

Background and Historical Context

In 1917, Scientific Management expanded into industrial engineering to apply engineering methods and practices to production and service enterprises (Badiru, 2014). Since then, organizations have strived to maximize productivity in all aspects of work design. However, a recognition of the importance of **motivation** in the productivity and efficiency equation has largely been overlooked.

Engineering approaches to job design and work processes focused on capabilities while the aspect of intrinsic motivation has largely been neglected. Moreover, organizational scientists have typically operationalized intrinsic motivation with a focus on the behavioral environment to the neglect of the physical environment. We argue that attempts to understand the psychological processes underlying work motivation require a focus on the intersection of both.

We suggest that by focusing almost exclusively on the behavioral environment, researchers may have been leaving half of the motivational component out of the equation. A high-ability worker reporting to a motivating boss is unlikely to perform at a very high level when working in a demotivating physical environment. HR professionals have also largely ignored the physical environment. **Rather than focusing on job satisfaction, the healthy workplaces concept focuses on employee need satisfaction, which underlies employee physical and psychosocial health, and in turn, stimulates intrinsic work motivation (Maslach & Banks, 2017).**

Contributions from the Physical and Behavioral Environment

Environmental psychologists, architects, designers, and organizational psychologists have identified aspects of the physical environment that affect emotions, behaviors, and interactions. Understanding how the physical environment affects employee health and well-being can help build an employee experience by complementing current HR-related employee programs, policies, procedures, and protections. The physical elements in Table 1 can greatly enhance employee physical and psychological comfort, cognitive performance, and engagement (Augustin, 2007).

Even when the physical environment has the “right” healthy elements, the workplace may not operate in a way that supports employee beliefs that they can fulfill basic needs. That is, **the “right” elements of the physical environment need to match or complement the “right” behavioral elements to create a holistic approach that supports employee health and well-being.** Table 1 lists the behavioral aspects that when present, complement or extend the effects of the physical elements.

What is a Healthy Workplace?

Scholars have yet to reach a consensus on what constitutes a “healthy workplace”. One view describes a workplace that offers **wellness programs** (e.g., biometric screenings, lifestyle management, fitness programs; Hull & Pasquale, 2018; Ozminkowski et al., 2016). Another interpretation involves programs that produce **positive emotions at work**, such as diversity/inclusion programs (Nielsen, 2014; van Wingerden, Bakker, & Derks, 2017). Still another interpretation held by environmental and occupational health professionals focuses on the **prevention of harm** (e.g., toxics, stress factors, and ergonomics) and the promotion of employee physical and psychological health through environmental interventions (e.g., indoor environmental quality, and floorplan design). We believe that any of these individual approaches does not consider the totality of what an employee experiences at work, and that **the aggregate experience (i.e., mental, social, and physical) is crucial.**

We suggest that the employee experience from the start to the end of the workday and workweek is the appropriate metric. This is because the underlying physiological and psychological response to work and the environment in which it is performed determines to what extent an employee’s health and well-being are supported or even promoted through their work life and work/life balance.

Table 1. Elements of a Healthy Workplace

Physical Environment Factors	
Indoor Environmental Quality	Abundant natural light, air purification, local temperature control, cleanliness.
Building Materials	Non-toxic materials, natural fabrics, floor vents surrounded by sound-dampening material to stop sound travel through raised floors.
Furniture & Equipment	Ergonomically-adjusted workstations, workstations placed at least 6-feet apart, high comfort seating and reclining in restorative areas, equipment to encourage movement.
Floor Plan	Spacious break rooms, proximity to amenities, team-based neighborhoods, multiple activity-based workplace options.
Behavioral Environment Factors	
Organizational Culture	Leaders’ behavior consistent with organizational values, frequent, timely and clear communication of commitment to a safe, healthy, and productive environment.
Benefits	Affordable healthcare, paid leaves of absence, and child/eldercare financial assistance.
Employee Growth & Advancement	Training and development opportunities available and are taken without penalty away from the job, career counseling, developmental opportunities offered.
Job Design	Support for alternative work arrangements (days worked, hours worked, working from home, and job crafting).

How to Create a Healthy Workplace

The most successful interventions address basic needs. A literature review by Maslach and Banks (2017) identified seven primary needs that relate to health and well-being: (1) **autonomy**: the desire to act with a sense of volition (Deci & Ryan, 2000); (2) **belongingness**: striving for close relationships and the desire to feel a sense of belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995); (3) **competence**: the need to bring about desired outcomes and to manage challenges (White, 1959); (4) **positive emotions**: the need to experience feelings of hope, optimism, efficacy, resilience, etc. (Cohn & Fredrickson, 2009); (5) **psychological safety**: opportunities to express oneself without engaging in identity suppression (Kahn, 1990); (6) **fairness**: the perception that decisions are made via a fair process and people are treated with respect (Robbins, Ford & Tetrick, 2002); and (7) **meaning**: the perception that employees are doing something they value that provides a sense of purpose for them (George & Park, 2016).

Organizations may fulfill these needs by approaching the workplace as an **integrated system of physical and psychological aspects that coordinate in support of employee well-being.** A healthy workplace combines the physical environment (e.g., indoor air quality, temperature, noise, and amenities) and the behavioral environment (e.g., culture/climate, and HR practices) to provide an employee experience that supports job performance, engagement, workplace enjoyment and satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

How Healthy Workplaces Constitute a Non-Monetary Benefit for Everyone

The marketplace for talent today is more competitive with the arrival of COVID-19 as top talent can work anywhere. What distinguishes one organization from the next goes beyond money — it is the employee’s total experience.

A healthy workplace that is holistic, comprehensive, and coordinated in providing a need-fulfilling experience that motivates people to do their best work every day while maintaining or enhancing their health and well-being is the most important non-monetary benefit an organization can offer. This type of benefit is unique and difficult for competitors to imitate, as it takes leadership’s commitment to the value of employee health and well-being and the investment in the organizational infrastructure to bring it to fruition.

Organizations that recognize this competitive advantage opportunity and commit to its investment will set the standard for psychologically healthy workplaces and likely be the employer of choice in their industry and location.

References

- For references, please go to: https://ucsf-my.sharepoint.com/:b?g/personal/lawitt_cougarnet_uh_edu/EQ11WCTY2WZMk8E43L4v-zM8vbmAd_P9vCpov7WplWfQ2e=ASWdFg