

Kiss Your Cube Goodbye

Maximize employee interaction and teamwork is the goal. Eliminate the isolating cube and redesigning the workspace to feature common areas, conference rooms, and tables, as opposed to individual desks. Look at transition in office layout that is coming and how to deal with some perceptions and objections. See successful ways to incorporate changing technologies, teaming, reduced real estate, and privacy concerns.

Take a look at transition in office layout and how to deal with perceptions and objections. When we eliminate the isolating cube, we move toward workspaces that feature common areas, conference rooms, and shared space—tables instead of desks. See some of the successful ways to address these and other concerns, such as changing technologies, teaming, reduced real estate, and privacy issues.

History of the Workplace

When it comes to communication and privacy conflicts we are in the same boat as we have been in since the invention of the office.

When World War II ended, management and the office environment changed radically and quickly. Workers on the home front had essentially maintained the status quo during this period of national upheaval. With the war over, American industry tooled up to satisfy the increasing demand for consumer goods. Factory jobs were paying far more for unskilled and semi-skilled laborers than office jobs. Thus sprang the need to “entice” office workers back from the factory.

Management started to look at their workers and their environment and discovered that people restricted to their desks for hours upon end, doing repetitious tasks became extremely fatigued and less productive. They decided that giving workers breaks in their day, varies types of work to perform, and coworkers to work with rather than alongside of, they actually became more content and productive. The humanitarian style of management worked, and company loyalty and productivity increased.

Thus the “cube” was born. The cubicle was not born evil, or even square. After years of prototyping, studying how people worked, and vowing to improve on the open-bullpen office that dominated much of the 20th century, Robert Propst designed a system he thought would increase productivity (hence the name Action Office).

Around the time the Action Office was born, a growing breed of white-collar workers, whose job titles fell between secretary and boss, were swelling in the workforce. Real estate prices were rising, as was the cost of reconfiguring office buildings, making the physical office a hardship on the corporate budget. Cubicles offered a cheaper alternative for quickly redoing the floor plan. Another critical factor in the cubicle's rapid ascent was Uncle Sam, during the 1960's, to stimulate business spending, the Treasury created new rules for depreciating

assets. The changes specified clearer ranges for depreciation and established a shorter life for furniture and equipment.

Workstation Design Propst's workstations were designed to be flexible, but in practice they were seldom altered or moved at all. This new system included plenty of work surfaces and display shelves, partitions to provide privacy and places to pin up works in process. The Action Office even included varying desk levels to enable employees to work part of the time standing up, thereby encouraging blood flow, and staving off exhaustion.

Designer Douglas Ball, for instance, remembers the first installation of cubicles he created for a Canadian company in 1972. "I thought I'd be excited, but I came out depressed," says Ball, now 70. "It was Dilbertville; I'd failed to visualize what it would look like when there were so many of them."

Five generations in the workforce

- Traditionalists - born before 1946 4%
- Baby Boomers - born between 1946 & 1964 38%
- Generation X - born between 1965 and 1976 22%
- Millennials - born between 1977 and 1997 36%
- Gen 2020 - born after 1997 0%

Traditionalist: Punctual, sharply dressed, and proudly conservative they believe that hard work is its own reward. They are survivors of hard times, the Great Depression, Two World Wars, and witness to the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor. Known to be loyal, self-sacrificing, and thrifty, many members of this group are military veterans, credit the GI Bill with jumpstarting their careers and, at work, operate on the military chain of command. It is therefore not surprising that Traditionalists best respond to a leadership modeled in a command-and-control structured hierarchy. Also worth noting, traditional gender roles and family structure were commonplace for this generation, with husbands working while wives cared for the home and children.

Baby Boomers: Baby Boomers are extremely hardworking and motivated by position, perks, and prestige. Baby Boomers relish long work weeks and define themselves by their professional accomplishments. Since they sacrificed a great deal to get where they are in their career, this workaholic generation believes that Generation X and Generation Y should pay their dues and conform to a culture of overwork. Baby Boomers may criticize younger generations for a lack of work ethic and commitment to the workplace.

Generation X: Overall, they are more ethnically diverse and better educated than the Baby Boomers. Over 60% of Generation X attended college. Generation X came of age in an era of two-income families, rising divorce rates and a faltering economy. Women were joining the workforce in large numbers, spawning an age of "latch-key" children. As a result,

Generation X is independent, resourceful, and self-sufficient. In the workplace, Generation X values freedom and responsibility. Many in this generation display a casual disdain for authority and structured work hours. They dislike being micro-managed and embrace a hands-off management philosophy. The Generation X mentality reflects a shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy. The first generation to grow up with computers, technology is woven into their lives.

Millennials: Millennials have high expectations for their employers and that they set high standards for themselves. So their preference for flexible work is not about doing less, but about contributing a more efficiently and effectively. They have a 'mobile lifestyle'. "Keep them engaged and they will be happy to overachieve for you." Overall, the millennial generation tends to be highly educated and technologically savvy. They have been plugged into computers and the Internet almost since birth. They have grown up over-protected and over-scheduled, yet close to their parents and families because of this rigid structure. Millennials tend to be very optimistic, overtly confident, and intensely competitive.

Generation 2020: Known for their savvy communication skills, they use technology and the internet to connect with people in new and distinctive ways. Text messaging, instant messaging, and email keep them in constant contact with friends. They are the "Look at me" generation. Social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and MyYearbook allow individuals to post a personal profile complete with photos and descriptions of interests and hobbies.

