

Designing Inclusive Workplaces



Contents

One What is Inclusive Design?	3
Two Why is Inclusive Design important?	4
Three Inclusive Workplace Design Principles	6
Four Implementing Inclusive Design	8
Five Getting it right	10
Six What's next?	14
Seven Appendix	15

Foreword

I'm delighted to introduce this white paper on inclusive workplace design.

Some of the more progressive businesses in the corporate world are now implementing policies to give opportunities to previously marginalised demographics, helping to support more diverse and inclusive workforces.

For diversity and inclusion policies to be successful, organisations need to consider how their workplaces can be designed more inclusively, to remove barriers for employees and visitors.

This paper offers an introduction and some insight to DE&I and HR leaders and their design teams to start making workplaces more inclusive when embarking on an office new build or refurbishment programme or planning the return to office routines after Covid-19 restrictions.

We believe when design teams and building owners break through 'minimum standard' thinking and fully engage with all stakeholders, disability groups and other underrepresented minorities in an integrated co-design process, inclusive buildings become a reality.

Designing more inclusive buildings and spaces reduces exclusion and fosters equity for everyone. It produces universally appealing environments, helps to hire, and retain the best talents, improves satisfaction at work and provides long term cost savings by avoiding the need for expensive and environmentally damaging retrofits and adaptations later.

I hope this paper provokes thought and actions, engagement with stakeholders to understand challenges in your buildings and that you are able to start planning solutions that make spaces more accessible and inclusive for everyone.



Ed Warner
 Founder & CEO, Motionspot
 Government Access Ambassador
 - Design of Spaces & Products

One.



What is Inclusive Design?

Inclusive design aims to remove the barriers that create undue effort and exclusion for people¹, by designing environments and products that accommodate the needs, desires and aspirations of every person.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development² suggests that an inclusive approach to designing living spaces, everyday products, and workplaces, allows individuals to interact with other people more empathetically and positively, leading to increased productivity and satisfaction in every aspect of life.

Whilst there are currently over 350 technical documents across Europe and the UK that support architects and designers in designing for physical accessibility, there is very little guidance on how to design for employees and visitors with sensory and cognitive disabilities, neurodivergent groups or different faiths and genders.

Inclusive design principles and practices gain a strategic importance when planning, designing, developing, and managing buildings and workplaces that offer accessible, inclusive, comfortable, and delightful experiences.

Two.

Why is Inclusive Design important?

Designing for disability is one of the principle cornerstones of inclusive design. One in five people across the world have a disability. When designing genuinely accessible and inclusive workplaces, businesses should consider the challenges in the workplace for staff or visitors with physical, cognitive, sensory, and social communication issues.

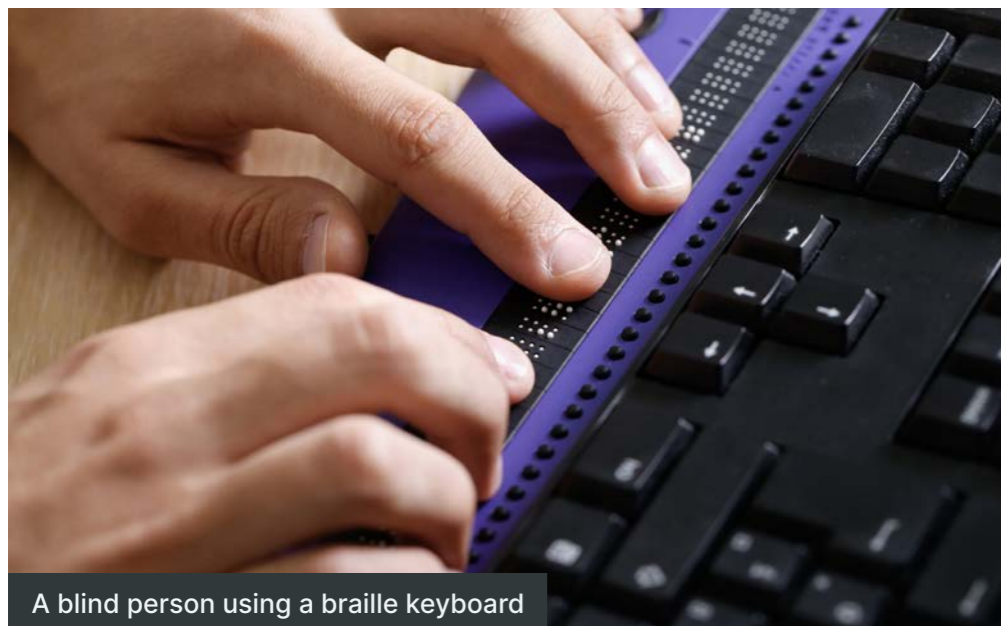
Improving the workplace design adds value by bringing a more inclusive perspective to all employees. It infuses a mindset of inclusion by reducing exclusion of people with different abilities, age, gender, religion or spirituality, language, and cultural backgrounds.

