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Understanding a Behavior-based Approach to Workplace Design — Emotions are Playing a Bigger Role

IT'S ABOUT GETTING AWAY FROM THE IDEA THAT IF AN OFFICE IS DESIGNED FOR THE MASSES, IT WILL WORK FOR EVERYBODY, THAT IT'S THE BEST THAT CAN BE DONE.

by Emily Clingman

As organizations bring their employees back to work, they are faced with easing uncertainties and exploring alternatives to the traditional nine-to-five office schedule. To better support employees moving forward beyond the pandemic, employers should shift their mindset from activity-based work to behavioral-based work to empower employees to choose how to work to perform at their best, according to national workplace leader Nelson Worldwide.

In a hybrid work environment, this extends beyond the physical office – to homes, coffee

shops, public parks, or even hotels — allowing introverted employees the freedom to work in less stimulating environments. This model will become the new differentiating amenity for employers of choice, those that offer not only schedule flexibility but prioritize the tools and environments that support the neurodiversity of worker types.

“There are no two people that think the same, that work the same, that utilize space in the same way. For me it’s less about labeling how many different people there are, it’s about getting employees and employers to

understand no two people are going to function in their best capacity in the same way,” said Kristin Cerutti, senior designer at Nelson Worldwide. “So, how can we provide space knowing that?”

Cerutti describes neurodiversity a celebration and acceptance of the fact that no two brains think the same. There are groups of people that have enough in common neurologically to be placed into neurodivergent and neurotypical categories.

“However, the whole idea of neurodiversity is celebrating the differences and seeing them as a positive and something companies should be acknowledging and supporting and less seen as a hurdle to get over,” she said. “Hopefully after what we’ve been going through, people are now more empathetic and understanding that people are in different places. Depending

on how they wake up in the morning, what they’ve dealt with at home, whether they are considered neurodivergent or not.”

This leads to a concept designers at Nelson Worldwide have been exploring more lately — how employees are physically reacting to what they are doing. Anne Gibson, workplace leader at Nelson Worldwide explains activity-based working is focusing on supporting the task, which is important throughout the day, whether it’s concentrating on an individual assignment, collaborating with someone, or learning something in a large group setting. Behavior-based work adds a dimension of emotional support someone gets within the environment created.

“Not everyone is coming at the same activity from the same emotional perspective,” Gibson said. “Being able to finetune a particular







environment to individual's needs is something we need to be looking into."

For example, space for someone to do heads down focus work for one person might be in a very quiet, enclosed place. For someone else, that might be in a louder, more open area with their earbuds in. Even with things like things like color and material, there's no one-size-fits-all solution," Gibson notes.

"We're even examining everything about color theory — warm and hot colors give you energy and cool colors calm you down — that's not necessarily true. Those are sort of broad, general statements. If we really look at the diversity of individuals and supporting those diversities, looking at the behavior trying to be supported, is sort the next evolution."

It's about getting away from the idea that if an office is designed for the masses, it will work for

everybody, that it's the best that can be done.

"The best way to describe it: Think of the ADA pushbutton to open doors," Cerutti said. "I can't think of how many times, I have been carrying too many things and elbowed one of those buttons and walked through the door, never even thinking about it; or walked up a ramp because I wasn't feeling like taking the stairs that day and didn't think twice. But how much effort went into designing for the people that needed this most but it's still helping everybody in the process."

What we can learned from neurodiversity, Cerutti points out, no matter where on the spectrum, neurotypical people can be at certain times of the day, hyper-sensitive — meaning certain lighting or noise can cause issues and people need somewhere to go that removes those things causing more sensitivity. And



some people are the opposite, all of which can change by the hour.

“Where we’re headed, if we understand every single person is different, and if we offer many choices and variety, I don’t know how that can ever be wrong,” Cerutti said.

Designing for flexibility and adjustment doesn’t have to be big budget.

“The perception in the past of how we purchase furniture was sort of like, pick one thing and buy a thousand of them because it’s cheaper and everyone will just make-do with this one thing,” Gibson said. “But if we think more fundamentally around parts and pieces —

think about the space as a kit of parts that are moveable and adaptable, that people can adjust I the way they need to, I think is probably the first step in thinking about flexibility to adjust and adapt around spaces. People don’t have to have the same designated space to work in every day.”

To be able to give options, it needs to be a fluid environment, not only in terms of space, but when people are coming and going. It doesn’t necessarily have to cost money for flexibility.

