

RESEARCHERS NEED GREAT SEATING, TOO!

JUST LIKE OFFICE WORKERS, OR MAYBE EVEN BETTER?



In the 1980's, office furniture manufacturer Herman Miller introduced two breakthrough chairs, Ergon and Equa, both emphasizing ergonomics and sparking a shift in thinking about how a worker's body interacts with their chair. Since that time, the behavior of companies trying to properly address the needs of their workforce in the office has shifted dramatically. In the past four decades, the office seating market has evolved significantly with most major office furniture manufacturers designing and developing a countless array of well-designed ergonomic chairs for their clients to consider. A vast majority of companies embrace the notion that providing great seating for their office and management staff pays dividends. As the importance of office design has elevated, the average business would allocate new seating budgets from \$400 to \$1,500 per chair to accommodate the needs of their employees. Leadership stakeholders felt that by making investments in the office environment, they were more successful attracting and retaining talent, as well as addressing the health and safety of their staff. The ROI seemed evident.

However, oddly enough, this same phenomenon and priority mindset has not taken hold within other interior work spaces like the laboratory or production floors. While the physical demands placed on researchers and technicians can be significantly more complex and risky than that of their office counterparts, even in today's most sophisticated labs, the focus and emphasis of ensuring scientists and

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engineers get seated in the best possible product for a research center seems to be a major afterthought to those involved in the process.

A few recent examples of this difference can help exemplify a disconnect that is prevalent in the design process for science seating. At Company (A), a leading Architectural and Design firm who are leaders in the field of Science and Technology Design, specified the lab interiors for a large new lab build project using cutting-edge lab furnishings, yet when it came to laboratory chairs, four common office chair models were the preferred options. Those models lacked the unique functions, materials or styling that should be evident in modern lab seating used in high-risk environments. Company (B) is a recognized global leader in bio-pharma research with thousands of high paid scientists on their payroll. As of 2021, no corporate standard was established for laboratory seating and so despite making monumental investments in their lab furnishings, lab managers were often left completely on their own to select and procure chairs for their labs. Not only was the design ignored but so was the appropriate budgeting for high quality lab seating that you would expect for these highly competent teams. The end result was many lab managers made the decision to purchase chairs at local office superstores, and so the lab interiors became an eclectic mixture of seating having inferior specifications and quality to hold up in their labs. Lastly, Company (C) standardized their labs on a suggested mesh-back stool to provide a great look and comfort level for the staff in a wet lab application where bio-chemical agents and pathogens were routinely used. Unfortunately, they failed to take into account that porous mesh materials are highly susceptible to trapping and fostering bacteria growth and are very difficult to clean.

The true contrast of work performed and the duties required between office and science workers could not be more different. Science workers are often required to do a high degree of forward-leaning over microscopes or trays of test samples. There is a need for frequent posture transitions, on and off the seat. They sit at elevated worksurfaces on stools far more where the need for height range adjustability is very important. Long periods of standing and leg fatigue can be common. Chemicals, cleaning agents and hazardous materials are commonly prevalent and add more risk factors to their space. The testing equipment needed within reach for experiments is often heavy and sophisticated. Working under fume hoods and strong ventilation systems is often required. Technicians often are required to wear protective apparel and head shields in cleanroom environments. Lastly, many technical workers need seating designed with electro-static discharge controls to help offset the risks associated with electrical shock and the damage that it can cause to circuitry and components.

The reasons for focusing on the physical differences in a research chair versus the common office chair are numerous and need to be addressed differently by the collection of Lab Planning Firms, Facility Managers, Health and Safety Managers and Lab Managers who design and run lab and high tech environments. What is even more important is that despite the average compensation and contribution levels of the scientists and technical research personnel being at the highest end of the spectrum and critical to driving revenues, tens of thousands have to sit in inferior seating solutions. Unfortunately, knowing all of the great improvements being made in today's design, environmental and facility management standards, lab seating is still sorely unknown, underutilized and underappreciated for how it can impact the health and performance of the researchers who sit in them.

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This dynamic can only improve over time with greater knowledge and awareness. We should no longer resign ourselves to the fact that just because lab furniture is a construction-driven specification and lab seating is part of the FF&E package, that the lab workstation is not looked at as a total holistic solution where all integral elements are properly defined and contribute to what is our better “Labs of the Future.” It is encouraging to know that in 2022, the Scientific Equipment and Furniture Association will publish for the first time, guidelines that address the definition and specification of lab grade seating. With the present explosion of spending and growth within the Sciences industries, now is an important time to begin to properly address and support the individual needs of each scientist, engineer and assembly technician to be at their absolute best on the job.

By Mark Scelfo - US Managing Director

Bimos Lab Seating: Seating for Science + Technology

BIMOS Lab Seating is a best-in-class brand globally for chairs and stools that support manufacturing, research and science workers. The brand stands for innovation, high design and high quality. BIMOS products were all designed specifically with the lab and production environment in mind defined by unique scale, function and materials, all intended for longevity and application.

BIMOS products are used prominently in labs, cleanrooms and ESD areas by global leading firms in the fields of Pharmaceuticals, Bioscience, High Tech, Food Research, Higher Education, Healthcare Labs and Cleanrooms and Mass Production.

Designed in close cooperation with professionals and academic experts, BIMOS focused on the specific activities of the lab, and addressed critical needs of ergonomics, health, safety and comfort. Backed by German engineering, BIMOS is produced to the highest standard levels and backed by a 10-Year Warranty.

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