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The art of space management

Planning flexible workspaces for people

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Abstract

Purpose – Technological innovations and IT developments have been hailed as the key influence on changing work-styles. However, the workplace is being shaped more and more by people and their needs. Supported by industry research, this paper aims to identify and explore some of the various elements and forces that have an impact on the space planning process.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper gathers current thought leadership, trends and external research together with the author's research, comments and opinions on optimizing space management. Global workplace trends are compared to author's observations in Dubai.

Findings – Real estate costs, building attributes, space planning concepts, technology and product innovations for the workplace are examined, as they have an influence on the role of people in the workplace. A case study provides the background and details of a revolutionary work-style – iWork, developed by Sun Microsystems, and shows how it was adapted to meet the requirements of their regional headquarters in Dubai.

Research limitations/implications – The current phenomenal growth of Dubai could impact some cited statistics over a short period of time.

Practical implications – The paper offers guidelines and ideas for facilities managers to assess the possibility of adopting similar space planning and work-style programmes within their own organisations.

Originality/value – Aside from the practical space planning guidelines, the paper also offers facility managers an introductory insight the challenges of establishing an office in Dubai – one of the fastest growing economies and cities in the world.

Keywords Work place, Facilities, Dubai

Paper type General review

CitySpace is an independent interior design company based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Jon Steiner, Executive Director and Co-Founder of the company, has over 20 years of knowledge and expertise in the areas of workplace design, procurement and facilities management both in the UK and the Middle East, and has driven CitySpace's business forward to its current position as a leading regional authority on office interiors and work practice. The company specialises in corporate workplace solutions with space planning and management as one of its core competencies. Since its formation over 12 years ago, the CitySpace team has designed and created over 2 million square feet of office space throughout the region, focusing on multinational and major local clients – it has also formed a strategic alliance with Evata to share knowledge and resources on regional projects. Jon's proactive approach to the staging of educational seminars on workplace design issues reinforces his commitment to provide continuing education to organisations throughout the Middle East.



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Introduction

A workplace is essentially made up of a number of planned zones and workspaces. Space planning, as a discipline, forms a major part of the Facilities Manager's responsibilities – it is a continuous process resulting from dynamic organisational growth and churn as well as the emerging new work-styles in today's global economy. Whether it is a brand new operation, full-scale office relocation or a partial re-organisation, a carefully planned and implemented workplace can have a profound impact on the performance of an organisation.

Changing the way we work

The boundaries that have traditionally separated work, family and leisure time are becoming increasingly blurred – driven by advances in technology, the global economy means that 24/7 has largely replaced the normal 9-5 cycle. Working hours are not necessarily longer, but new methods of working let people take their job away from the physical office to virtually any other place – whether at home, in a restaurant or commuting.

In today's corporate world, more and more people are becoming "Knowledge Workers". Born out of the fast-paced IT sector, the principles of relying on the individual's power of ideas, thought leadership and information to make the right decisions that enhance competitive advantage are crossing over and being adopted by other industries.

Knowledge transferred through human collaboration via formal or informal meetings and social interaction is further enhanced by communication technology, which can ultimately translate into company assets.

With a variety of needs depending on job function, specific tasks, work-style and personal life, knowledge workers have greater freedom in choosing when and where to work, which helps in the achievement not only of optimum productivity, but also a healthy work/life balance.

It naturally follows that the design of the physical workspace and infrastructure must also evolve to successfully accommodate this changing approach to work.

A 2004 study carried out by the British Council for Offices (2004) revealed that our workplace and the way we use our office space is shaped by four key factors (Figure 1).

- (1) *People*. The human factor is an increasingly fundamental issue – the future workforce and resulting economic success will be a key driving force for all aspects of office design in the future.
- (2) *Location*. Office location will remain important in the future, but specification and design will become a lot more important.
- (3) *Management and work-styles*. Management styles must adapt to fit a faster-moving, ideas-based environment and cope with a more mobile workforce, as there will be an increase in the freelance "knowledge worker" who will migrate from project to project. Traditional benchmarks such as organisation charts, job titles, seniority and cost per employee will no longer dictate workplace design.
- (4) *Technology*. Technology will be seen as an enabler not a driver of change – it has enabled greater worker flexibility for over 20 years, but this flexibility and its options have not been as fully implemented, as many would have expected.

