

Design for Wellness: Therapeutic Approaches in Workplace Interiors

Meghna Jain^{1,*}, Deepti Pande Rana², Pooja Singh³

Abstract

The modern workplace is increasingly recognized as a pivotal environment influencing employee well-being, productivity, and overall organizational success. This research paper delves into the integration of therapeutic design principles within office spaces to foster a healthier, more supportive environment for employees. The study investigates how strategic interior design can promote physical and mental well-being, reduce stress, and enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. By incorporating elements such as natural lighting, biophilic design, ergonomic furniture, and thoughtful spatial layouts, workplaces can be transformed into spaces that support holistic wellness. The research examines various therapeutic design strategies, including the use of calming color palettes, natural materials, acoustic treatments, and flexible workspaces that encourage movement and collaboration. These approaches are analyzed through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, drawing on case studies from a range of industries to illustrate the effectiveness of these design choices. The findings reveal that therapeutic design not only enhances the aesthetic and functional aspects of office interiors but also plays a crucial role in improving employee morale, and engagement, and reducing absenteeism. The study emphasizes the importance of creating environments that cater to sensory needs and foster a sense of belonging, comfort, and psychological safety. It also discusses the economic benefits of investing in wellness-oriented design, such as reduced healthcare costs and higher retention rates. Ultimately, this paper provides valuable insights for interior designers, architects, and business leaders looking to cultivate more sustainable, inclusive, and well-being-oriented workplaces. By aligning design with wellness objectives, organizations can create environments that promote both individual and collective thriving, leading to improved overall performance, a healthier workforce, and a more resilient organization.

Keywords: Therapeutic design, therapeutic design strategies, employee well-being, productivity, holistic wellness, healthier workforce, resilient organization

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of wellness in workplace interiors has gained significant attention in recent years, as organizations recognize the profound impact that the physical environment can have on employee health, productivity, and overall well-being [1]. Historically, workplace design has primarily on efficiency and functionality, often at the expense of employee comfort and health. However, the evolving understanding of how environmental factors influence psychological and physiological states has led to a paradigm shift towards creating spaces that support holistic well-being. Wellness in workplace interiors encompasses various elements

including ergonomic furniture, biophilic design, optimal lighting, acoustics, and air quality. These components synergistically reduce stress, enhance mood, and promote physical health, ultimately leading to increased productivity and job satisfaction.

Objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore and analyze different therapeutic approaches to workplace interior design and their impact on employee wellness. Specific objectives include:

- *Identifying key therapeutic elements:* To identify the critical design elements that contribute to a therapeutic workplace environment, such as ergonomics, biophilic design, lighting, color psychology, acoustics, and air quality.
- *Evaluating impact:* To evaluate the impact of these therapeutic elements on various aspects of employee wellness, including physical health, mental well-being, stress levels, and productivity.
- *Analyzing case studies:* To analyze case studies of workplaces that have successfully implemented therapeutic design principles, highlighting the outcomes and lessons learned.
- *Providing implementation strategies:* Offers practical guidelines and strategies for integrating therapeutic design into workplace interiors, addressing potential challenges and cost considerations [2].
- *Future research directions:* To suggest areas for future research in the field of therapeutic design and workplace wellness, paving the way for continued innovation and improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Context

Therapeutic design in workplace settings has evolved significantly over the past century. Early 20th-century office designs primarily focused on maximizing efficiency and productivity, often at the expense of employee comfort and well-being. The advent of the open-plan office in the 1960s aimed to promote collaboration and communication but frequently resulted in noise and distraction.

The 1980s and the 1990s saw a growing awareness of ergonomics, with a focus on designing workspaces that reduce physical strain and injuries. This period also marked the beginning of the wellness movement with increasing recognition of the link between the physical environment and employee health.

In the early 2000s, the concept of biophilic design emerged, emphasizing the integration of natural elements into indoor environments to improve mental and physical health. This approach is supported by growing evidence from environmental psychology and neuroscience, demonstrating the benefits of natural light, plants, and natural materials in reducing stress and enhancing well-being.

