is a belief that, although people can request materials that are impervious, easy to clean, and less likely to spread infection, the safest workplaces will be those that adhere to local health officials’

regulations (Jow; Mason 20). Consequently, an integrated strategy of operations, policies, and personal accountability will be needed.

A color must first appropriately reflect consumer opinions to obtain traction and appeal. Understandably, the pandemic has caused customers to feel uneasy, sad, and anxious. As a result, they are now drawn to hues that give them a sense of security and comfort. Consumers will examine their homes more closely, trying to understand how they operate and how they may turn them into a haven in these uncertain times, even when shelter-in-place orders are lifted (Jow). It is expected that employees will want to see more biophilic colors that can make one feel like being in nature — especially in urban inhabitants' spaces (Jow; Mora). That is so because in a time when maintaining one's mental and physical health is crucial, these hues will encourage inner serenity.

It is obvious that designers and other design professionals are used to prioritizing people and their needs. Consequently, researchers predict that design firms will rely on their colleagues and community in their everyday internal activities (Jow). According to the executive vice president of IIDA, designers are likely to realize that the skills and aptitudes their profession gives to them, such as empathy, creativity, patience, rational thinking, and problem-solving, are more important than ever (Jow). However, Jow notices that interior designers who have lately established their businesses will need to be more independent even though their main obstacle is fear. They must, therefore, distinguish between their fears of the coronavirus and a global economic slowdown. The future generation is expected to focus on recession-proofing their company and what overhead is necessary as newer organizations emerge as more financially conscious practices (Jow). Shared offices, web-based meeting tools, digital presentations, and rapid international delivery will be in high demand.

After the COVID-19 epidemic, most of the riches, particularly the clientele that many designers serve, have not vanished. As a result, wealthy people will continue to have a high degree of wealth and will continue to spend lavishly (Petermans 66). When the environment is cleared of firms that did not survive, the majority of developers will see a future brimming with potential (Petermans 66). Conflicts over pricing and finances will have more to do with connections than actual investing capacity (Jow). The capacity of designers to demonstrate the value of their services will be a more serious issue. Pricing their services is not just based on what the market will bear or what the industry norm is. The matter of pricing also takes into account perceived value.

Furthermore, like many designers, one might already have an agreement template specifying how the risk is divided among all parties. However, it is challenging to anticipate project changes due to COVID-19's rapid evolution and lack of clarity regarding its complete scope. The possibility of customer conflicts, litigation, and claims may increase if the contract's current terms do not include unexpected changes to the performance, timetable, or pricing (Petermans 67). Clients might hold the designers liable for cases of pathogen transmission and any resulting project disruptions or business setbacks if there is unclear commercial language.

It is expected that the coronavirus outbreak will have a distinctive impact on each project. Comprehensive solutions to risk distribution and crisis management that do not take into account project- or industry-specific constraints may make performance significantly more complex, more expensive, or even unachievable in some circumstances (Squier). One may be responsible if COVID-19 affects individuals' services, such as supply shortages, manufacturing delays, or secure building sites. Also, it is crucial to bear in mind that if users embark on the project manager position, clients will typically have higher expectations.

It is undeniable that COVID-19 has changed how people perceive social places. Infection management is and will remain a significant problem because of the increased social distance awareness, contact sensitivity, and elevated emphasis on safe settings (Mudditt). Interior designers are and will be crucial to the public's health as the problem develops (Jow). Notwithstanding a particular area of expertise, clients will continue relying on designers for recommendations related to creating homes and businesses that are safe, comfortable, and functional (Jow). Typical examples include:

- **Space Planning:** Reimagined floor plans and interior designs for commercial spaces are necessary to incorporate public health guidelines through bigger rooms, wider corridors, and other means (Petermans 70);
- **Designing with Materials:** Designers may be tasked with choosing materials that are hygienic, non-porous, silky, and easy to wash, disinfect, or clean for furnishings, fixtures, floors, high-touch interfaces, and household items (Mora);
- **Healthy Spaces:** Customers may be more interested in specialty goods that lessen the likelihood of the growth of bacteria and germs in their spaces, such as air purifiers, indoor air monitoring, water filters for better ventilation (Mason 21), auto-cleaning technological advances, more hand washing channels and sinks, anti-microbial surface coating, ultraviolet lamps, and more (Mudditt);
- **These queries can result in Price Variations:** If there is a lack of in-demand resources, integrating safety measures could make it challenging to work within the customer's budget or schedule (Jow). Changing to a more hygienic solution can frequently result in project cost overruns.
- **Property Damage:** Clients on a tight budget could insist that a person refit home decor