A similar survey, also in 2004, was commissioned by DEGW (Laing, 2004) on behalf of Knoll – this took a closer look at the physical workplace. A survey of 20 leading

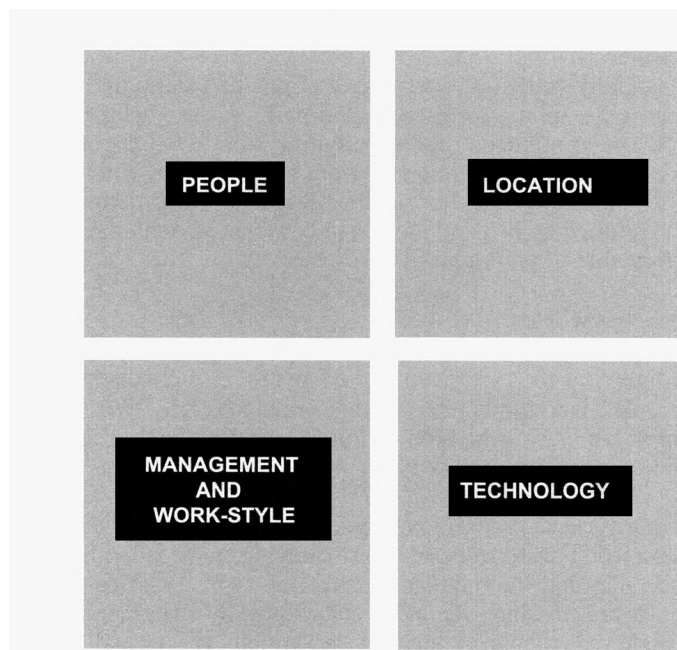


Figure 1.
The office is all about
people. Workplace
trends—BCO survey

European facility executives, representing about 250,000 employees, also revealed four major interconnected themes which will determine the future of the workplace in the next five years (Figure 2).

- (1) *Working environment.* As many as half of all staff are expected to work away from the office some of the time in a continued shift towards distributed working. It is estimated that 45 per cent of all staff will work from home at least one day a week, and that a third of all staff will not have their own allocated workspace (as they will be “hoteling” or “free-addressing” in the workplace).
- (2) *Individual workstations.* The size of individual workstations is expected to shrink along with the overall amount of space dedicated to individual work.
- (3) *Group workspace.* As individual space decreases, there will be a corresponding increase in the amount of collaborative and group spaces, which will account for to up to 40 per cent of all workspace.
- (4) *Technology.* Technology will be used increasingly to support collaborative and distributed work. Tools will include collaborative software for virtual teamwork and software for remotely accessing corporate data networks.

Technology has often been cited as the key driver in work-style changes, but interestingly, this has not necessarily been the reality. In actuality, it is the power of the human factor that is the key force. Advances in emerging areas of technology such as mobile and wireless devices, power cells and pervasive computing solutions may have further accelerated the changes in the workplace, but this will only continue to have an influence as long as:

- the costs of implementing such solutions are not prohibitive; and
- the workforce successfully adopts and utilises the tools to their full potential.

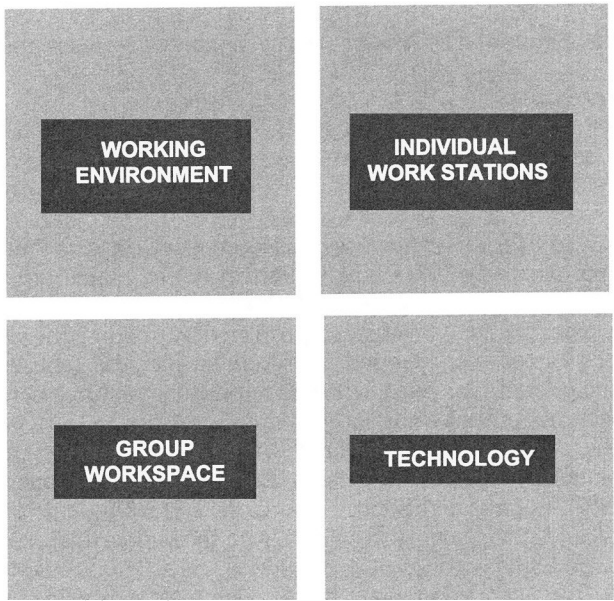


Figure 2.
Changing work-styles.
Workplace trends - DEGW
survey

What do people look for in the workplace?

First impressions count! In office environments, by far the single greatest cost to employers is that of the salaries of the employees occupying the space. Successful organisations have, therefore, recognised that an effective workplace helps attract and retain the right staff.

According to research carried out by the American Society of Interior Designers (1999), the physical workplace is one of the top three factors employees take into account when deciding to accept or leave a job, so this clearly has a massive effect on employee productivity, meaning that employers have to give serious thought to issues such as employee comfort, access to people and equipment, privacy and flexibility.

The criteria, ranked according to importance are as follows (Table I);

When asked about workplace factors that enabled greatest productivity, the general responses indicated that privacy and the comfort of furniture or equipment were considered more important than general aesthetics. Yet at the same time the greatest

1	A neat and clean workplace
2	Visually appealing or pleasant looking
3	A well-lit and bright environment
4	New furniture and equipment
5	A private and quiet workspace
6	A workplace that provides easy access to people and equipment
7	Comfortable furniture
8	Air quality
9	Windows and/or a nice view

Table I.
ASID Survey – what do
people look for in the
workplace?

area of dissatisfaction mentioned by the majority of employees is the view they have from their workspace (followed by lack of privacy, temperature, noise and air quality).