Current Trends

Therapeutic design in workplace interiors encompasses a holistic approach that integrates multiple elements to create environments that support overall wellness (Figure 1). Key trends include:

- *Biophilic design:* Incorporating natural elements such as plants, water features, and natural light to create a calming and restorative environment.
- *Ergonomics:* Designing furniture and workstations that support proper posture and reduce physical strain, thereby preventing musculoskeletal disorders.
- *Smart technology:* Utilizing smart lighting, climate control, and noise-canceling systems to create adaptive environments that respond to individual needs.
- *Wellness rooms:* Create dedicated spaces for relaxation, meditation, and physical activity to support mental and physical health.
- *Flexible workspaces:* Designing adaptable work areas that can be easily reconfigured to meet different tasks and preferences, promote movement, and reduce sedentary behavior (Figure 2).
- *Sustainable design:* Using eco-friendly materials and sustainable practices to create healthier indoor environments and reduce environmental impacts.



Figure 1. Therapeutic workplace environment.

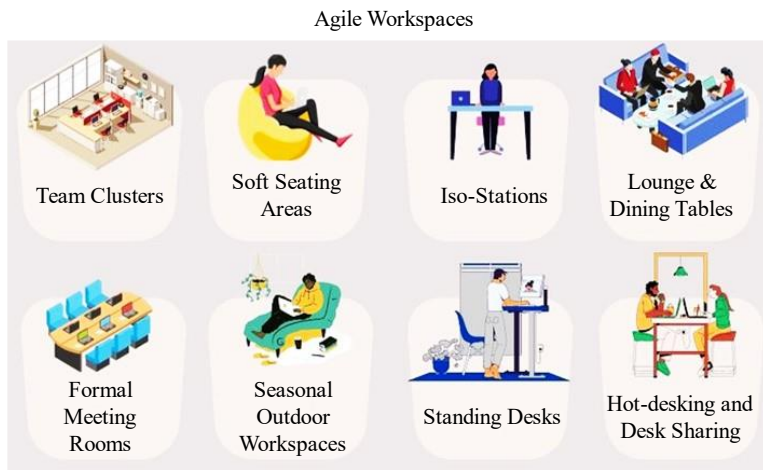


Figure 2. Flexible and dynamic work environment.

Key Theories and Models

Several theories and models underpin the practice of therapeutic design in workplace interiors:

- *Environmental psychology*: This field studies the interplay between individuals and their physical surroundings, providing insights into how different design elements can influence mood, behavior, and well-being.
- *Biophilia hypothesis*: Proposed by Edward O. Wilson, this hypothesis suggests that humans have an inherent affinity for nature, and integrating natural elements into built environments can enhance well-being.
- *Ergonomics theory*: Focuses on designing work environments that align with human physiology and psychology to optimize comfort, efficiency, and health.
- *Salutogenic design*: Developed by Aaron Antonovsky, this approach emphasizes designing environments that promote health and well-being rather than merely preventing illness.

Gaps In the Research

- *Industry-specific studies*: Limited research on therapeutic design tailored to specific industries.
- *Longitudinal impact*: Few long-term studies have been conducted on the sustained effects of therapeutic design on wellness and productivity.
- *Technology integration*: Limited exploration of how smart technologies can enhance therapeutic design.
- *Demographic impact*: Lack of studies on how design affects different demographic groups within the workplace.

- *Economic feasibility*: Few analyses have been conducted on the cost-benefit and ROI of implementing therapeutic design in businesses.
- *Environmental sustainability*: Limited exploration of how to balance wellness design with environmental sustainability.
- *Employee engagement*: Lack of research on the role of employee participation in the design process.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study is rooted in a qualitative approach, focusing on a comprehensive analysis of therapeutic design in workplace interiors to enhance employee well-being and productivity. This study relies on an extensive literature review of academic articles, books, industry reports, and case studies, which provides a foundational understanding of key concepts, such as natural lighting, biophilic design, ergonomic furniture, color psychology, and spatial organization. Additionally, this research incorporates case study analyses of leading companies that have successfully implemented therapeutic design principles, allowing for an in-depth exploration of real-world applications and outcomes [3]. To further enrich the study, expert interviews with interior designers, architects, and workplace wellness specialists were conducted to provide valuable insights into the practical challenges and benefits of integrating therapeutic design elements. This multifaceted qualitative approach enables a thorough examination of how therapeutic design can create supportive, inspiring, and wellness-focused work environments.

