



## Diversity and Design Panel Held: How We can Shape a More Inclusive Workplace

THE DISCUSSION DREW A DIVERSE GROUP OF ERGONOMISTS, INTERIOR AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS, HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGERS, FACILITIES MANAGERS AND STAFF MEMBERS OF THE ONTARIO MINISTRY OF LABOUR.

Over the last decade, the Canadian workforce has gone through transformational changes and has become more diverse ethnically. More people with disabilities participate in the workforce, and more organizations are focusing on and shaping their cultures to become more inclusive.

On Nov. 21, ergoCentric Seating Systems organized a panel discussion on the importance of office furniture and technology design in meeting both diversity and inclusivity objectives at its downtown Toronto showroom&store.

### **Inclusive design results in better experiences for everyone.**

The panel included three experts in the field: Ricardo Wagner, Microsoft accessibility lead; Michael Sonne, Brock University adjunct professor and MyAbilities vice president of innovations and research; and Marcia O'Connor, Asset Management and Facility Management Consulting Group president and University of Toronto instructor. The panel was moderated by Jane Sleeth, ergonomist, founder and senior consultant of Optimal Performance Consultants.

The discussion drew a diverse group of ergonomists, interior and industrial designers, human resources managers, facilities managers and staff members of the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

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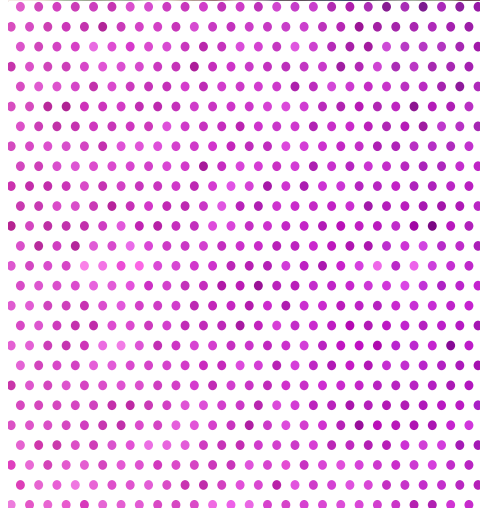
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In Canada, 6.2 million adults have a disability, and 60% of complaints made to the Canadian Human Rights Commission are related to disability issues (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/careers/workplace-award/article-what-is-an-inclusive-workplace/>).

“Why should design include ... everyone?” Wanger asked to kick off the conversation.

“As design leaders and practi-

tioners, we must embrace diversity and inclusion because our professional growth depends on it,” he said. “I truly believe disability is an engine of innovation.”

Wagner talked about how designers, business leaders and architects are not leveraging everything available to create diversity and inclusion in the ecosystem. He also spoke about accommodation vs. adaptation in

the design process. Accommodation is after the fact and always a cost. Nobody wants to raise their hands and say “I am sorry, but I need accommodation,” Wagner said. When you approach the design process from the adaptation perspective in the beginning, you embrace humans and unlock all their potentials, and that is a game changer, he added.

O’Connor’s speciality lies in integrating work spaces with



people who have different needs. Every time she steps into an office building, a condo tower or a shopping mall, her sensors are on for air quality, noise and accessibility point of view. These are the things she looks for when designing an office space, public space or home space.

Inclusive design results in better experiences for everyone. One of the projects Sonne discussed was his post doctoral

research fellowship for the Ford Motor Company, which was very up front with its production ergonomics in the design process. Sonne and his team modeled the assembly plant in a three-dimensional space, immersing parameters such as height, weight, length of arms and legs in mannequins to fit employees with different physiques. The benefits of Ford using this design concept of adapting to the different

ergonomic needs of its employees in the early stages include a decrease in the cost of injuries, an increase in productivity and a significant decrease in the cost of retrofitting.

Miles Keller, president of Dystil, a creative product design studio in Toronto said, “That was really great event. I learned some things and left feeling rather inspired.” **BoF**