

Accessibility in Co-working

DESIGN BRIEF v.3.0

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INTRODUCTION

Co-working spaces facilitate a social, dynamic, professional community for businesses and individuals alike. These spaces provide open-concept areas for collaboration, as well as booths, pods, or alcoves for focused work. Post-pandemic, many establishments are moving to hybrid or fully remote work. As a result, businesses and employees are using co-working environments, making them main places of work.

As a common gathering space for society, co-working spaces have the potential to change people's perceptions, especially regarding accessibility. Co-working establishments value diversity, since it contributes to a more dynamic workspace and idea hub. Like many modern-day workspaces, these establishments promote inclusive design and discourage normalist and ableist perceptions. This creates a hierarchy between able-bodied people and people with disabilities, and the exclusion of the latter. These subconscious views are perpetuated by the misrepresentation of people with disabilities in mainstream society (Charlton, 1998, p.30). More inclusivity and representation in co-working spaces would help reduce these harmful views and would create a more diverse community.

PROBLEM

Co-working environments lack accessible options for semi-private work spaces because their current options are not designed for wheelchair-users. These options include focus pods, restaurant-style booth seating, and alcoves in the main co-working space. None of these provide space for wheelchair maneuverability, they often contain fixed-place furniture that become obstacles, and they are often elevated without easy wheelchair access. Current furniture solutions are minimal and flawed because they do not provide enough space for a diversity of wheelchair users, and do not include support for transfers from a wheelchair to the workspace's designated seating. Other solutions include automatic doors and electronically-adjustable furniture. These high-tech solutions are too expensive for co-working spaces. This lack of affordable, quiet, accessible work spaces limits the options for wheelchair-users, forcing them to work from home, consequently maintaining ableist and normative views in society. For this reason, it is important for regular work places to be accessible because people with disabilities are then included in these places and are represented in the regular workplace.

OPPORTUNITY

Having more wheelchair-accessible, semi-private work spaces in co-working areas would create a more welcoming and versatile environment for people with disabilities. An improved semi-private workspace would provide a space for wheelchair-users to work without furniture crowding the space. This would involve compact furniture that is hidden when it is not needed. The space would also be optimized for versatility while remaining compact for smaller co-working environments. Within the alcove, an adjustable desk would be available, as well as amenities such as storage, and ideation boards. The amenities would be modular for optimized customizability while using the space efficiently. The alcove would also be low-tech to remain affordable to co-working establishments. This increase in accessibility would encourage more diversity and representation. This would then enhance the flexibility, community, and a sense of welcomeness of the co-working environment.

SPECIFICATIONS

- The workspace should be semi-enclosed, reducing auditory and visual stimuli without isolating the user
- The design should adhere to the Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC)
- The design should adhere to the Accessibility Design Standards of Ottawa (ADSO)
- There should be no obstacles for entering or exiting the workspace
- The design should include furniture that is movable to accommodate for a wheelchair user
- The design should consider aesthetics that invoke a welcoming and comforting environment for users
- Environmental sustainability should be considered when sourcing materials for the design

Bibliography

Charlton, J. I. (1998). *Nothing about Us Without Us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment*. Chapter 2 - The Dimensions of Disability Oppression: An Overview. University of California Press