THERAPEUTIC DESIGN PRINCIPLES

Sensory Design

- *Multi-sensory experiences*: Integrate elements that engage multiple senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell) to enhance overall comfort and relaxation (Figure 3).
- *Sensory rooms*: Design dedicated spaces with calming colors, soft lighting, and tactile materials to manage sensory overload or relaxation.

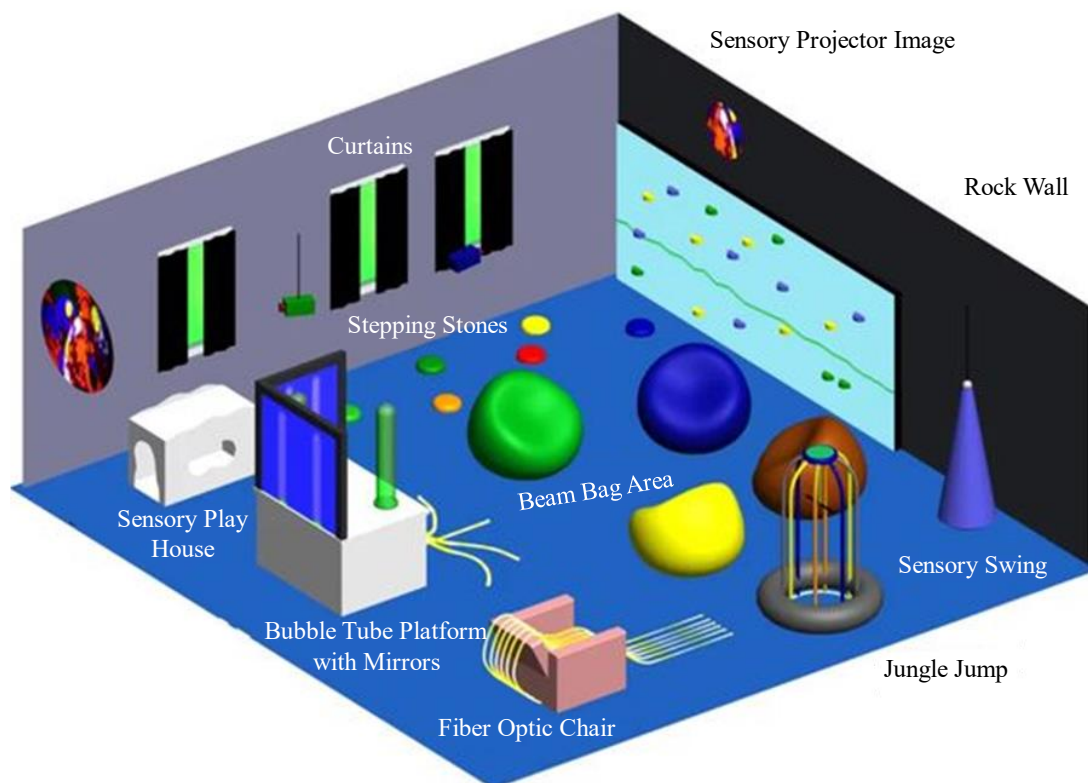


Figure 3. Sensory design.

Personalization and Customization

- *Customizable workspaces*: Allow adjustable features such as lighting, desk height, and seating to accommodate individual preferences (Figure 4).
- *Choice and control*: Empower employees with options to adjust their work environment, such as temperature, lighting, or noise levels.



Figure 4. Customizable workspace.

