EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES TO CO-CREATE WORKSPACE

A NEW APPROACH THAT EMPOWERS EMPLOYEES TO CO-CREATE THEIR WORK-SPACE MAY OFFER THE KEY TO INCREASING JOB SATISFACTION, EFFECTIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY ACROSS MULTIPLE INDUSTRIES.

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"If you want to design a workspace to attract and retain talent, you need to understand what that talent values. Do they value autonomy, work-life integration, trust, sustainability, team work, privacy, or even fun? Workspaces can be designed for all these things. In addition, successful workspace supports employees' tasks and increases their effectiveness."

R ecently published by Schiavello and co-authored by Keti Malkoski and Dr. Jacqueline Vischer, who have backgrounds in applied psychology, The Power of Workspace for People and Business emphasises the importance of incorporating employees' experience.

"There is an implicit 'deal' between employee and employer that gives workspace its symbolic power. We call this agreement the 'sociospatial contract'," say Dr Vischer.

The book explains how employees' functional comfort can be measured and the results applied to workspace strategy and change.

Workers are the experts on performing their jobs. The authors argue that this knowledge capital can be usefully applied to creating the spaces where they perform their jobs.

"If you want to design a workspace to attract and retain talent, you need to understand what that talent values," says Malkoski. "Do they value autonomy, work-life integration, trust, sustainability, team work, privacy, or even fun? Workspaces can be designed for all these things. In addition, successful workspace supports employees' tasks and increases their effectiveness."

Based on surveys of employee needs and values, Australia Post redesigned its Sydney headquarters. The result saw the successful transformation of a traditional office building into an open environment with shared spaces for collaboration, meeting and focused work.

"Our business is all about connecting people and supporting their communication needs," says Australia Post chief operating officer Ewen Stafford. "We wanted to create an environment that would facilitate connections – both within the building and with the surrounding community."

That integral sense of community and connection was augmented by a new glazed atrium, foyer, café and meeting places around the entrance of the Cleveland street building.

"Workspaces need to promote communities and connect people," say the authors. "They also need to foster feelings of belonging and purpose. They must also support the range of tasks that people are doing and tools that they use."

The authors' experience has taught them that in all organisations, incorporating the psychology of workspace is a primary factor in the successful workspace change.
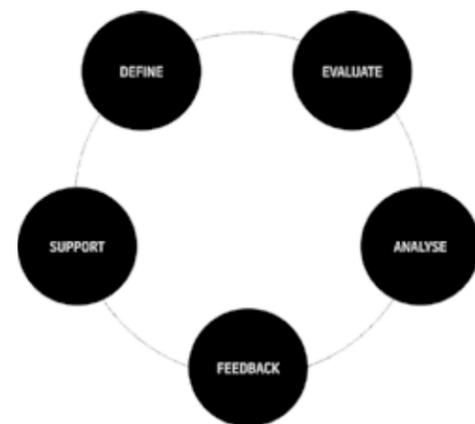
FIVE KEY TRENDS IN WORKSPACE STRATEGY AND CHANGE

Sit-stand work points and retreat spaces are among five key trends named by the authors of a new book on workspace strategy and change in Australia published by Schiavello.

Authors Keti Malkoski and Jacqueline Vischer have backgrounds in Applied Psychology. Their book points to five major workspace trends that respond to the changing nature of work.

1. Furniture That Encourages Movement
An increasing amount of evidence links prolonged sedentary behaviours at work to chronic back pain and more serious illnesses, as well as to psychological stress.

Mobile and flexible working trends, in addition to sit-stand work points, encourage people and teams to get out of their seats and move around during the day, leading to improved health and wellbeing.

"Movement is a key to better health and improved effectiveness at work," say the authors.

2. Chameleon Furniture: Adapting Space To Tasks
Workspace furniture that is flexible and can be customised allows teams working on different projects to set up the best possible work environments – when they are empowered to do so.

"Employees are more satisfied when they have some control and choice over their workspace, which also improves team morale," say the authors.

3. Degrees Of Separation: Spaces For Teamwork Focus And Retreat
The trend of blending open-plan workspace with other areas for concentrated work now includes provision for relaxation, reflection and rejuvenation.

Dubbed 'serenity spaces' in the US, these retreat spaces allow workers to quieten minds that get clogged by multi-media multi-tasking.

"Modern workers need privacy and respite from media overload," say the authors.

"Companies spend a lot of money on surveys before ICT upgrades and are now realising the same benefits apply to redesigning workspaces,"

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"At work we see this manifested both physically and psychologically. Employees experience stress when in an adversarial relationship with noise, furniture, privacy and other design elements. Stress is costly to organisations and can be avoided by designing environments that support work."