comply with safety regulations, such as using closet lockers or storage cabinets as separators to ensure a 6-foot spacing (“How Will the Interior Design Industry Change After Covid-19?”). In contrast, if any fittings or furniture are harmed in the process, this can result in a claim (Jow).

Buying and selling one’s services depends not only on what the market will pay or the international organization for standardization but also on monetary quality. Once the economic system is back on track, there will be a rise in purchases, as expected by Jow and Mudditt. There will still be many transactions that would have been completed, in addition to all the regular transactions. More than ever, individuals will desire to indulge in their homes (Mora). After spending so much time imprisoned in their residences, the post-COVID customer will be more aware of any problems with interior design. They will unexpectedly realize how important it is to remedy the minor irritations they have been ignoring for years, and they will be prepared to spend more to have it done correctly.

Design firms will rely on their peers and the community in their daily activities. People and their needs come first for designers and design specialists (Jow; Mason 19). At the same time, the surprising unpleasant effects of the pandemic made and will continue making designers more willing to communicate and support each other (“How Will the Interior Design Industry Change After Covid-19?”). Squier states that recent entrepreneurs in the interior design industry will need to become more independent, while the sentiment of the coronavirus must be distinguished from the fear of a recession. Shared offices, virtual meeting spaces, and the development of relevant and quick delivery worldwide will be in high demand.

Both employers and employees have acknowledged the viability of working from home. Therefore, one may suggest that future workplaces will increasingly depend on individual

preferences, staff confidence in the security of their working environment, and productivity gains that can be made whether working from home or in an office (Jow; Squier). These decisions will be influenced both temporarily and permanently by individual preferences and experiences (Squier). The long-term effects of COVID-19 will primarily depend on how individuals balance their need for social contact with their need for safety. People will not be forced to return to the workplace or to work in an uncertain environment offered by organizations or HR teams (Richtel). As an alternative, businesses could think about better air filtration systems, improved cleaning methods, expanded options for employees across a campus (offering spaces for focus, teamwork, learning, socializing, and leisure), and more exposure to outdoor space.

The pandemic also offers a chance to speed up the adoption of smart building technologies, which will guarantee that workplaces are made in a way to stop the spread of airborne illness. The development of building operating systems, smart components, and sensors has made it possible for spaces to be very flexible and adaptable (Jow). These may also assist in promoting physical separation, workstation allocation, and space utilization optimization.

Touch-free technology will be more prevalent in offices after the pandemic and may eventually be used in elevators, security access, and other spaces. Some buildings may put in place health screening procedures at their security gates during outbreaks (Squier). This may show up in the increased use of voice recognition technology and sensors. Adopting touchless technologies can not only stop the spread of potential diseases but also be combined with other technologies to measure, optimize, and maintain space consumption.

Further, it is expected that tenants might not want to pay for an office with unoccupied desks if half of the staff will be working from home on any given day. The decline of individual office spaces could force businesses to rethink their current workplace designs and move away

from having allotted places for each employee (Richtel). Companies might be unable to justify the expense of square footage depending on the types of work that employees must undertake and given the high cost of rent in big cities (Richtel). Working from home can be a method for saving money and lowering the stress of commuting, as well as a tool for attracting and retaining talent.

Conclusion

To draw a conclusion, one may say that there are more and more platforms that make up what people may think of as the 'workplace.' At the same time, while it becomes more accessible to work from home, the majority of employees would prefer to return to their offices as soon as it becomes possible. The demand for remote solutions that support virtual environments has increased as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic. Thus, working conditions during coronavirus lockdowns are frequently seen by many as concrete evidence that remote work may be successful. This and several other factors mentioned in the paper indicate that the function of current physical workspaces, as well as their interior design, has already been altered and will change more. Overall, while these changes are almost entirely positive, some trends may still be harmful, which is why there is a need to prepare for them.

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