Dynamic and Adaptive Design

- *Flexible furniture:* Use modular and adaptable furniture that can be reconfigured for different tasks or collaborative needs (Figure 5).
- *Responsive environments:* Implement smart technology that adjusts environmental conditions (lighting and temperature) based on real-time data (Figure 6).

Cultural and Artistic Integration

- *Cultural elements:* Reflects diverse cultural backgrounds in the design, including artwork, symbols, and motifs that foster inclusivity and belonging.
- *Art therapy:* Incorporate art installations or interactive art pieces that inspire creativity and provide emotional expression (Figure 7).

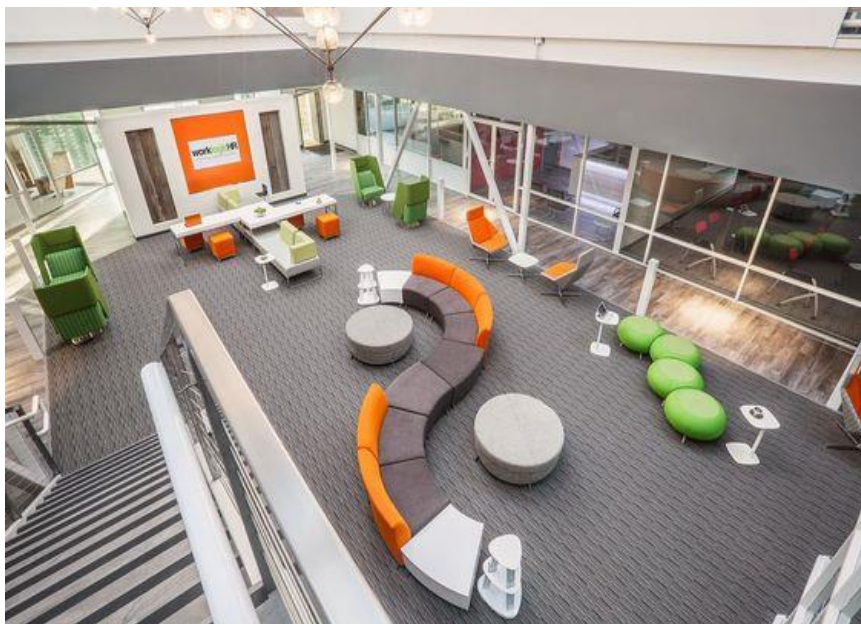


Figure 5. Flexible furniture.

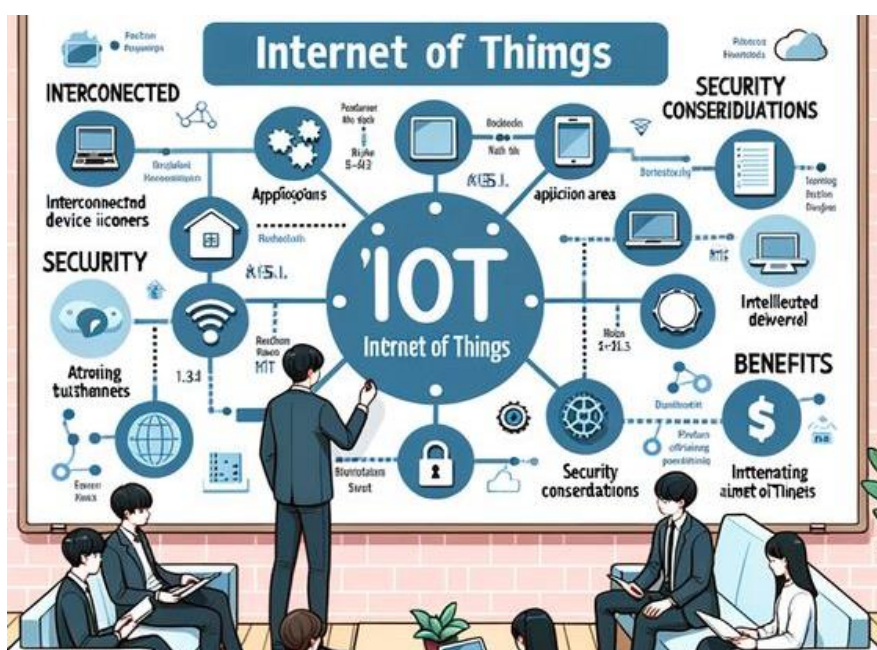


Figure 6. Responsive environments.