The Workplace

Revolution In recent history there have been many attempts to get away from "the cube," however that seems to be a larger challenge than we thought it would be. One of the most ambitious assaults came in 1993, when Jay Chiat, chairman of ad agency Chiat/Day, declared a sort of Bolshevik revolution when he moved his employees into newly renovated space in Venice, California. The design was "loungy, like Starbucks," remembers Stevan Alburty, head of technology. "It was 20 years ahead of its time." It however, had a fatal flaw: no one had a fixed place to work. Employees were expected to park their belongings in lockers and check out laptops every morning as if renting a movie at Blockbuster. It quickly sparked a counter-rebellion, many employees simply stopped coming to the office, preferring to work at home. After the firm was acquired by an advertising conglomerate, employees moved into workspaces again. (Cubicles: The great mistake by Julie Schlosser, FORTUNE Magazine, March 22, 2006)

Past workplace: "Grow or die," had to adjust to the accelerated growth rate of some industries, aerospace, electronics. (Can of Sardines). Since there were large typewriters there was a need for deeper worksurfaces and desks in a grid layout producing a sea of desks.

Present Workplace: Organizations are opting to dedicate more square feet to public spaces vs. numerous dedicated workstations and private offices. Workstations have shrunk by 35%-40% since 1980's. Managers are moving out of private offices and into 10x10 or 8x10 cubicles. A private office is more likely to be dedicated to those who need acoustical privacy due to the nature of their job, i.e. human resources professionals, financial planners, and others engaged in confidential work. Flat screen monitors and laptops means there is not a need for deep work surfaces or corner desktop orientations. Mobility of today's worker, and in particular the telecommuting worker cause fluctuations in the office population, this is addressed with "touchdown" spaces and a business center for those who spend a significant amount of time off-site, but also require an on-site workspace when visiting the office for several hours or days.

Future Workplace: More offices are starting to work outside the box, working in places other than a workstation or an office. Corporate nomads on the move can collaborate using the telephone, email, instant messaging, as well as share information from their cell phones. They can even participate in web-based conferences, thus, work from virtually any place. The competition for capable workers is intense and crowded cubes are not the way to attract the best and the brightest.

Past conferencing: Information passed through formal meetings and presentations. Conferencing was held in large settings of 20 or more people. This was extremely time consuming and not as affective.

Present conferencing: Collaboration allows for full potential for innovation. Spend more time collaborating and learning, meeting rooms, training rooms, team spaces, lounges, cafes, gets people to move around more and are more productive when they do. Information exchanges brief times and casually. Productivity is no longer characterized by long hours of solitary research, analysis; writing and creating with the occasional break to confer with colleagues. In today's most successful companies, more time is spent collaborating, learning and socializing.

Future conferencing: Recent surveys indicate that 29% of companies are considering a mobile work strategy or more flexible work option in order to reduce costs, increase productivity, and help reduce employee stress. Sales reps, consultants who occasionally or frequently work off-site rely on networks rather than buildings for support and the result is often happier workers. Hp facility in Melbourne, Australia, indicates that employees were utilizing their dedicated space only 38% of the time. Result HP changed outlook on meeting places and saved 55% real estate cost per employee. Because they are mobile, information can be pasted at anytime, anywhere.

Factors affect workplace design today and will continue to do so in the future.

- A multi-generational workforce, each with a different concept of self and work
- New work styles that have emerged as a result of new technologies
- Collaboration as the dominant work mode
- Economic imperatives and the need to minimize real estate costs
- Sustainable business practices and “green” design
- Trends in style, taste and lifestyle

Designing for the office of the future. (Common areas, conference rooms, and shared space)The terms for employees in this new space can be redefined as well. According to Workplace One by Teknion, there are several types of employees:

Residents - working at the computer has not changed, however, the range of tasks within jobs has evolved to include meetings, (planned and impromptu) and collaboration. This means that less time is spent in a workstation. The new workstation is compact, efficient and reflects the interactive nature of work. The efficiency of systems furniture is evident in the Resident station. These can be laid out for maximum efficiency and floor plan.

Touchdown / Shared Address (Space) - Wireless technology has paved the way for workers to become more nomadic, no longer tied to a cable at their workstation. These types of spaces are ideal for non-Resident workers to be able to connect immediately when visiting the office for hours or days. These spaces also provide storage for personal use and shared access. (Filing Areas) The touchdown spaces are often adjacent to the Resident spaces, allowing access for those employees to interact when in the office.

The workplace of the future will be a place where all workers share space, views, and access to natural light. Amenities will include;

Café's - size and shape may vary and goal is to provide a more casual place for physical renewal. The Café can also provide additional meeting space.

Meditation Spaces - size and shape may vary and goal for these spaces is to contribute to employee health and performance.

Lounge - This multiuse space can contain the above areas and is generally being used to replace the conventional reception area. Lounge areas support the social aspects of work.

Collaborative spaces - these are used throughout the day as people share knowledge, skills and experience in working together. Interaction is important to the creative and innovative process, and such areas should be placed throughout the space to encourage that interaction.

Privacy Areas - There is still a need for acoustical privacy, and enclave spaces can accommodate 2-4 people, and can be furnished to support a variety of activities that may take place in the space.