BOTTOM: Part of the Singapore Indesign Intimate 2015 two-day event saw Schiavello Principal – People and Culture, Keti Malkoski, participate in 'Design Conversations', where she joined a panel of industry leaders for 'Work Life: The Culture of Workplace Strategy' discussion.

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4. Employee Feedback For Workspace Change
Every business and work environment has different design needs which change as technology evolves

Surveys that collate employee feedback on workspace needs are increasingly popular as a tool for cost-effective investment in design.

"The book discusses how to measure functional comfort as a method for diagnosing how well workspace supports workers' tasks" say the authors.

"Companies spend a lot of money on surveys before ICT upgrades and are now realising the same benefits apply to redesigning workspaces," say the authors.

Employee feedback has already been adopted by many leading organisations.

Engineering firm Norman Disney and Young found measurable benefits after a workspace redesign based on employee feedback.

5. Design For Different Needs And Values
Different organisations do different types of work that need to be supported by different types of space.

Standardisation is not always a cost-effective approach to workspace design – one size does not fit all.

"Knowing the values of your employees is crucial to good workspace design," say the authors.

"If you want to design a workspace to attract and retain talent, you need to understand what those people value. Do they value autonomy, work-life balance, trust, sustainability, team work, or even fun?"

"Knowing how they work ensures supportive workspace design and greater employee effectiveness" say the authors.

WHY OUR PHYSICAL WORKING ENVIRONMENTS ARE THE KEY TO HEALTH, WEALTH AND HAPPINESS

"Design is more than aesthetics; it has a direct impact on how we feel, think and behave at work. When executed strategically, workspace design provides relief, ease and renewal," says Malkoski.

"At work we see this manifested both physically and psychologically. Employees experience stress when in an adversarial relationship with noise, furniture, privacy and other design elements. Stress is costly to organisations and can be avoided by designing environments that support work."

Many types of work, particularly office work, are characterised by less physical activity and more time in front of a computer. The average office worker spends 80 per cent of their work hours sitting, and it is estimated that people spend around 80,000 hours (or nine years) seated over the course of their working life.

"Sedentary behaviours are associated with a range of negative health outcomes including musculoskeletal disorders, cardiovascular disease and diabetes caused by repetitive overuse. Such disorders make up 44 percent of compensation cases and account for 15-22 percent of workplace sick leave in Australia," says Professor David Dunstan, Head of the Physical Activity laboratory at Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute.

Alfred Health has led research into the perceived health benefits, as well as the practical application, of sit-stand workstations with positive results.

"More than 100 employees at Alfred Health received a sit-stand workstation and after 12 weeks, average sitting time was already reduced from 91% of the working day to 54%. Staff noted multiple benefits, including improved health and wellbeing, greater concentration or focus, greater productivity, reduced pain and discomfort
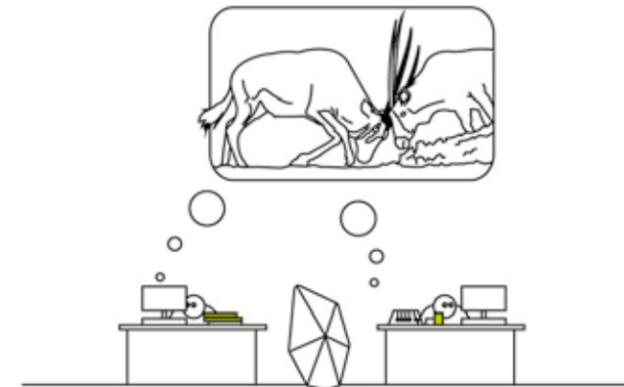
and reduced fatigue," says Alfred Health's Lead for Population Health & Health Promotion, Kirstan Corben.

Broader building design can also offer more mobility to occupants by activating transitional spaces – such as accessible stairs and attractive circulation paths – and providing fitness rooms and classes.

Employers are exploring ways to encourage physical activity both by integrating furniture such as sit-stand workstations that encourage posture change and through workspace layouts that encourage mobility.

For example, health and wellbeing can be improved by strategies such as brainstorming sessions on whiteboards and collaborative workspaces where participants stand.

The Power of Workspace for People and Business provides a guide to implementing successful workspace change. The process involves senior management buy-in, employee input and the implementation of policies and procedures that support dynamic work practices.

"We have found workspace change management and 'co-creation' with employee participation to be an essential component of successful workspace,' say the authors.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS
Keti Malkoski is an organisational psychologist who has consulted to many of the largest companies in Australia in the areas of workspace strategy and change. She is currently Principal – People and Culture at Schiavello.

Dr Jacqueline Vischer is an environmental psychologist and world expert on workplace psychology and design. She has written more than six books, taught at major universities in Canada and the US and advised governments and corporations around the world on workspace design, change and productivity.