Figure 7. Artistic integration.



Figure 8. Meditation and yoga.

Mindfulness and Relaxation Spaces

- *Meditation and yoga areas:* Designate spaces specifically for meditation, yoga, or mindfulness practices with calming colors and minimalistic designs (Figure 8).
- *Silent spaces:* Simulate silent and concentrated spaces to focus and relax (Figure 9).

Healthy Movement and Ergonomics

- *Active design:* Encourage movement with features such as standing desks, walking paths, or active meeting rooms to prevent sedentary behavior (Figure 10).
- *Posture and alignment:* Support proper posture and body alignment with ergonomic chair adjustments, footrests, and workstation design.



Figure 9. Sensory concentration space.

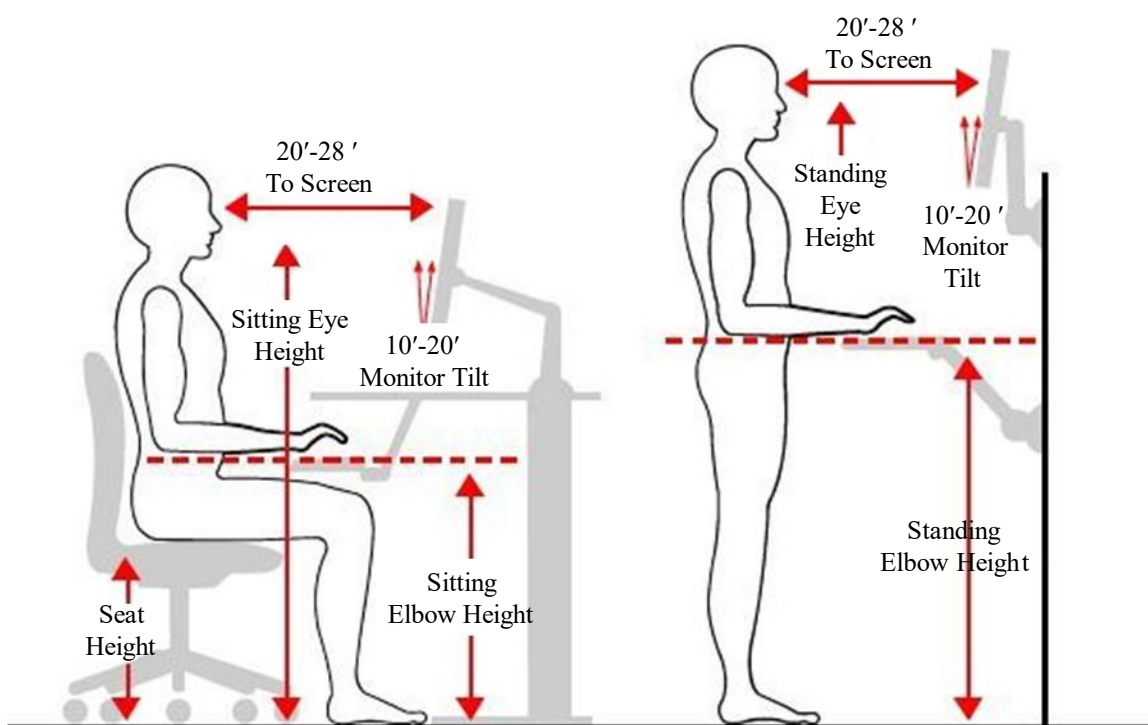


Figure 10. Ergonomic workstations.

Biophilic and Natural Interaction

- *Living walls and gardens:* Install living walls or indoor gardens to improve air quality and provide a continuous connection to nature (Figure 11).
- *Seasonal variations:* Reflect seasonal changes in design elements, such as plant species or color schemes, to align with natural rhythms (Figure 12).