Higher real estate costs

Occupancy costs by location

After salaries, property is considered to be the second highest business cost by 95 per cent of companies and is ever-increasing as real estate continues to be a defining economic driver.

The annual DTZ (2004a) survey defines office occupancy costs as the average total cost of leasing approximately 10,000 sqft (929 sq m) of net usable office space in a modern, well-specified office building within a prime Central Business District location.

Occupancy costs per workstation are then calculated by dividing the net usable area by the number of planned workstations. The formula includes rent and outgoings (maintenance costs, property tax, etc.), but does not include rent-free periods, costs of fitting out the space and other leasing incentives.

According to the survey, as shown in Figure 3, total office occupancy costs (\$US per work station per annum) are highest in Western Europe (US \$8,494), followed by North America (US \$6,287), Central and South America (US \$4,699), Central and Eastern Europe (US \$4,612) and Asia Pacific (US \$4,112), with the Middle East recording by far the lowest cost at US \$3,496.

London's West End and Paris remain the top two most expensive locations with accommodation costs of US \$16,682 and US \$15,700 per workstation, respectively.

At a time when Dubai and other GCC countries have embarked on multiple ambitious construction and development programmes, future surveys may see the Middle East cost gap closing significantly. In fact Dubai boasts over US \$30 billion (Gulf News, 2004) in development projects currently underway, with a multitude of projects still in the pipeline. During 2004, many new businesses set up base in Dubai and office space rents shot up by as much as 20-30 per cent, with the cost of office space now ranging anywhere from US \$10-40 per square foot.

A middle east perspective

CitySpace asks similar questions of its clients in Dubai and the Middle East as part of the design brief process, and this has shown that the region generally follows similar trends to the US study.

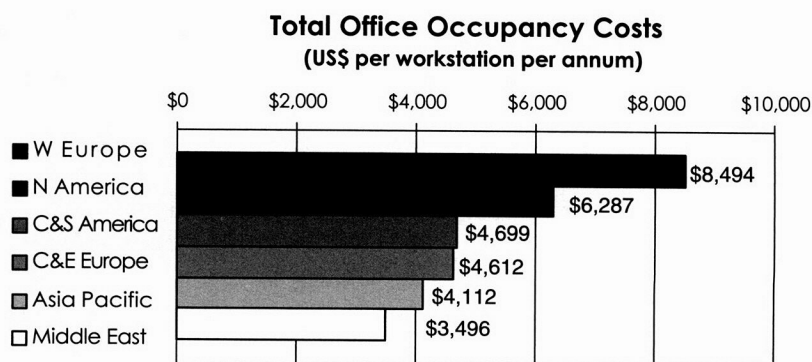


Figure 3.
Total office occupancy
costs in 2004

However, the cultural differences that are an inherent part of the Middle East's diverse cosmopolitan business community also throw up some interesting debating points, such as workplace style and décor, religious, protocol and cultural considerations (such as a prayer room and separate facilities for male and female employees), and open versus closed offices. Temperature and air quality are considered to be a major factor, particularly in the hot summer months.

Another, often overlooked factor in employee workplace satisfaction, is the quantity and quality of available parking space as well as accessibility to the building. The specific nuances that are specific to companies in the Middle East may seem irrelevant at first glance, but people around the world are increasingly relocating and travelling globally for business reasons. Cross-cultural requirements within the workplace crop up more and more frequently as part of the space planning process.

Global space utilisation per workstation

Space utilisation per workstation (DTZ, 2004b) also varies widely across the globe (Figure 4), ranging from 22 sq m in North America, to 10.5 sq m in the UK. Although these statistics are not currently available for Dubai, CitySpace allocates an average of 18 sq m per workstation on client space plans.

The shift towards more flexible, smaller workspaces to reduce business costs is now a prevalent global trend, as companies continue to restructure or downsize office space in a bid to counteract increasing real estate costs. For example, the typical space utilisation in Sydney has substantially decreased from around 20 sq m per person three years ago to around 14 sq m per person in 2005 – a cost saving of around US \$8,202 per person, per annum.

Building design

Effective space planning starts with the building itself – according to a recent article by the National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) (Conway, 2004), a new generation of high-performance office buildings is beginning to emerge. They are designed to promote increased worker satisfaction, productivity, better health, greater flexibility, and enhanced energy and environmental performance.

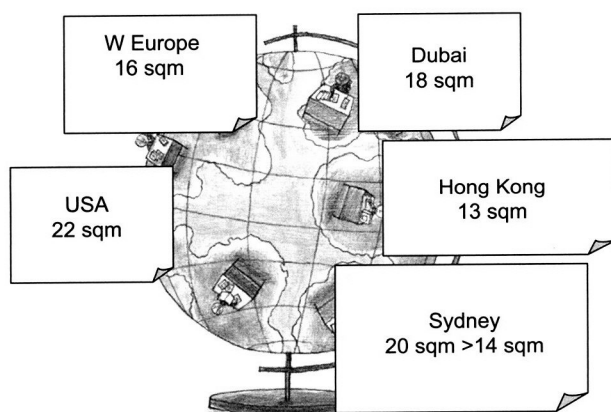


Figure 4.
Space utilisation per
workstation in 2004

However, very few companies currently have this luxury of choice – invariably, the chosen building already exists and the optimum workspace concept has to be compromised and adapted to suit the location.

