

The Information Technology Workplace: Designing for People



Key Points

- Innovation drives the need for flexible work environments.
- The workspace has gone from something that is singularly disciplined and unrelated to multi-disciplinary and interrelated.
- Space planning has evolved because of the theory of casual collision.

Technology impacts how we work and the skill sets we need. We stand at height adjustable smart desks that encourage us to change positions. We check emails in our eye wear and record videos on our wrists. Company badges track our business interactions--how we speak, our energy levels and where we go. If we cannot physically be at the office, telepresence technology allows us to communicate with portable video-conferencing devices. We bridge co-working spaces with collaborative technologies to work remotely.

WORKPLACE SATISFACTION

Workplace demographics will soon expand to five generations: Veterans, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Y and Z. As we live and work longer this phenomenon

will impact everything from building teams to increasing performance. Job satisfaction is vital as tech companies look to attract and retain our highly connected workforce. A Gallup study reports two-thirds of all high tech workers believe they could find a better job in less than 60 days if they took the time to look. Companies are responding with flexible working hours, goal setting, performance feedback and socialization tactics. More importantly, the new workforce wants to join a company that gives them a balanced lifestyle. Susan Lim, Head of Client Engagement at HASSELL, states, “It’s not about space efficiency, the utilization of desks, accommodating numbers...successful organizations look beyond those metrics.” She feels it’s our job to bring people together to realize their potential—connecting, enabling and helping them to belong.

WORKPLACE DESIGN TRENDS

The World Green Building Council (WGBC) links office design to health, well-being and productivity. Natural lighting, expansive views and the opportunity to choose your workspace based on the task can contribute to a sense of connectivity and engagement. Perkins+Will is applying this concept in a joint research/data center facility. Traditionally, data centers are warehouses without windows—not a pleasant environment to be in. The new building’s exterior windows will bring in natural light and warmth. Each floor will have several non-designated areas for people to come together with writable walls for spontaneous conversations. An open central stair links the office with the analysts, furthering chance encounters across teams.

The theory of “casual collision”, where casual encounters drive the sharing of ideas, can be seen at Pixar. The original site had computer scientists in one building; animators in a second; and executives in a third. Separating the groups, each with its own culture, discouraged collaboration. Steve Jobs’ design united everyone into one campus. Now, animators run into CPAs and executives bump into interns,

providing new insights. Google recently applied the collision principle in New York where no employees are more than 150 feet from a cafe or micro-kitchen—to encourage interaction.

Research about lab design, in general, shows the space itself facilitates how quickly and efficiently work gets done. In this software lab, for example, plug-play power and data are accessed overhead for easy reconfiguration with



Plug-play power and data runs from the ceiling for easy reconfiguration in this technology lab.

Symbiote height adjustable workbenches. Taking this one step further, Cisco IT is monitoring how people move within a space to get a better understanding of workplace design. They plan to anonymously study employee movement using RFID, WiFi and ultra-wideband tracking. In addition, some areas within the building are intentionally left “unassigned” for sharing to reduce facility costs.

DESIGNING FOR PEOPLE

Technology allows us to be more integrated, yet the approach to outfitting a space remains the same. As outdated electronics are replaced, modular furniture remains integrated with little cost or effort. It can be reallocated and reconfigured to other departments that are growing to lower the overall cost of ownership. Designing workplaces for people is about having areas to daydream and areas to share eureka moments. It has different sized rooms of furniture that adjust easily; provide comfort (sit/stand and ergonomic adjustment). It supports connections to people and nurtures innovation.