

The Evolving Workspace

Property managers must shift from focusing on saving space and cost, to creating workplaces that enhance individual creativity and performance, team collaboration and innovation, and the productivity and success of the occupying business.

OUR WORK, WORKSTYLE AND WORK ENVIRONMENT ARE IN a state of flux adapting to meet the continuous change in global markets and economies. Advanced economies are moving from a service industry base to a knowledge critical economy fired by the creative and innovative worker. Consequently, we need to understand how the workplace should respond and support these new workers.

A useful tool when predicting future trends and the possible evolution of an organisation is the STEP analysis, where the impacts of *Sociological, Technological, Economical and Political* factors are explored.

Sociological

Much research has been conducted on the changing demographics of workers and their specific needs. The mix of generations within the workplace is extending.

On the one hand we have the millennial/gaming/IPOD (Insecure, Pressured, Overtaxed and Debt-ridden) generation entering the workplace after time in the new breed of college and university, where learning is considered a 'social experience'.

Compared to their Generation X and Y colleagues, the millennial workers want to be:

- treated like partners
- expect the latest technology

- consider themselves as experts brought in to deliver a specific task
- wish to manage their own time and multi-task with occasional mentoring
- prefer a social and unstructured workplace that is active, open, informal, sustainable and ethical.

This new generation of workers is seeking employers who offer choice in work environment and work patterns with a good track record in corporate social responsibility.

At the other extreme, longevity is increasing and 'Baby Boomers' (silver surfers, 3rd generation) with many years of experience and knowledge are choosing to remain in the workplace beyond the traditional retirement age or even return to work after a short break.

Equality means that we are now designing for variations in disability, culture and ethnicity. The level of expertise around the globe is broader such that organisations are widening their recruitment to attract workers beyond traditional geographical boundaries. We must therefore create work environments that are universally inclusive and meet the demands of the wider demographic of workers offering choice to maximise their performance and contribution to the organisation.

Technological

Technology is progressing at an increasing rate. Consider the advancements of the phone, laptop/PDA and wireless connectivity over the last ten years. Such hardware is no longer a constraint to the workplace but an enabler that has unshackled us from the workstation and allows us to work in different locations within and outside the office, at home and on the move.

Whereas wireless is currently built in to processors, in the near future we will see the evolution of 'thin client' where personal devices become even smaller but with greater processing capacity due to continuous and seamless connectivity to the web and servers.

Social networking sites are changing the way that people interact and communicate, and built in webcams will become standard progressing remote interaction. Virtual sites such as Second Life are already being used by IBM and others to host global meetings, using personalised avatars, or to test designs and products with larger and more varied audiences.

In contrast, as the workforce becomes more



mobile, a key function of the physical workplace may be to encourage real-world social interaction, team cohesion, corporate loyalty and reduce the risk of isolation and de-motivation; but the physical workplace will need to be interesting and exciting to compete with the virtual world and attract staff back into the office.

The use of the World Wide Web and shared information is becoming ubiquitous; knowledge (per se) is no longer 'King' and industry leaders will be those who can use freely available knowledge creatively and innovatively. Our work environment, and communication tools, will be a merging of physical and virtual worlds which workers move seamlessly between.

Economics

The Web has not just changed the way we work but the way we do business, the global market and economics. Smarter and smaller businesses are taking advantage of global virtual working that spans all geographical boundaries creating large teams of small agile collaborators.

Wikinomics is testament to our changing attitude to business. According to Accenture "Emerging-Market Multinationals, enterprises based in emerging markets with operations in more than one country, are expanding at a speed and scale that is transforming the nature and norms of global business. The rising international prominence of these new players is both a cause and consequence of the multi-polar world, characterized by growing economic interdependence across five dimensions: capital, talent, resources, consumers and innovation".

Working in a global market allows us ride the cycles of downturn in our domestic market. The way we procure, deliver and consume is all affected by the expanded global market and in turn this is affecting how we design and manage our work environments to support the new emerging enterprises. The new workplace must be global, virtual, responsive, agile, adaptive and flexible.

Political

The issues of sustainability and social corporate responsibility can no longer be ignored. At one end of the scale legislation dictates that we are sustainable, but a key driver is the expectations of our staff and customers, and companies are responding to these drivers to maximise their performance.

The design and operation of our work environment has a big impact on its carbon footprint. Flexible and virtual working clearly reduces travel, energy use and carbon production.

However, of more significant impact is the amount of space developed and occupied. If a company that only utilises space for 50 per cent of the time occupies a building of half the original size, then it can realise significant savings in embodied energy, materials and operational 'costs'. Furthermore, good sustainable design will reduce energy consumption and further burden on the environment.



Occupiers should also consider universal design and adaptive reuse, where the building's physical structure enables it to be easily altered for a variety of uses, for example office, residential, education, depending on the requirement at the time and thus extending the building's life and utilisation.

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Future shifts

The office workforce could become one of international and multi-cultural nomadic networked entrepreneurs with deliverables expressed as targets and output rather than time on the job. The office environment will need to respond to the Sociological, Technological, Economical and Political trends outlined above. In particular: the changing demographic and attitude of the worker, the seamless interconnection of the physical and virtual worlds, emerging global markets, and sustainability.

The way we design and manage the workplace will need to change; consider the following paradigm shifts, adapted from Oseland and Wright (2007) :

- Work is an activity not a place – work is no longer confined to the office environment and we need to support work in different locations and on the move;
- The activity and time will vary – work is a mixture of activities which are best suited to different environments and times;
- The office is a social experience – we are social animals and at times crave interaction, off-line interaction may lead to collaboration and innovation;
- Property is an asset not a cost burden – the key purpose of our properties is simply to support the activities that take place within them, we need to design and manage property to maximise the benefits and focus less on just the costs of the property;
- Design for diversity not homogeneity – we are all different with individual preferences and social/cultural needs that change over time,

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Flexible and adaptive environments that are stimulating, offer choice and can swiftly respond to meet the current and future changing needs of the modern mobile and creative workforce

design environments that offer choices cater for these differences rather than assume we all have the same requirements;

- Measure value not just cost – at its most basic, Value equals Quality over Cost (V = Q / C), we need to maximise quality and minimise

costs rather than create poor quality low cost (cheap) environments;

- Less is more – we should provide less space per person but more space per workstation, so when we are in the office we have better facilities but assume that creative workers are not always in the office and do not require their own desk;
- Status equals choice and trust not space – the new generation of creative workers prefer the freedom and trust to choose how, when and where they work rather than be expected to sit daily in their private office;
- Manage output not input – time at the desk does not necessarily equal more productivity, the mobile workforce needs to be managed by tasks and results rather than time and effort;
- Design for the future not the past – we can not ignore sustainability, we need to develop buildings that are agile and adaptable to changing needs so that they will be around longer;
- Property is a people business – work extends beyond the office walls, property is no longer simply about “bricks and mortar” but how we support a mobile and creative workforce.

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• **Rob Wright and Nigel Oseland. Paradigm Shifts in property Management and Work. Presented at Workplace Trends: Managing New Workstyles, London, 14 November 2007.**



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