Summary

By Isabel de Waard, s1803808

Modern office design has been through a variety of concepts and trends over the years. The introduction of flexible offices meant for many employees and managers alike they had to trade their (private) enclosed offices for open-plan spaces, resulting in pro- and opponents of the flexible working trend. Activity Based working was later introduced to play into the possibilities of open-plan offices even more, by encouraging employees to move through the office according to the type of tasks they are performing at that moment. And as the topic of ergonomics has become a hygiene factor when it comes to office design, health as part of a broader understanding has become the current topic of focus for employers.

The trend of health in offices nowadays does not focus only on the physical well-being of employees, by encouraging them to get away from their desks more often and providing healthier meals for instance, a large part of the focus also goes to the mental well-being of the employees. This due to an ongoing increase in reports of burnouts (Nivel Zorgregistraties eerste lijn, 2018). Employers show increasingly more concern with the health of their employees, out of both moral and financial reasons. On top of that employers find themselves struggling to find and keep young, talented employees, as the 'war for talent' continues to stay a relevant strategic business challenge in this day and age (Michaels, Handfield-Jones, & Axelrod, 2001)

Wanting to find an answer to how design could contribute to lowering the perceived workload for generation Z employees, this thesis describes the process of designing for belongingness. Part 1 goes into contextualisation of the topic of modern office life and how people work, it focusses on the preliminary knowledge needed to find a clear focus for this research project. Part 2 goes into finding this focus through analysing the target group, reviewing literature and exploring solutions through sketching and a co-design session. This yielded a clear focus, making up the final research question and design challenge, which are presented in Part 3, after which the part goes into answering this question by presenting a guideline for designing a lounge area for generation Z employees, after which the process of designing the final design is presented. In the last part, Part 4, the final design is presented, discussed and evaluated, after which an answer is provided to the question: *How could a design contribute to lowering the perceived workload for generation Z employees, through design for belongingness?*

The final design is a multi-functional table with three main uses: its use as a drop-in workstation, spontaneous use and planned use. As professional and attractive drop-in workstations are in high demand, the final design is a great place to work at for employees and visitors for short amounts of time. On top of that, the product encourages users to connect with their co-workers through the sharing and improving of their personal or work-related projects, as part of the spontaneous use. It allows users to share queries, so that others can reply to those. And the last use, planned use, focusses on facilitating and improving on meetings and creative sessions by providing relevant features, such as the possibility to write on and turn the table in order to make and share notes and by providing external input through the use of screens.

When evaluating the effectiveness of the final design in making users feel a larger sense of belonging, the final design was evaluated on the requirements as presented in the guideline. From this it was found that the final design is effective in facilitating spontaneous encounters, through its general

function as a (high) table as well as its query-function. On top of that the product is successful in facilitating the act of connecting with colleagues one does not know (well), through its shape, where people are facing each other, and its query-function. The third requirement the final design meets is that of 'facilitating the act of connecting between colleagues who do know each other', by providing a designated space for conversations to be held at and providing input through its query function. The shape of the final design also helps in meeting the fourth requirement, 'facilitating playful interactions' by leaving more freedom to move and express oneself in a playful manner and the fifth requirement is that it fosters an informal atmosphere by encouraging users to use the product in a dynamic, creative and playful way.

As focus for this project lay on defining functionality of the final design, matters such as materialisation, technical specifications and building prototypes fell out of the scope. Because of this, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done before the final design as presented in this thesis could ever be sold by Ahrend. This includes, building a prototype that could be used to run user tests in companies with, research into additional possibilities regarding functionality and a variety of different analyses on how the final design is to be commercialised. This includes working out the technical specifications of the product, together with analyses on materials and suitable production methods, the combination of which is likely going to result in needs for re-designs. On top of that, it is also important to look into the costs of the product, how the product is going to be priced, how the product is going to be marketed and a market placement analysis.

When taking all previous points into consideration, it becomes clear that (the interplay between) a variety of different functions of the final design contribute to meeting the design requirements. This establishes that the final design is successful in having users feel a larger sense of belonging at the company they work at, helping them in lowering their perceived workload.

References

Michaels, E., Handfield-Jones, H., & Axelrod, B. (2001). *The War for Talent* . Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Press.

Nivel Zorgregistraties eerste lijn. (2018). *Nieuwe gevallen van overspannenheid 2017.* Utrecht: Nivel.

The final design in and of itself not solve the issue of high perceived workloads amongst generation Z, as this is such a complex issue, with a wide variety of factors being of influence. This means that the user is not going to feel a sense of belonging *because* of the product, but the product is going to help foster an atmosphere that makes it easier for people to feel they belong at the company they work at. The final design possesses plays an important role in facilitating belongingness amongst its users. The final design proved to possess the ability to facilitate belongingness in its users, helping generation Z employees in lowering their perceived workload.