

THE COMFORT FACTOR

Oooh—

Blame It on Productivity

my

Spend a Saturday at your workplace and the dream of owning a second home with a view becomes reduced to a Pentium chip and eighteen-inch terminal. Moving nanomillimeters in our office chairs, never before have we accomplished so much with so few calories. Besides a long vacation, a good solution to our computer lifestyles is ergonomics.

What's ergonomics?

Ergonomics concerns how people's bodies interact with their environment. The term can be used scientifically, measuring muscles, or in design, reflecting a "people friendly" approach. All in all, "ergonomics" is too vague to really mean much. We are using the term to answer this question: How can you design a work environment that will motivate people?

Why Swedish Ergonomics?

Motivation in today's information age depends on effectively integrating humans, information technology and the workplace environment. There is one major reason that Sweden excels this way: employers are concerned about their workers' well being. Given the focus on equality, standards have been high through all levels of society. In addition, since wage increases have been offset by taxes, Swedish employers have improved the work environment as an incentive. Swedish unions are even more so the driver for improved worker efficiency and comfort. As a result, ergonomic awareness—knowing what is comfortable at work—is much

higher in Sweden than in the United States.

Given the interest in Swedish ergonomics, the Swedish Trade Council has opened the Swedish Ergonomic Center. Our experience at the National Ergonomics Exposition shows the important ergonomic lessons Sweden offers.

Lesson 1: Stay Out of the Courtroom

Ergonomics reduces and minimizes liabilities for injuries sustained in the workplace. This starts with simple changes, such as height-adjustable tables. According to Caroline Mohlstrom, a chiropractic physician with expertise in workplace ergonomics, "If the cause of a repetitive strain injury is due to a poorly designed work environment, the environment has to be changed. If this is ignored, the patient will likely become re-injured—perpetuating care, patient suffering and medical expenses."

Lesson 2: Act Like You're at Home

Puttering around the house means using your body in different ways and places. Why can't your job be the same? It can! Future Office of Sweden designs office workplaces to harmonize routines, technology and employees. Rather than changing the way people work, it helps them expand their positive productivity flow. The result: desks that descend from the ceiling; cordless telephones to take calls anywhere in the office; and quiet places for relaxing, concentrating or creating.

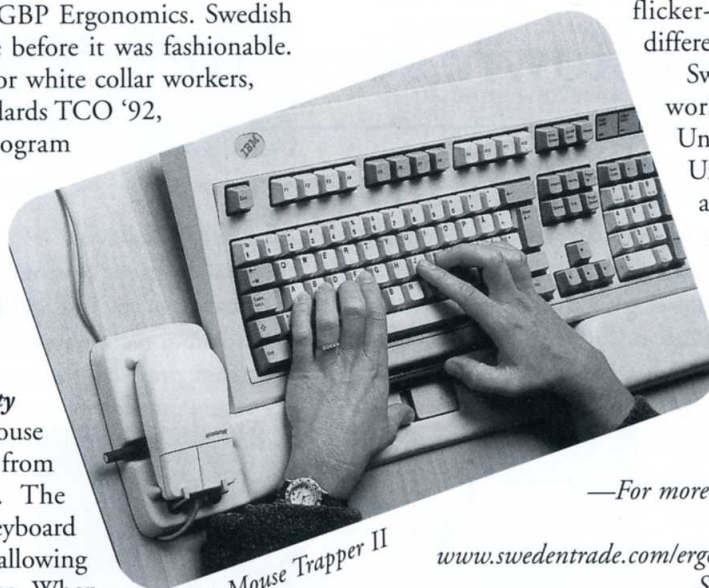
Lesson 3: Take a Cue from Swedish Farmers

What Swedish immigrant farmers lacked in sophistication

they made up for in practicality. The same emphasis on quality, design and function is found at ergonomic office furniture and accessories companies such as Kinnarps, Edsbyn, Today Ergonomics and GBP Ergonomics. Swedish farmers also lived close to nature before it was fashionable. TCO, the Swedish trade union for white collar workers, has developed the voluntary standards TCO '92, TCO '95 and the 6E Program (ergonomics, ecology, emissions, efficiency, energy and economy). Good environmental practice can be united with sound business economics.

Lesson 4: Blame It on Productivity

Perhaps you've experienced a "mouse arm" from constantly switching from your keyboard to mouse pad. The MouseTrapper is an ergonomic keyboard accessory that alleviates this by allowing your thumbs to control the mouse. When you see one, you'll understand it—and then want one. Eye strain is another form of repetitive stress. An



The Mouse Trapper II

engineer using CAD may refocus his eyes 300,000 times a day! D-Tec manufacturers fluorescent lighting with even light distribution and minimum glare that is flicker-free. The result—a big difference for many small muscles.

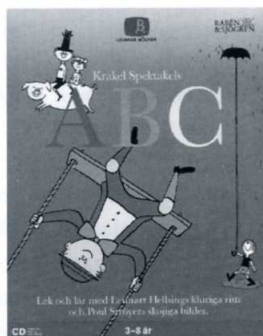
Sweden is clearly recognized as a world leader in ergonomics. Unlike the emphasis in the United States on productivity and liability, Swedish ergonomics is motivated by "quality of working life". Motivations may vary, but the opportunities and challenges of the workplace are more universal than ever before.

—For more information about the Swedish Ergonomic Center, please see www.swedentrade.com/ergoexpo or contact Anders Benson, Swedish Trade Council, Chicago. Telephone: 312/781-6243; e-mail: anders.benson@swedentrade.com.

The American Swedish Institute Bokhandel



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