Additionally, the recent impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people's lifestyle and psychosocial needs has increased the importance of inclusive workplaces that guarantee safety and security both at a physical and psychological level.

Those new trends highlight that inclusive design is becoming a fundamental practice for companies aiming to create spaces that guarantee inclusive and equitable experiences for all the employees returning to work in person.

Discussions and research on the application of inclusive design demonstrate a generalised lack of understanding of the primary needs of employees in workplaces, from unconscious bias towards LGBTQIA+ communities to misunderstanding of religion or spirituality habits, to exclusion for underrepresented minority groups. Creating a safe work environment starts by acknowledging exclusion and designing spaces that accommodate the needs and aspirations of all people.

Therefore, designing inclusive environments is not just a 'nice-to-have' but is a process based on a people-first approach³ that starts with understanding the different needs and desires of the customer, continues with the delivery stage and endures with constant facility maintenance.

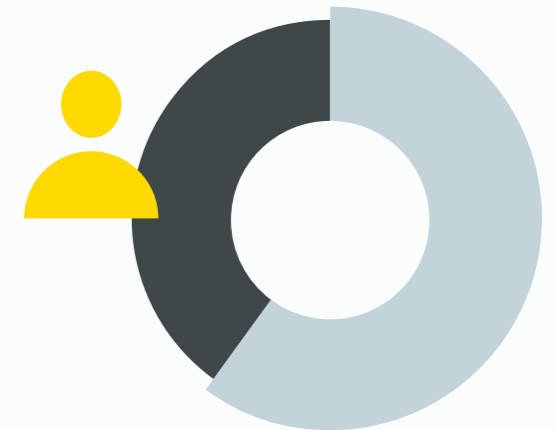


A blind person using a braille keyboard

The move towards inclusive design, and it's positive impacts

60%

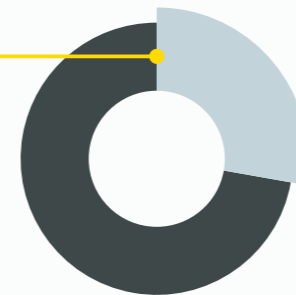
of **Fortune 500** companies have a chief diversity officer or a similar role dedicated to implementing Diversity & Inclusion policies⁴. When this is the case, employees:



Engagement

28%

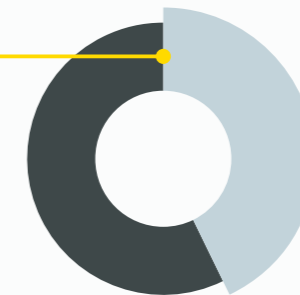
more are engaged at work⁵



Commitment

43%

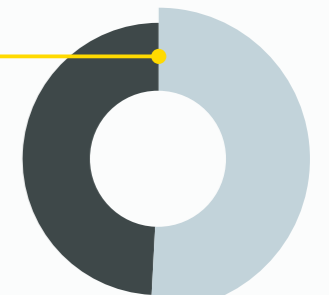
more committed to the company⁵



Positivity

51%

more likely to recommend their company as a great place to work.⁵



...designing inclusive environments is not just a 'nice-to-have' but is a process based on a people-first approach.³

Three •

Inclusive Workplace Design Principles

"The key to designing inclusively is to work out who is being excluded and how. Understanding these needs translates into design requirements and helps design teams frame robust inclusive strategies for people using the building now, and in the future."