Older buildings often have small lobbies and narrow corridors, low floor-ceiling heights, limited vertical shaft space, embedded ducts and cabling, minimal zones and localised controls – all of which restrict the flexibility required for effective space planning.

Facilities managers will find the following checklist of the attributes of “high-performance” buildings useful in assessing an existing building’s suitability for their specific workplace needs;

- *Integrated building* – there is a holistic relationship between the design, construction, use and maintenance of a building, with the cooperation of architects, engineers, maintainers and clients throughout the design and construction process.
- *Flexibility* – frequent alteration and renovation (churn) due to reorganisation, business restructuring and the introduction of new technology or changes in personnel must be easily and economically accommodated by the building. The floor plate size and layout is the primary factor, as well as the number of floors and access between them.
- *Technological innovations* – the building should be capable of integrating IT, telecoms, cabling and lighting innovations through advanced features such as improved raised floor systems, plug-and-play floor boxes for power, data, voice and fibre, modular and harnessed wiring, buses and conferencing hubs.
- *Safety, health and comfort* – the cost of salaries generally exceeds the lease and energy costs of a facility ten times over on a square foot basis. Therefore the health, safety and comfort of employees are of paramount concern, and by consequence, the provision of advanced features (such as individualised climate control which permits users to set their own, localised temperature, ventilation rate and air movement preferences) plus access to windows and a visually stimulating view, become increasingly important.
- *Energy efficiency* – high-efficiency lighting and controls, occupancy sensors and high-efficiency HVAC equipment (to minimise energy consumption) are all considerations in the world of “high performance” buildings. Renewable energy systems that are now available include building-generated electricity and solar thermal systems.
- *Cost-effectiveness* – building owners should strongly consider investing more initially, bearing in mind that savings will be made on long-term operations and maintenance, while also attracting longer-term tenants.
- *Sound construction and maintenance* – a comprehensive quality assurance plan should be an integral and ongoing process.

Space planning models and concepts

Duffy (1997), a leading authority in space management, devised an office model in the 1990s. This model provides a good basis for space planners today, and classifies workspaces into four discrete types, as typified by the footprints in Figure 5:

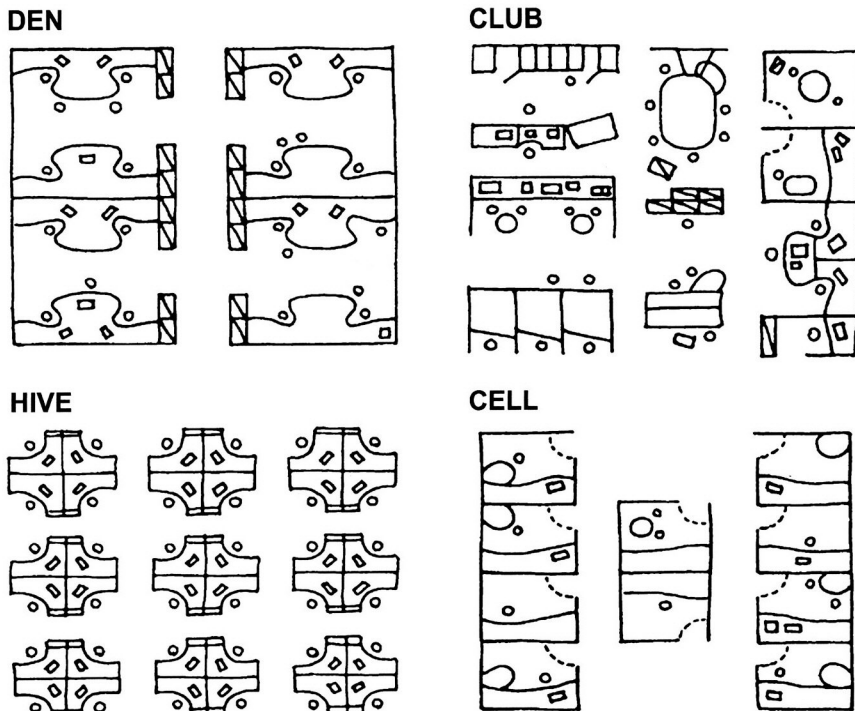


Figure 5.
The Duffy office model

- (1) Hive – individual processes
- (2) Cell – concentrated study (autonomy increases)
- (3) Den – group processes (interaction increases)
- (4) Club – transactional knowledge (autonomy and interaction increase)

In reality, the majority of companies are typically a dynamic mix of all four types, depending on factors such as job type, industry sectors, location, size of company and corporate culture.