“About 7% to 11% want to come back full time,” Gibson said. “What that says to me is that employers don’t really know what kind of



surroundings their employee want and need to be most productive. Listening to where high-performance employees need to be to get their best work done is a huge part of this whole equation.”

Another part of the equation is training in how to use different spaces available, beginning with the understanding that its ok to move around and find different spaces to accommodate varying needs throughout the day. Seeing executives and HR people who have made these accommodating design changes use the spaces and take advantage of the flexibility as well inspires belief in the design.

“Maybe offices need a concierge to welcome them back in, to help them adjust to the new environment and new schedules,” Gibson said. “Having a function available like that is a gesture of empowerment. Nobody knows what the right solution is, and as your workforce changes too, your spaces are going to need to adapt. The office space is no longer one and done. We’re always in beta test mode. Adaptability and change is the norm. It needs to be in constant flux. The space needs to be welcoming, a space where everybody belongs. That goes a long way in equity and inclusion and helping people feel like they are invited.”

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CAREERS

//3877 Welcomes Interior Designer

➊ Architecture and design firm //3877 has hired interior designer Beth Brenner.



Brenner

Brenner brings valuable insight to the growing multidisciplinary practice as //3877 strives to continue building a strong team, rising to meet the evolving needs of the hospitality industry as it bounces back from a strenuous year.

“We are thrilled to have Beth aboard the interior design team,” said David Tracz, co-founder and principal. “We are committed to providing innovative designs to enhance the lives of clients, partners and communities alike. It’s great to welcome a design professional who has like-minded values and further strengthens that mission.”

With an extensive background in hotel interior design, Brenner has a thorough understanding of meeting brand standards through research and purposeful design, knowledge of ADA requirements, matrix quantities, value engineering products, customizations and consultant collaboration.

“//3877 is known for its out-of-the-box approach in the industry,” Brenner said. “As a designer, I can tell the team spends time on getting to the root of the design challenge from a client’s perspective, requiring a deeper level of dedication and drive. I have always wanted to be a part of a forward-thinking company that pushes the boundaries of design.”

Brenner is taking on a variety of responsibilities, including site surveys and the selection of finishes, products, furniture, fixtures and materials. She also handles conceptual and schematic design development, hands-on space planning and construction administration.

CAREERS

NELSON Worldwide Appoints Todd Chitester as Senior Vice President of Global Solutions

➋ NELSON Worldwide expanded its leadership with the addition of Todd Chitester as senior vice president of Global Solutions.



Chitester

“Todd brings a unique fusion of leadership, development and organizational design expertise to our team,” said John “Ozzie” Nelson Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of NELSON Worldwide, an architecture, design and strategy firm. “Todd’s expertise will allow us to further develop trust-based partnerships while maximizing our clients’ value across their entire portfolio.”

Since the pandemic, the real estate landscape has experienced more cross-market influences than ever before. Hospitality, retail, workplace and industrial lines are blurring and consequently, a shift has occurred in familiarity, design and utilization of spaces. Chitester’s new role will focus on assisting the teams in connecting the dots from planning to post-occupancy.

With more than a decade’s worth of experience in the corporate real estate industry, Chitester is skilled in all facets of the industry. Before joining NELSON, he served as executive account

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Suzanne Tron

director for the Southeast Market at Cushman & Wakefield. At the firm, he was responsible for the delivery of corporate real estate services and developed strategic outsourcing solutions for Fortune 500 clients while ensuring accounts were understood to drive growth. He also worked at Bank of America, where he oversaw the global corporate procurement strategies for all facilities. At NELSON he served as an industry expert and advisor to CRE executives by providing commodity knowledge, emerging trends, benchmarking and best practices.

“The timing couldn’t be more perfect for me to join the NELSON team,” said Chitester, who will be based in Charlotte, North Carolina. “As we begin to rise from the pandemic, the work within corporate and commercial real estate presents many challenges but is exciting at the same time. Both myself and the NELSON team have a unique opportunity to utilize the information on data for how we work, live, dine, et cetera to come up with innovative solutions and navigate the next steps together as one.”

CAREERS

Mark Baker named CEO at Santa Clara-based One Workplace

➔ One Workplace has named Mark Baker as CEO of One Workplace.

Baker’s expertise in commercial furniture and family-owned enterprises brought him to the company as chief operating officer in 2017. Mark Ferrari, who is celebrating his 50th work