Motionspot works closely with businesses that wish to create a blueprint for inclusive workplaces and understand the importance of designing the environment where people live, work and spend most of their time.

Behavior, culture, satisfaction, and productivity represent pillars of inclusive design in the workplace. For the purpose of this paper, some examples have been given against each pillar to demonstrate the challenges and potential solutions to deliver inclusive workplaces.



Behaviour

Challenge - Grace identifies as non-binary and works in an office that only has male and female designated toilet facilities. This has a negative impact on Grace's sense of belonging in the workplace and prevents her from using the facility during the day.

Providing the most basic of facilities that everyone can use safely and comfortably is vital for any inclusive business.

Solution

- Create a choice of toilet facilities, including All Gender toilets alongside female/male only toilets as certain people and faiths require gender specific toilet facilities.
- Destigmatise the use of traditional colours for males and females.
- Design a parents' rooms that meets the needs of people of all genders.
- Create welcoming spaces where people feel comfortable in manifesting their ideas and beliefs.



Culture

Challenge - Rashmi prays five times a day but other than a meeting room, there is not a designated private and quiet space for her to perform her faith obligations.

Workplaces should provide the right inclusive spaces and opportunities for people to manifest religious and spiritual beliefs.

Solution

- Create washroom facilities with ablution and lavatories that respect religious and spiritual obligations.
- Develop private and quiet faith rooms that accommodate people's needs.
- Design kitchen areas that allow the opportunity to keep different foods separated (e.g. Halal, Kosha and vegan)
- Recognise and celebrate cultural festivals and events (e.g. consideration for Muslims eating and drinking restrictions during Ramadan)



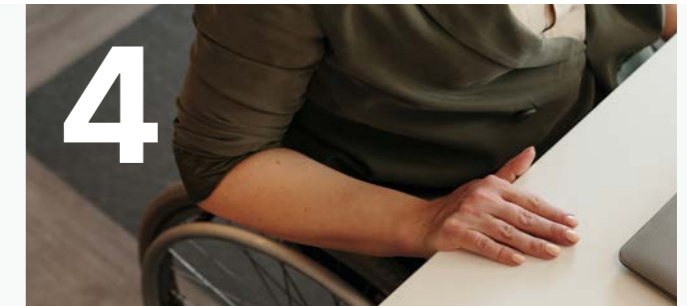
Satisfaction

Challenge - John has been shielding during much of the Covid-19 Pandemic. He is feeling very anxious about returning to the office which is affecting his motivation, and ability to focus and communicate effectively.

Covid-19 has impacted the life of billions of people around the world and offices should be designed to be welcoming spaces that promote a sense of belonging and community, while also supporting improved health and wellbeing.

Solution

- Reduce unwanted noise and distractions by increasing space between desks, introducing noise control measures such as acoustic wall and ceiling panels, strategic placement of large planters, and separation of zones for focussed and team work.
- Create quiet spaces where people can have a break, rest and spend private self-awareness moments.
- Provide zones for 'warm-desking' where individual spaces can be booked throughout the day.
- Provide comfortable places for concentration to improve productivity.



Productivity

Challenge - Ann has multiple sclerosis and works in an office that is difficult for her to access due to furniture positions, desk heights and uneven floor finishes. She currently uses a stick but as her condition progresses, she will likely use a wheelchair in the office.

Designing accessible and flexible workplaces allows the person to improve productivity, motivation and as a result happiness.