Over the years, a comprehensive menu of space planning and utilisation concepts has been developed – designed to meet diverse individual and organisational needs, these space-planning models are characterised by size, form, function, boundaries and privacy, use of IT tools and the appropriate workplace systems, as shown in Table II.

They include: universal private offices and hoteling are at extreme ends of the space management options. Hoteling, in particular, has undergone a renaissance lately, with companies such as KPMG refreshing and re-applying the principles in their new corporate headquarters in the USA.

Flexibility is the significant trend and driving force in space planning

Group collaboration has become a reality in corporations today, driving an increased variety of group space. New office designs are encompassing more shared spaces with conference rooms and smaller private meeting rooms that accommodate the need for privacy or a quiet area for certain tasks, as people still need privacy.

Table II.
Flexibility. The new
approach to space
planning

Individuals		Groups	Out of office
Non-territorial	Territorial	Huddle spaces	Home office
Free-range	Assigned/owned workspace	Learning spaces	Virtual office
Hot offices/desks	Cubicles	Team spaces	Client site
Hoteling	Bullpens	Assigned/owned workspace	Satellite officing
Touch down areas	Enclosed/private office	Meeting rooms	Telecommuting
		Conference room	
		War room	
		Project rooms	
		Cave/commons	
		Club/cafe areas	

The non-territorial options offer some flexibility for staff churn and make economic sense as some companies find they can no longer afford to provide one desk per person (especially if it is likely to lie empty for long periods). However, the challenge facing facility managers is to create a flexible space that can seamlessly accommodate multiple modes of working.

Emerging product trends for the workplace

The inter-connected nature of today’s workplace has set the product development agenda for suppliers and designers of office space and technology. Furniture manufacturers are now re-thinking their products – primarily for collaborative use rather than for individual workspaces.

At Orgatec 2004, the CitySpace design team noted a number of new, emerging product trends for the next generation workplace, which were showcased by leading workplace systems and furniture manufacturers.

These included: modular systems with multi-tasking functionality, mobility and flexibility are a clear trend. Solutions that combine storage with soft seating and incorporate power and data connections in breakout area seating are among the new innovative solutions available today.

The major systems manufacturers have pared down their designs to cleaner, simpler lines. They have also focused on developing flexible partitioning systems that are easy to dismantle or move within the workplace, with glass and aluminum being the preferred choice of partitioning materials.

Collaboration appears to be the key driver of new products, with fully equipped, flexible desking solutions available for large teams of people. New solutions allow the individual physical space to be easily increased or decreased according to changing needs. Workstation tables and chairs have wheels so that they can be quickly and easily grouped together for team meetings. Furniture that has a more of a “residential” feel through design, materials and function is another current trend, with a resultant blurring of the boundaries between the home and office. Pioneering acoustical materials and sound-masking systems embedded within furniture or partitioning systems are further reducing office noise, allowing workers to better concentrate on their tasks.

In open or semi-open workspaces, the optimum balance between privacy and interaction can be achieved by creatively arranging mobile workstations and seating solutions. For example, a zigzag arrangement can minimise visual and acoustic

disturbances while allowing easy communication with colleagues through the simple movement of a chair.

Ergonomics and health are still high on the agenda, with fully adjustable chairs, desks that incorporate lift technology, keyboard trays with wrist supports and more products that incorporate adjustable flat screen technology appearing in the workplace.

Greater environmental awareness means that there is also an increased awareness of sustainability, and the result is an increase in the number of products that are manufactured from recycled materials.

Lighting solutions that enhance visibility between workstations and distinguish between private workstations and interactive social spaces are becoming more familiar features, also creating a feeling of natural daylight in areas where employees have no access to windows.

Cabling solutions for electronic data and telecommunications are being addressed by innovative, easily accessible flooring systems or through ceiling troughs. As teams regroup and evolve, essential IT and power supplies can easily be reconfigured in line with the new requirement. Cabling has also been incorporated into seating, further contributing to the emerging concept of workplace freedom; people are no longer confined to working solely from their traditional desk/workspace.

Inspiring workplaces – Sun Microsystems: iWork

Sun Microsystems (www.sun.com) has embraced its own vision and technologies to develop their award-winning iWork programme. Its principles are based on a combination of work environment, technology and best work practices that have been created to allow Sun's employees to work as effectively and productively as possible. iWork also aims to address the new realities that are changing working life. The objective is to improve employee productivity, optimise assets and resource utilisation, with the result a substantial reduction in costs and increased potential for long-term profitability.