Figure 11. Living walls.



Figure 12. Nature elements and indoor gardens.

Thermal Comfort and Climate Control

- *Individual climate control:* Provides personalized options for heating and cooling to maintain comfort and focus.
- *Thermal zoning:* Design spaces with varying temperature zones to suit different activities and preferences.

Wellness and Social Interaction

- *Community spaces:* Communal areas that promote social interaction and teamwork, such as informal lounges, coffee bars, or collaborative spaces (Figures 13 and 14).
- *Health and wellness programs:* Include facilities or features supporting wellness programs, such as fitness rooms, health workshops, and nutrition counseling areas [4, 5].

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Design Process

The design process for therapeutic workplace interiors begins with assessing employee needs and organizational goals through surveys and research on best practices. Initial concepts are developed by incorporating elements such as ergonomics, biophilic design, color psychology, and sensory design, and are refined through stakeholder engagement involving employees, management, and designers. Detailed plans and prototypes were created, followed by an overview of the construction to ensure the correct installation of therapeutic features. Finally, post-occupancy evaluations are conducted to assess and optimize the design [6, 7].



Figure 13. Community Spaces.



Figure 14. Relaxation Nooks.

Collaboration with Stakeholders

Engaging employees in the design process through feedback and workshops fosters a sense of ownership and ensures that the design meets their needs. Consulting with management is crucial to align design goals with the organization's objectives and secure their support. Close collaboration between designers and contractors is essential to maintain clear communication and coordination, ensuring the successful implementation of the design.

Budget and Cost Considerations

Effective cost estimation and planning involve creating a detailed budget with a cost-benefit analysis of therapeutic features. To manage expenses, a phased implementation approach was adopted, prioritizing the key elements. Cost management strategies, such as value engineering, vendor negotiations, and close expense monitoring, are crucial. Continuous financial monitoring and control allow for adjustments to ensure that the project remains within the budget while achieving the desired design goals [8, 9].

CASE STUDIES

1. *Corporate office: L'Oréal Kyiv, Ukraine*
 - *Building typology: High-rise office building.*

- *Therapeutic design elements:*
 - Central relaxation area with natural elements (Figure 15).
 - Birdsongs create a soothing atmosphere.
 - Natural light enhances mood and productivity.
 - Library and silence room for focused, undisturbed work.
 - Multiple nooks for relaxation and meditation.
 - Flexible Workspace.
 - Soft color scheme (Figure 16).
- *Outcomes:*
 - Increased employee productivity and job satisfaction.
 - Reduction in reported stress levels.
 - Enhanced sense of well-being and connection to nature.



Figure 15. Central Relaxation area with natural elements.

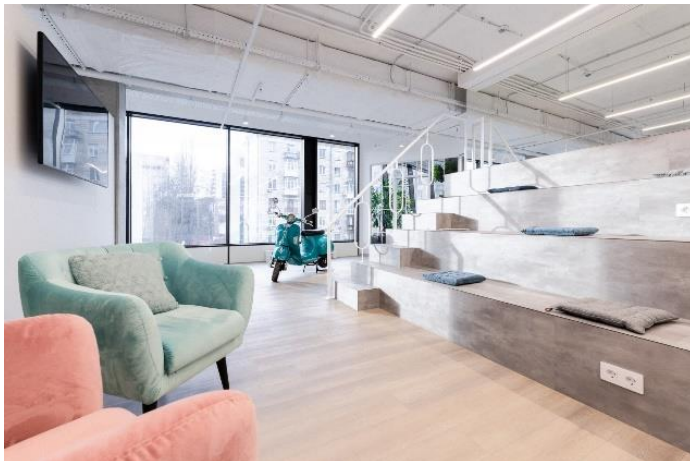


Figure 16. Soft color scheme and natural light.

