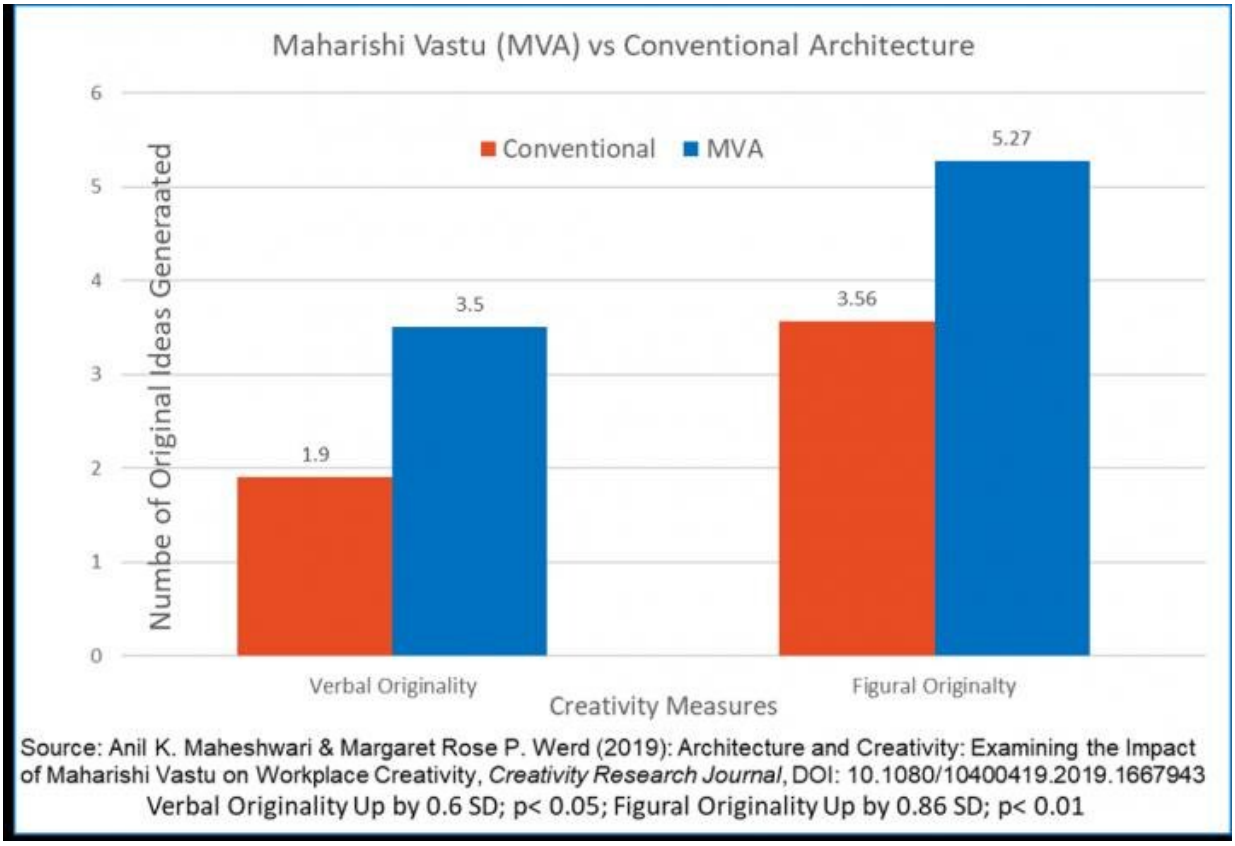
Can the design of a building improve the creative output of its occupants?

October 18 2019



Graph maps the average number of unique, original ideas produced per respondent on y-axis, for two types of tasks against the two building architecture (Conventional vs Maharishi Vastu) on the x-axis. The first pair of bars show that the average number of unique, original ideas produced for a product enhancement task increased from 1.9 to 3.5 or about 84% upon move to Maharishi Vastu. The second set of bars similarly show that the average number of unique, original ideas for a graphical figure completion task increased from 3.56 to 5.27, or about 48% upon move to Maharishi Vastu. Credit: Maharishi

A ground-breaking study published in the September issue of the scholarly *Creativity Research Journal* found increased creativity in employees who worked in a building designed according to Maharishi Vastu architecture. In this first study of its kind, employees of an architecture and engineering firm, based in a major metropolitan city in the Eastern United States, moved into a Maharishi Vastu office building and scored higher on the standardized Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking (TTCT) compared to their score four months earlier in their previous location. In particular, they generated 50-80% more original ideas. The study found that there was less than a 1% possibility that the result was due to chance.

"This research experimentally demonstrated that moving from a conventional architecture building into a Vastu building led to large measurable improvements in employee creativity, in particular in the originality of the ideas generated and their open-ended and detailed elaboration," said Professor Anil Maheshwari of Maharishi University of Management, the first author of this study. "I think every organization, big and small, could benefit from this."

The study was conducted by Maharishi University of Management with participation from The Tower Companies and NIKA in Rockville, Maryland, a city located just outside of Washington, D.C. 2000 Tower Oaks is a Maharishi Vastu building developed by The Tower Companies in 2008 and was recognized as the largest application of Vedic design in the world. NIKA moved into the building as a new office tenant in 2017.

Architecture in harmony with nature

Maharishi Vastu is a traditional system of architecture that originated in India, and is known there also as *vastu* or *sthapatya veda*. Features of Maharishi Vastu include alignment with the cardinal directions; a silent central area called a *brahmasthan*; specific placement and proportions of rooms; appropriate slope and shape of the land; an unobstructed view of sunrise; a location that's distant enough from major sources of electromagnetic radiation; and use of natural materials and solar energy. The researchers hypothesized that this architecture would have a wide range of benefits because it is said to be more in harmony with nature.

"It may seem unfamiliar to a Western, scientific perspective, but the fact is that our physiology is intimately tied to the material and rhythms and forces of the earth and sun," Dr. Maheshwari said. "Traditional systems of architecture, which have arisen in many places around the world over a long span of time, take these things into account. And now we're intent on seeing whether the supposed benefits can be scientifically verified." Earlier exploratory studies have documented that specific elements of the Maharishi Vastu system can influence such markers as mental health and heart health.

Greater originality and depth of creativity

The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (TTCT) includes three assessments of verbal creativity and five of figural creativity. The researchers hypothesized that Maharishi Vastu architecture would show improvement on all eight assessments. Since before-and-after tests can result in higher scores on the second test simply due to being familiar with the testing instrument, TTCT has two different but comparable versions to control for familiarity and learning. One version is used in the initial condition and the other different version is used after the variable/s has been applied. 32 employees took one version of the test in the conventional architecture location, and 22 employees took the second version of the test in Vastu location. Of these, 21 employees

were common and took the tests at both locations.

The results of the verbal tests found a statistically significant (p