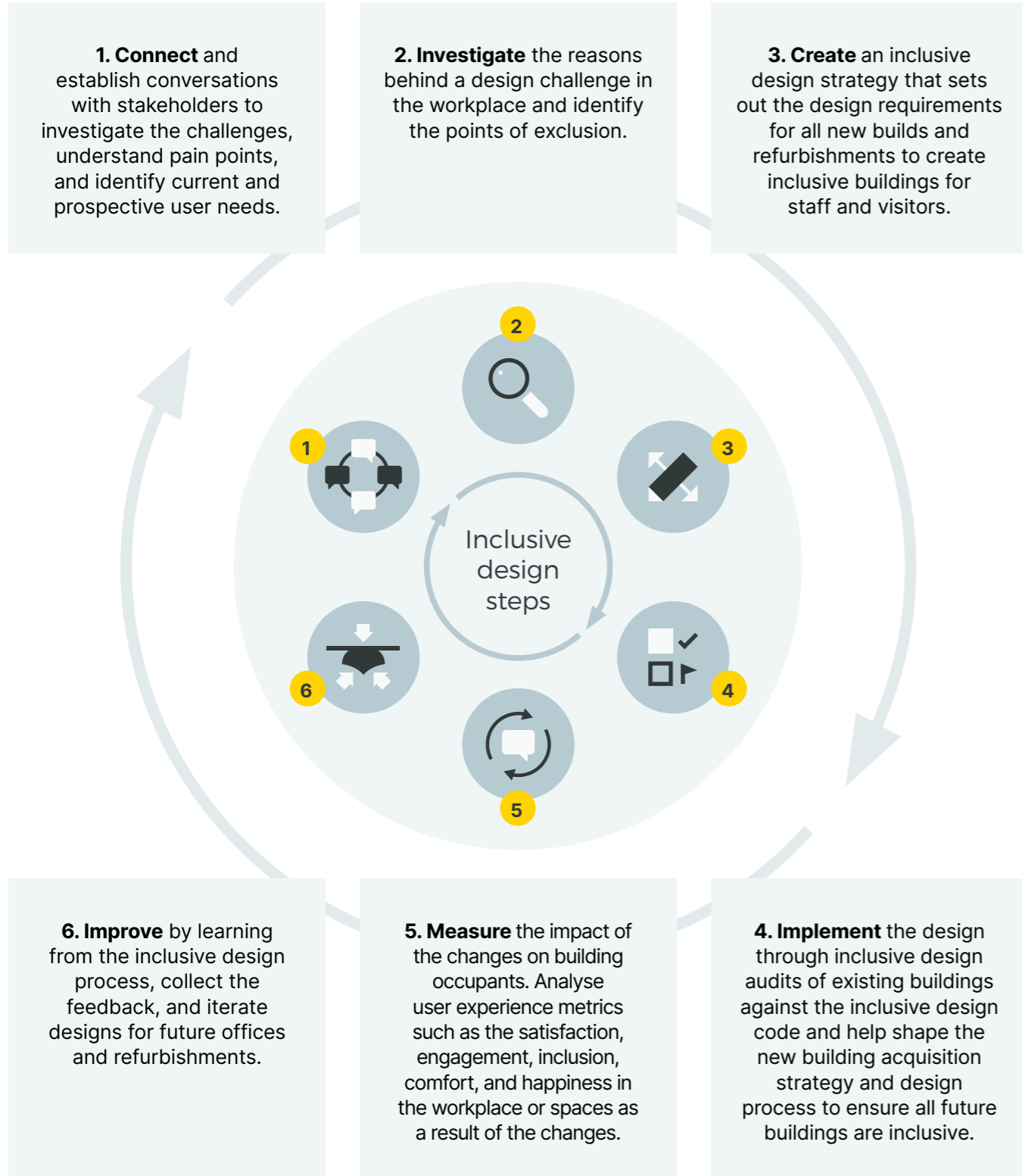
Solution

- Create step free entrances with handrails to support walking or wheelchair use.
- Consider horizontal and vertical circulation to be accessible for wheelchairs and ambulant disabled people.
- Design resting areas that could be used for informal corridor conversations but also for people with walking difficulties to rest.
- Improve visual, sensory, and auditory wayfinding across the whole building.
- Create ambulant accessible toilet facilities in addition to wheelchair accessible toilets.