2. *Tech company:* Google Headquarters, Mountain View, USA

- *Building typology:* Campus-style office complex.
- *Therapeutic design elements:*
 - *Open spaces:* Large open areas for relaxation and informal meetings.
 - *Recreational facilities:* On-site gyms, game rooms, and outdoor recreational spaces (Figure 17).
 - *Biophilic design:* Extensive use of greenery and natural elements throughout the campus (Figure 18).

- *Ergonomics*: Height-adjustable desks, ergonomic chairs, and varied seating options.
- *Outcomes*:
 - High levels of employee satisfaction and retention.
 - Boost in creativity and innovation.
 - Improved mental health and reduction in workplace stress.



Figure 17. Recreational facilities.



Figure 18. Biophilic design and open spaces.

3. *Financial institution*: Bloomberg LP, London, UK

- *Building typology*: High-rise office building.
- *Therapeutic design elements*:
 - *Indoor air quality*: Advanced air filtration systems and monitoring of indoor air quality.
 - *Lighting*: Use circadian lighting systems to align with natural body rhythms (Figure 19).
 - *Noise control*: Acoustic design to minimize background noise and enhance concentration.

- *Biophilic design*: Incorporation of natural materials and greenery in the workspace (Figure 20).
- *Outcomes*:
 - Enhanced focus and productivity among employees.
 - Improved overall well-being and job satisfaction.
 - Positive impact on employee health and reduction in absenteeism.



Figure 19. Lighting and indoor air quality.



Figure 20. Biophilic design.

4. Visage Beauty and Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.-O3 Plus
 - *Building typology*: Commercial office building.
 - *Therapeutic design elements*:
 - *Biophilic design strategy*: Vertical Planters, Daylight and Ventilation
 - *Noise control*: Acoustic panels on ceiling fins
 - *Ergonomics*: Height-adjustable desks
 - *Muted color palette*
 - *Open and authentic spaces* (Figures 21 and 22.)
 - *Outcomes*:
 - Improved Employee Well-being
 - Increased Productivity and Creativity
 - Enhanced Brand Identity
 - Higher Employee Satisfaction and Retention

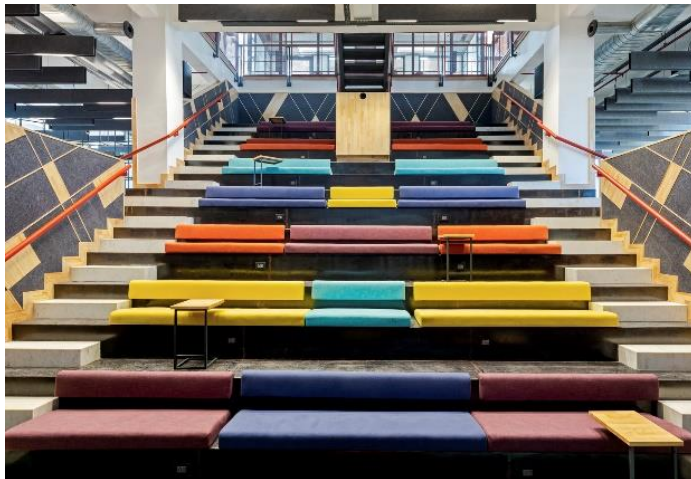


Figure 21. Open Auditorium.

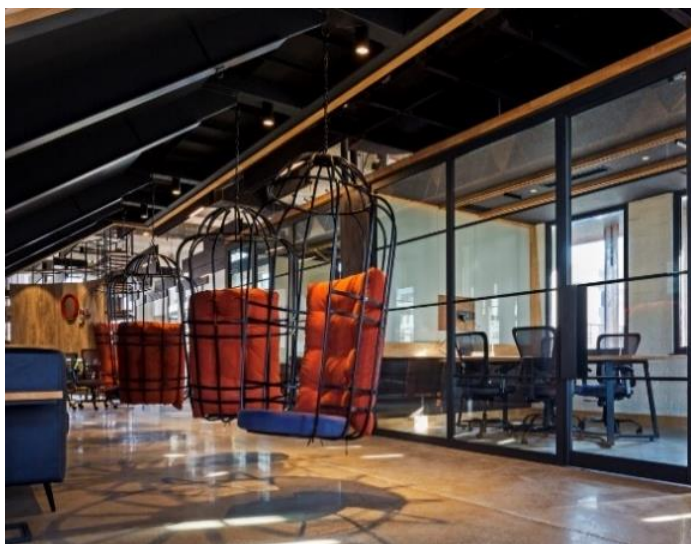


Figure 22. Social spaces.

