

# AWD-IT

## Why Ergonomics Are Important

If you've ever examined the human hands in detail, then you'll know that they're incredibly sophisticated and precisely-adapted tools. You'll also appreciate that they aren't square. So why is it that so many of the devices we use with our hands – like our computer keyboards and mice – are?

In order to get the best out of our equipment, whether it's in an office or factory, it's vital that that equipment is designed to get the best out of us and vice versa. That's the role of ergonomics – the study of the sort of work people do, and the tools they use to do it. Through this study, we can design tools that are better able to work with the people who use them.

You might have encountered an 'ergonomic' keyboard – which bends in the middle in order to offer the human hands a more natural typing position. But the field extends far beyond that – covering everything to the construction of the devices themselves to the way that they're positioned on our desks to the techniques we employ to get the best from them.

Let's examine some of the reasons that ergonomics is a valuable and worthwhile field of study, and how its application might benefit a workplace.

### Injury prevention

If you force your body into an unnatural position, and then demand that it perform the same actions over and over again, then the chances that it will become uncomfortable will quickly become overwhelming. After a while, injury is almost certain to result.

Think about Victorian seamstresses, stooping over their looms for fourteen hours a day. Is it any wonder that so many of them ended up with back problems? If you're running a business which relies on skilled labour, then these sorts of injuries can be crippling to the business as well as the employee. Not only will you have to contend with the direct costs of the injury, but the indirect ones too – which can often be far greater.

If you're running an office, then the ability to sit at a computer and type is crucial for the vast majority of your workforce. Any steps you can take to avoid downtime will therefore likely prove valuable in the long run.

### Improved efficacy

As well as ensuring that workers don't suffer injury unduly, ergonomics can also take us in the other direction – making workers more comfortable than ever before. If a worker isn't distracted by a crippling pain in their wrists or lower back, then they'll be able to devote all the more concentration to the task at hand – whatever it may be. If a job is physically taxing, then it's unlikely that a worker will perform it to their fullest ability. This will, in turn, mean more frequent errors and a fall in quality. For most companies, a set of healthy employees is the most valuable asset – and so taking steps to preserve and improve that asset will undoubtedly reap dividends.

### Improved workspace

Ergonomics isn't just about technology. It's about the way people interact with one another, too. By physically arranging your workplace in a way that resonates with your employee's brains, then you'll be improving their efficacy in just the same way that a curved keyboard might resonate with their fingers.



For example, you might examine how your employees tend to spend their day, and which activities they find the most stressful. For example, you might place departments that interact with one another frequently next to one another. Strategically-placed open spaces in the centre of offices can also yield greater productivity.

#### Morale

There are few things more demoralising for an office worker than the idea that their employer doesn't care about them. If an employer goes out of their way to make their workforce more comfortable, then, it's likely to be noted – if not consciously, then through a positive atmosphere.

If you install a new air conditioning system, for example, then workers will see that you take their well-being seriously. The same is true if you present them with a new chair, an ergonomic keyboard, or special safety instructions.

#### Culture

The value of ergonomics doesn't only stem from top-down lectures from on-high. The best way to achieve all the benefits we've mentioned is to instil into a workforce that ergonomics matters. If you impress on your employees not only that they should take ergonomics seriously, but why – and incentivise good behaviour, too – then you'll be able to create a culture where health and safety is a important value.

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