Four.

Implementing Inclusive Design

Motionspot's approach is grounded in observing, analysing, and understanding the complex variety of people's needs, abilities, desires, and aspirations and follows a 6-step inclusive design process.



Inclusive design doesn't mean institutional, utilitarian or uninteresting. Our innovative design solutions create beautiful, accessible facilities that appeal to everyone.

●● Ed Warner



Five ●

Getting it right

For the last 10 years, Motionspot has been providing impactful solutions to inclusive design challenges for private and public clients across the world, helping businesses design spaces that are inclusive and accessible.



Barclays commissioned Motionspot as inclusive designers to work alongside Gensler architects and the wider Barclays design team to deliver a welcoming and inclusive office environment for their 5,000 employees and visitors on their new 500,000 sq ft campus in Glasgow.

Developments like this have raised the bar beyond design for physical access through features such as recalibration rooms for employees with sensory needs, use of biophilic design and natural materials to improve health and wellbeing and help reduce stress and anxiety, and a focus on the design of lighting and acoustics for building users with a visual and/or hearing impairment.

The focus on the small details makes a building genuinely inclusive. Barclays has embraced this ethos by reducing decibel levels in the washroom hand dryers for autistic people, specifying door handles for people with limited dexterity and choosing floor and wall finishes that give the necessary contrast for visitors and employees with a cognitive or visual disability.

Thanks to the success of Glasgow, Motionspot is now working on the inclusive design standards for all Barclays offices across the globe.



Motionspot worked with us to create an inclusive workplace that goes well beyond standard access guidance. The Glasgow project has paved the way for future developments, enabling Barclays, in collaboration with Motionspot to achieve world leading accessible design standards and create spaces that are truly inclusive for all.

●● **Ron Coghil**, Director,
Major Projects Delivery Lead,
Barclays



DERWENT LONDON

Derwent London is a FTSE 250 London office investor and developer. They are known for their innovative approach to developing creative office spaces. Core to their business is their design-led philosophy to craft spaces that appeal to a range of tenants, including the creative industries.

Derwent engaged Motionspot to advise on the inclusive design of a 300,000 sq ft office space at 80 Charlotte St. This included setting the inclusive design strategy with the client, reviewing plans and working with the design team on the specification of accessible facilities and features in the building. Since this project, Motionspot has conducted similar work on Derwent London's Whitfield St, Featherstone, and Soho Place buildings to help deliver aspirational buildings that are accessible to everyone. Motionspot has also most recently worked with Derwent London on the design of Covid safe spaces, ensuring the safety measures are accessible for all employees and visitors.



●● Motionspot brilliantly merges the skills of an access auditor with the knowledge of a product specifier to identify potential issues within a building as well as the opportunities for improved inclusivity. They then propose design solutions which improve access for all whilst simultaneously complimenting the look and feel of our offices..

●● Paul Williams, CEO, Derwent London

Six.


What's next?


Businesses that embrace inclusive design will see significant benefits for their workforces and visitors. Not only will inclusive businesses be able to attract and retain the best talent, but by investing time and engaging expertise at the start of the design process, inclusive design principles will help encourage staff back into the workplace and have a positive impact on team collaboration and productivity.


Developing this white paper has been a team effort. Thanks to researcher Dr. Matteo Zallio from the University of Cambridge, the experts at Motionspot, and our clients Derwent and Barclays.


Keep in Touch

If you want to speak to one of Motionspot's inclusive design specialists about how we could help your business, please email team@motionspot.co.uk, or follow us on social media:

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Seven.

Appendix

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