Through iWork, as shown in Figure 6, workspace options are multiple to meet appropriate work practice needs, which include:

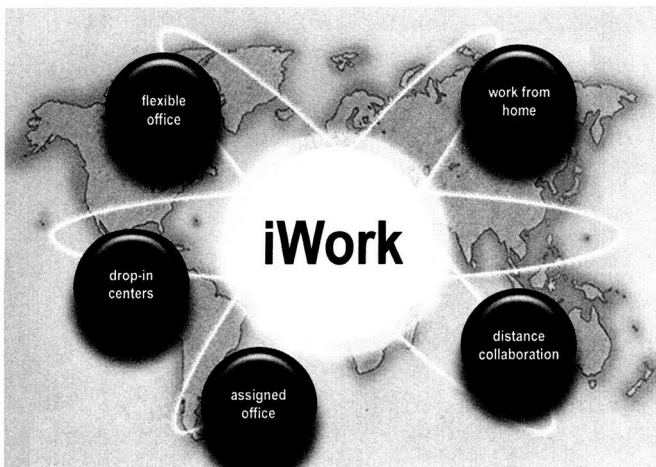


Figure 6.
The iWork
principles–Sun
Microsystems

Flexible offices and zones – workspace can be pre-reserved via a network tool, which also helps flexible workers locate co-workers and resources.

Drop-in centres – unassigned workspaces. See Plate 1.

Assigned offices – the traditional approach of “one individual, one office” is still used for permanent-basis workers.

Group collaborative workspaces – informal group space and conference rooms with enhanced technology.

Work from home – iWork technology offers the capability of using the very latest in “distance collaboration” tools and practices. Sun’s internal research reveals that up to 33 per cent of employees do not badge into assigned locations on any given day – they may be at a customer location, travelling or working from home, and rely on mobile communication technology to keep them connected.

Work and business process

Personal organisation, familiarity with (and the correct use of) shared resource protocols, remote management skills and distance collaboration are key skills that today’s knowledge worker must acquire and put into practice for the total work infrastructure to integrate seamlessly.

Supporting business processes are the backbone to any infrastructure, especially in the new knowledge worker era. Evolving and dynamic, these include work profiling, user surveys, self-assessment surveys and effective internal communications, all of which help identify the solutions that are most appropriate for individual workers or groups.

“People today work primarily in teams and ‘virtual teams’ that may include colleagues in different buildings, different time zones, and even different continents – the new workplace has to reflect that – in both facilities and management” says Scott McNealy, CEO, Sun.

iWork has created a whole new set of terminology that relates to the work environment;



Plate 1.
The touchdown area
allows employees to
quickly access information

Flexible office design – Sun Microsystems optimises the use of space and technology and supports all employees by matching their work tasks to the appropriate work setting.

Personal storage – provided for employees working on a flexible basis near to the workspace. See Plate 2.

Dynamic workplace – designed to allow focus on collaborative work and connections between people, wherever they are located in the world.

Commons – spaces for both formal and informal meetings are provided and can include games, refreshments areas and drop-in workspaces – they are designed to provide a contrast to the quiet areas.

Neighborhood – quiet, discreet areas are designated for employees to engage in focused work.

Customer area – client areas that include multimedia messaging, AV facilities and hospitality features.

Group workspace – multi-use workspaces that support a wide range of collaborative work.

Wayfinding – effective building orientation systems are critical to the success of flexible office design, and essential elements that aid easy navigation in the building include space layout, kiosks to reserve workspace, signage, maps and interior design features.

The iWork design brief

The design element application uses a number of adjectives to describe the desired interior image in all Sun buildings; casual – comfortable – dynamic – economical –

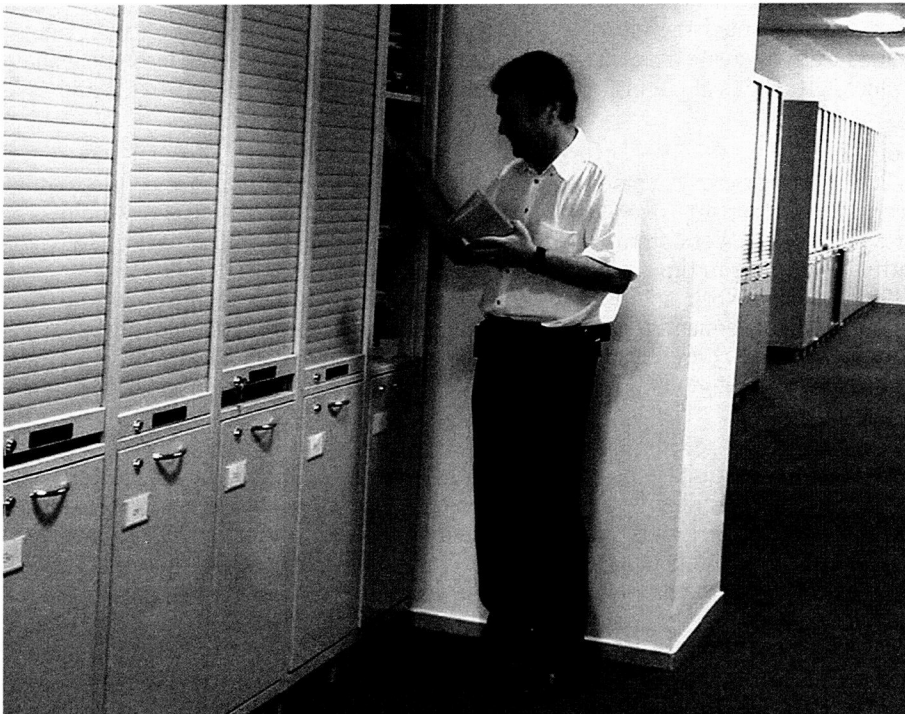


Plate 2.
Personal storage helps
maintain a clutter-free
environment

efficient – functional – light non-corporate – savvy – simple forms – stimulating – timeless – understated.