Table 1. Inference.

Company	Building typology	Primary design focus	Secondary design focus	Expected outcomes
L'Oréal Kyiv	High-rise office building	Mental well-being and relaxation	Productivity and focus	Increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, enhanced well-being
Google Headquarters	Campus-style office complex	Creativity and collaboration	Employee satisfaction and retention	Boost in innovation, improved mental health, high employee retention
Bloomberg LP	High-rise office building	Productivity and focus	Employee health and well-being	Enhanced focus, improved job satisfaction, reduced absenteeism
Visage Beauty and Healthcare Pvt. Ltd.-O3 Plus	Commercial office building	Employee well-being and brand identity	Productivity and creativity	Improved employee well-being, increased productivity, enhanced brand identity, higher employee satisfaction

Table 1 highlights the correlations between the type of company, design focus, and desired outcomes. It also underscores the importance of creating workspaces that prioritize employee well-being and productivity.

DISCUSSION

Benefits

Implementing a therapeutic design in workplace interiors leads to several benefits. Enhanced employee well-being is one of the most significant outcomes, with ergonomic furniture and improved air quality reducing physical health issues [10, 11] while biophilic design and mindfulness spaces contribute to better mental health by lowering stress and improving mood. These wellness improvements translate into increased productivity, where proper lighting and acoustics boost concentration and creatively stimulating environments foster innovation. Additionally, such designs lead to improved job satisfaction because prioritizing well-being enhances engagement and reduces employee turnover, resulting in a more stable workforce. Lastly, a well-designed workplace bolsters the organization's image, aligning with corporate social responsibility (CSR) by demonstrating a commitment to well-being and sustainability and serving as a competitive advantage in attracting top talent.

Challenges

Despite these benefits, the implementation of therapeutic designs presents several challenges. Cost constraints are a major hurdle, with high upfront investments required for quality materials and features along with the ongoing risk of budget overruns. Design complexity is another challenge, particularly when integrating therapeutic elements into older buildings or unique layouts and balancing diverse employee preferences for customization. Additionally, measuring the effectiveness of therapeutic design can be difficult, especially in quantifying its impact on well-being and productivity, and long-term evaluation of these effects can be resource intensive. Finally, stakeholder resistance can pose a significant obstacle, as cultural resistance to change requires effective communication, and ensuring buy-in across various departments adds to the complexity of implementation.

Future Directions

Several future directions can enhance the implementation of therapeutic design in workplace interiors. Integrating technology is a promising area, with smart environments that adapt to enhance comfort and efficiency and wearable technology that monitors well-being, providing insights into the impact of design. Longitudinal studies are also crucial for assessing the sustained benefits of therapeutic design and conducting cost-benefit analyses to guide investment decisions. Cultural adaptation is essential for addressing diverse needs and for understanding the benefits and challenges of therapeutic design in different international contexts. Finally, the strategic integration of therapeutic design into broader organizational goals, combined with holistic approaches that align with other wellness initiatives, will support a comprehensive approach to employee well-being and organizational success.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the profound impact of therapeutic design on workplace interiors, revealing its potential to significantly enhance employee well-being, productivity, and job satisfaction. By integrating principles such as ergonomics, biophilic design, and sensory optimization, organizations can create supportive and health-promoting environments that contribute to both individual and organizational success. Despite the challenges related to cost, design complexity, and stakeholder buy-in, the benefits of therapeutic design present a compelling case for its adoption. Future advancements in technology, along with ongoing research and adaptation, will further refine and expand the applicability of these principles and solidify therapeutic design as a crucial element in the evolution of effective and resilient workplace environments.

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