Work and the workplace have been hit hard by Covid19. Working from home is just one of the obvious changes. This crisis presents us with opportunities to take a good hard look at the workplace and re-evaluate whether what we have been doing in the past is really the best option in the post Covid19 world. Is there not a better, more productive and beneficial approach?

That is precisely the thinking behind this timely, innovative **Position Paper** on **Good Work Design.** It presents the professional experience and knowledge of ergonomists on the most effective means to optimise human work and system performance. It sets out the process to create positive impact in the workplace. And it demonstrates that Good Work Design translates into the common good for all those connected to the enterprise.

The **Good Work Design Position Paper** is published by the **Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Australia (HFESA**), the peak body that oversees the professional standards and the accreditation of ergonomists who seek recognition and wish to practice as professionally qualified ergonomists and members of the HFESA.

**What is Good Work Design?**

It is a contemporary response to our changed expectations of a workplace.

It is design that not only solves problems in the workplace, but also optimises the entire system.

“Good design inspires positive growth and change, not just restricts or constrains adversity,” says Dr Sara Pazell, Chair of the Position Paper Committee Members. It is about designing for positive impact, not just mitigating negative impact. It is more than identifying hazards or eliminating a safety risk. It is as much about what can be gained, as it is what new opportunities can be presented.

This includes fostering innovative ways of doing work; new tasks; new designs of tools, equipment and systems; new organisational approaches; and more appropriate regulations.

Good Work Design does not mean increasing production costs because it mainly affects the most price-elastic component of workplaces: the people.

And significantly, Good Work Design produces positive impact that is both measurable and sustainable.

**Who benefits from Good Work Design?**

The guiding principle is that all stakeholders should benefit from Good Work Design:

* **Workers** benefit from improved health, safety, confidence, engagement, performance and career advancement.
* **Employers and management** benefit from demonstrable improvement in productivity and profitability. They do not suffer enormous losses due to inefficiencies, work injuries, absenteeism and compensation claims.
* **The environmental** and **social impact** of the enterprise is enhanced, which adds to its profitability, retention of workers, and prospects for investment.

An example of the overall benefits of Good Work Design is the re-designed bitumen tanker. In the past, every time a worker drove these tankers, the driver and bystanders risked being killed or seriously burnt in a catastrophic explosion of boiling bitumen. The transport company and engineers worked with an ergonomist and were not restricted by just removing the hazards. They asked, “What is the opportunity here? How can we help workers better manage their energy and the efficiency of the transportation of bitumen?”

Based on extensive and on-going consultations with workers and all stakeholders, a new bitumen tanker was designed. It was a world-first and revolutionised the design of bituminous tankers. It also won a Good Design Award for engineering.

An electric in-transit heating element replaced the dangerous on-site liquid petroleum gas heating method and a range of design changes resulted in the benefits for workers, management and even for the environment: <https://good-design.org/projects/bitumen-trailer-heat-in-transit/>

For **Workers,** it reduced the danger of explosion or roll-over, improved driver safety, and significantly reduced on-road travel time and driver fatigue.

For **Management,** it presented an excellent return on investment, significant commercial and safety benefits, increased productivity with reduced transit and heating times, and reduced the likelihood of compensation claims.

For the **Environment,** it provided safeguards against fire or toxic substance spills and the lighter vehicle design reduced damage to roads. It also established a new regulatory precedent for the safe transit of dangerous goods.

**What distinguishes GWD is that it is human-centred**

At its core, Good Work Design is based on a radical re-thinking of work. It views work as a springboard for health, wellbeing, productivity, social inclusion, education and learning, and sustainability.

It seeks to promote joy in work and to establish conditions in which workers affirm that “I like what I do and I enjoy my work environment”.

The ergonomist involves workers, management and suppliers in the design development and the implementation of the Good Work Design solutions. It is a participatory process in which end-users become co-designers. This inclusive model empowers the workforce to become the architects and owners of the improved work design.

This stimulates the ergonomist to find ever more creative solutions to challenges and to explore opportunities. “If you can dream it, maybe we can design it.”

A year after a major insurer applied Good Work Design to a building and call centre in the CBD, they measured the outcomes. It had been a radical change to the work environment. In the newly designed workplace, one of the innovations was that employees could choose to move between a variety of workstations instead of having a fixed desk. The survey showed a strongly positive response on key issues with respondents affirming that they felt more collaborative, connected, productive and healthier in the new workplace.

The business also saw 5% reduction in absenteeism (refer: Medibank Private, Docklands, VIC).

GWD offers significant innovation. In general, existing approaches fall into three categories:

1. **No overall design**

This describes most workplaces. As a result, many are plagued with reduced productivity, costly product and system failures, a workforce with low levels of competence and engagement, compromised safety, and a negative impact on the environment. These workplaces typically suffer a high number of workdays lost due to injuries - predominantly musculoskeletal disorders. This is costing the Australian economy over $25 billion each year and is one of the most serious drains on our productivity.

1. **The** “**bathroom renovations “approach**

This occurs when a company has no overall Good Work Design, but adds on

different systems, features, and tasks at different times as they go along. This results in a bad fit with other systems and with workers who have not been consulted or trained. And it usually necessitates further changes to fix the system again. It is a very inefficient and expensive approach, like the result and expense of ad hoc bathroom renovations.

3.**The** **minimalistic approach**

This is the traditional safety management focus of following existing health and safety laws and regulations.

Following a growing number of fatal accidents at work, a new Victorian workplace manslaughter law was recently introduced. In the worst-case scenario, an employer could now be liable for a $16.5 million fine and 25 years jail time.

These laws and other health and safety regulations governing work are essential, but they are not enough.

Beyond the physical safety of workers, there is also the serious psychosocial impact on health and wellbeing. Research available on the HFSEA website shows that Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs), the most prevalent form of workplace injuries, are closely connected with mental stress.

It is important to understand that Good Work Design does not just step in after a failure or accident to determine ‘what went wrong’. It should apply at the outset to determine ‘how can we make the whole system better?’.

**GOOD WORK DESIGN PROCESS**

The ergonomist develops the Good Work Design in a process that covers three phases: **Discovery, Design, and Realisation.** This process can be applied to existing workplaces and activities, as well as new job tasks, equipment, or product interface.

*GWD PHASE 1: DISCOVERY*

In the discovery phase, the ergonomist explores the ‘fit’ between the worker and the task within the context of the workplace. Tasks are examined under different conditions. In this way the ergonomist can determine whether the work being done is actually the work required or prescribed. And if not, why is this so?

In order to be most effective in the discovery phase, the ergonomist observes and speaks with all relevant stakeholders - workers, management and sometimes focus groups. This is reinforced with task analyses, modelling, and qualitative or quantitative measurements.

*GWD PHASE 2: DESIGN*

The Design phase involves the testing and trials of multiple design versions and models, and incorporates feedback and data. It brings people and teams together to determine solutions that are supported by empirical evidence and are widely accepted.

*GWD PHASE 3: REALISATION*

The improvements are implemented and monitored in this third stage. Positive effects may take time to be realised.

Given the dynamic nature of the workplace, Good Work Design must remain responsive to changing conditions to ensure it is competitive, resilient and sustainable.

**Conclusion**

Good Work Design achieves the optimum level and balance between productivity and the health, wellbeing, and safety of employees.

Good Work Design is a key strategy for a successful transition to the post-COVID-19 workplace.