The main objective is to create a comfortable, convivial and visually interesting work environment through the imaginative use of functional planning, straightforward interior design and durable application of finishes with a focus on economy and functionality that has strong synergy with Sun's corporate image.

The development of architectural elements that make space layout, hierarchy of circulation and building configuration obvious to users as a means of way-finding, reflects the iWork principles of providing a functional efficient workplace that will ultimately help improve productivity.

Sun Microsystems regional headquarters, Dubai, UAE

CitySpace was appointed by Sun Microsystems in 2003 to undertake a pre-lease occupancy study and consultancy, concept design, space planning, detail design and project management.

Sun's new Middle East regional headquarters is based in Dubai internet City, a purpose-built business park and free zone, which provides state-of-the art buildings and facilities specifically for IT companies. CitySpace followed the company's iWork strategy, allowing over 100 employees to access a secure hot-desk environment, and to leverage available workstations and conference rooms via Java smart-cards.

The new office, in which less than 5 per cent of employees have fixed desks or offices, also features a Java laboratory and interactive demonstration environment for partners and customers.

CitySpace adapted the global iWork guidelines in close collaboration with Sun's facilities team to create a warm, spacious and harmonious working environment that also took specific local cultural requirements into consideration. See Plates 3 and 4.

iWork facts

By 2004, Sun Microsystems had rolled out over 70 "Flexible Office" locations worldwide, supporting over half of the 35,000 + employees, 2,000 employees registered in the "Work from Home" programme, while 5,000 chose to use "Drop-in Centres" from time to time.

Through its iWork solutions, Sun has "saved" 4,000 seats within its current portfolio and subsequently, real estate holdings have been reduced. Operating costs were cut by US \$71 million in 2002, and estimated to be US \$180 million as the programme rolls out globally, with a further US \$2.8 million has been saved in power.

The benefits

iWork offers the flexibility to work in multiple locations to improve access to partners and customers. Unproductive time is effectively reduced and a better work/life balance can be achieved. iWork puts Sun Microsystems' core products into action, which can not only positively influence customer and shareholder perceptions, but also allows employees to utilise the products they are developing and marketing on a daily basis.

And the challenges

iWork is a radical altering of traditional work-styles for many employees, and some have expressed concern over a lack of "soul" due to the higher ratio of unassigned desks.



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Plate 3.
The main reception area is
the hub of the workplace

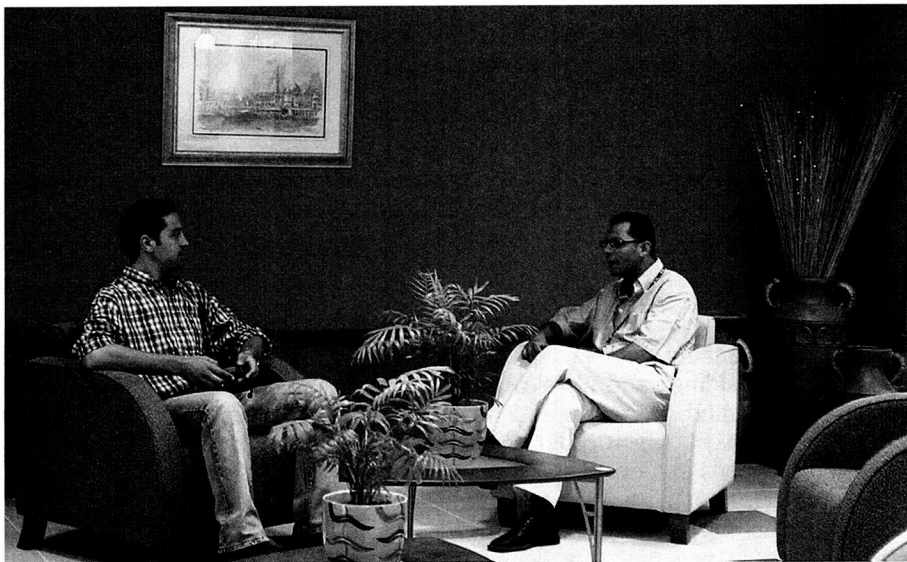


Plate 4.
A comfortable breakout
area provides the ideal
setting for informal
discussion and relaxation

For example, it is more difficult to keep personal belongings (such as photographs) in shared workspaces. Other issues that have arisen include having to remember to book a workspace at least two days in advance, and personal storage that can sometimes be far away from the actual working area.

Facilities managers have also taken on additional challenges – they are charged with streamlining, maintaining and updating a more complex set of facilities standards.

Some experts in human relations have expressed concerns that pushing iWork too far will erode interoffice relationships and create feelings of job insecurity, which are somewhat at odds with the increased productivity iWork aims to achieve. While IT and the internet enable effective communication, the human factor is becoming increasingly important in today's workplace.

Applying iWork principles within other companies

The use of IT in work practice and communication is the main driver behind the successful implementation and running of iWork practices. For some companies in other industries the investment in specialised IT product and re-training of the entire workforce is a limiting factor.

The nature of business and industry sector also influence the space planning approach – IT companies are adopting the iWork style of working, but pharmaceutical companies still often opt for a cellular scheme, and private offices are still the norm within legal organisations. For others, the main issue is the radical change of work-style, which may not integrate well within the corporate culture.

CitySpace has found that many clients have taken inspiration and ideas from the iWork guidelines, adapting certain elements within their workplace. Clients are also embracing open plan workspaces that incorporate multiple zones for formal/informal meetings, the use of flexible workstations, and a home-feel in breakout areas in keeping with corporate standards. The cosmopolitan workforce and local culture in the Middle East means that face-to-face communication always has, and always will, be paramount in business relationships.

Space planning: addressing the challenges

Good space planning and design will stem from business trends that influence work-style, such as knowledge-sharing, collaborative work, a flattened hierarchy, employee churn, increased mobility and technology innovations and tools.

These key influencing factors need to perfectly synchronise with best work practice to achieve success, and work process has become the major factor influencing workplace design today.

Core elements of the workplace

People

The first step in planning space is to focus on the employees' needs, i.e. the occupants rather than the buildings and physical space. Careful planning takes into account company structure and operations, vital employee input and feedback plus the new ways that people work which could positively impact the organisation, as well as customers perceptions and expectations.

Managing and training people to work in different ways, whether it be remotely, in a collaborative setting or with new technologies is also a primary consideration, and requires facilities managers to consider change management.

Collaboration

Individual workspaces are shrinking in importance as well as in size, as collaborative spaces become a greater proportion of the total workspace in the office. Activities like creative work, tasks requiring concentration and communications all have different optimum environmental conditions – and these might also further vary according to the preferences of the staff.

According to some management theorists, successful groups are what create successful organizations, and teams will build their group relationships more effectively within their own space. Therefore, a space plan that incorporates multiple “soft areas” within each team’s area will be conducive to thriving teams.

Work process

The objective of the physical workplace is to support the work processes that originate from best practices. Job function and roles will diminish in importance compared to how people work, work patterns, with whom they work and what tools will be used to support the work.

Corporate image

The corporate vision may need to be re-analysed and re-defined before being translated into design solutions, which will represent current and future company needs. With increasing frequency, company culture, with its inherent its priorities and values, will be reflected in the design and layout of the workplace. Corporate culture and the messages communicated about the organisation to employees and customers alike are best represented by the physical workplace.

Many companies wave their web site as the major corporate flag, yet the workplace touches all five of the human senses beyond the powers of the internet, and corporate image is strongly interconnected with the power of human motivation.

Beyond the workplace boundaries

The workplace is not just restricted to the physical walls of an office. The influence of the view, access, parking and leisure facilities all impact on the overall space planning process. Facilities lacking within the building location need to be compensated for within the office environment to meet employee expectations. The solution can often be as simple as a vending machine, though to the provision of recreation facilities or a health club.

Cost versus productivity

Thinking beyond workstation allocation and representation of the corporate image through design and colour to a pre-determined budget is the key to effective space planning. People need different types of surroundings depending on the specific activity they are engaged in at any given time, and they need to be able to change that space when the activity changes.

More flexible space is needed to bring out the best from our workers, and many of these new concepts can actually reduce floor space requirements. Budget constraints means some companies may recycle existing workplace systems that do not conform to new work-style requirements. However, a greater initial investment at the outset may well be offset in terms of increased motivation and employee productivity.

Companies should perhaps start to think about revenue per square foot instead of cost per square foot.

Elements that should be taken into consideration in the space planning process – a checklist

- What is the nature of the business and is it appropriately reflected in the workplace?
- Does the workplace meet the immediate and long-term business strategies, operating procedures and work processes?
- Are the client-facing areas communicating the right message?
- Does the environment project the appropriate image for the business?
- What are the specific types of work people engage in?
- Can people think strategically in the workspace?
- Does the environment support people – is there enough light, air quality, sound, physical space?
- Is the workspace and furniture ergonomic, healthy and comfortable?
- Is the right balance of privacy and open space achieved, as per individual and group work?
- Is the infrastructure and workspace efficient?
- Is communication and workflow effective?
- What are the technologies and tools being employed?
- Are appropriate leisure facilities provided to meet the blurring work/life boundaries?
- Are there going to be major work-style changes, resulting in re-training programmes?
- Have employees been adequately involved in the space planning process – through surveys and ongoing feedback?
- Most importantly, is the workplace flexible and future-proofed?

In other words, over the next five or ten years, will the workplace stand the test of time?

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