



Workplace Strategies: Understand the Evolution, Anticipate the Future

Essay by DeLinda Forsythe July 2016 – V1

The workplace of today is radically different from years past where grey, beige and dehumanizing panels encouraged a relentless pursuit of productivity. Workspaces now are full of whimsy, color, fun and extravagances. As the sharing economy has evolved, employees share massive long tables. Costs for furniture and required square feet per person have radically been reduced. Employers want their people to build strong personal relationships with co-workers and stay at work long hours as part of their life style. They go to great lengths to build the most absorbing and enchanting corporate culture possible.

Finding, attracting, retaining talent is the largest driver in today's workplace. Talent is what will take a company to the next level; it's critical to propel a company. The competition is stiff. The built environment has evolved to be one of the most influential and impactful factors to the success of a company. It not only has a profound effect on where we work, it affects how and why we chose to work for a specific company in the first place. All aspects of the physical environment have taken center stage.

History has shown that northern California leads the nation in workplace design followed by southern California, than spreads to the rest of the US. The workplace trends that we saw in northern California offices of Facebook, Google, Apple, even Goldman Sachs, helped to define that region. With fierce competition for talent, companies conceived and designed spaces that would attract the best tech personnel.

Greg Horowitz, venture capitalist and innovation ecosystem architect, projected in 2012 in his bestselling book, 'the Rainforest: the Secret to Building the Next Silicon Valley' that San Diego had the critical social, educational and structural elements to be a successful innovation ecosystem; in essence "to be the next Silicon Valley". We are seeing clear signs from companies relocating to San Diego from Silicon Valley to the increase in the number of start-ups to the opening of a Google office.

If employees are your most valuable asset and creating an environment that attracts and retains employees is imperative, what elements are being effectively employed? One successful solution is to create a residential feel to the space; a space where people feel they belong, where they are valued, where relationships naturally evolve into a feeling of kinship. When a company designs an atmosphere that is this familiar, friendly, personal, comfortable, it reduces boundaries and increases communication leading to breakthrough discoveries and increased productivity. That's when you build a super glue culture. The distinction between work and non-work environs has become invisible; this outcome was only inevitable.

We are defined by our work for the obvious reasons but also because our work makes an impact on society. The Millennials are putting the quality of their work output and its impact on society at the forefront; it's imperative that our spaces reflect and enable them and us to excel. In 2013 MIT Professor Bill Aulet quoted an update to Peter Drucker's "culture eats strategy for breakfast" by adding "and operational excellence for lunch and everything else for dinner". **Culture dominates** but it's not just the space and place but the programs a company implements by enlightened leadership.

"Helping People Win at Work" is Ken Blanchard and WD-40 CEO Garry Ridge's new book. WD-40 employees are called Tribal Members lead by Tribal Leaders. Teams are all about winning. A tribe is a richer concept; it evokes family, community and membership. Collaborative cultures thrive with the workplace evolution and conversely, collaborative cultures are born and evolve in these bionetworks.



It all starts with great design. Design is influencing everything, it's a major driver in established and start up corporate ecosystems. Design needs to include spaces for introverts and extroverts, it is continually evolving and it must allow unprecedented future flexibility.

Companies are not just hiring a designer, they are hiring a **workplace strategist** that seamlessly navigates between functionality in a balanced environment to maintaining affordability with an ability to anticipate and understand upcoming trends and their influence on the built environment.

The top three crimes against productivity are lack of temperature control, not enough meeting spaces and as varied meeting spaces and nowhere to go for quiet, focus work. Every aspect of the space influences the ability to innovate, increase productivity. It's judicious to incorporate non-sedentary design that encourages activity from standing or walking to connecting. Design must be inclusive to all, think unisex bathrooms.

There are four considerations of space for knowledge work:

1. Focus work
2. Collaboration
3. Learning
4. Socialization

Collaboration has taken center stage but it's Focus that is #1 in importance. This is not a repudiation of Collaboration, but an embracing of Focus. 55% of work is Focus work and in a recent Workplace Performance Index was rated by 88% of respondents to be critical.

Who you are collaborating with is more important than where but how you collaborate is equally significant and includes formal, informal spaces, passive and virtual observation. Spaces that offer this have experienced a 20% increase in productivity. To realize what your company needs, spend time observing staff working, take notes, how do they engage as individuals and with each other? Make this an immersive experience and if time allows, design, plan and install your solution in advance to "test drive" prior to implementing it for the entire company. For instance, install a few sit stand desk top or desk units and observe if they're used. Install lounge areas and see if it encourages collaboration. Test it before implementing companywide.

Employers must create interactive and reactive environments and the intent has to be embraced by the company and ownership / management to be systemically and effectively embraced culturally. If employees see managers relaxing, using the foosball table, they'll follow suit and know it's encouraged.

Today's furniture must allow the end user flexibility to move their desks to block or access lighting, increase visual or auditory privacy, adjust table and work surface height, reduce or increase access to other staff, etc. In order to maximize human capacity for invention and innovation, furniture requires an unprecedented freedom to modify space; not one size fits all.

Furniture that offers a more natural look such as "live edge" wood slabs integrated into all areas of the office, especially public areas, is especially impactful. People want an emotional connection to their space and "live edge" natural wood provides that link to nature, offering a personal meaning to not only the material (think redwood or burl walnut trees) but to the craftsman that handmade that piece. To quote Gensler:



The revival of craft resembles the Arts and Crafts Movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Craft in the 21st century is a counterpoint to digitized life. People want to find personal meaning in products by linking them to their makers, artists, and artisans. They look for evidence of craft as handwork. In parallel, there is a renewed interest in making, often with the ambition of finding markets for handmade goods. By emphasizing local production as a sign of authenticity, small-scale producers are enjoying wider appeal.

Accelerating and leading this movement to authenticity are millennials. In 2016 – 25% of managers are now millennials. There are 80 million millennials currently in the workforce in the US, they are the majority and have had an enormous impact on the workplace of today. Millennials are not as concerned with brands as much as they are with authenticity. They have instigated a major movement back to the natural which includes materials in their most raw form, plants, natural lighting. The general design aesthetic of the space must address the “naturalness” or authenticity of the environment. The furniture must complement and enhance the design of the architecture. The architecture must be flexible with sliding and movable walls, raised floors and multi-functional with more glass and increased visibility. Facebook’s new corporate headquarters is very free of adornment, it’s 430,000 square feet of completely open space, designed to “foster the free exchange of ideas”. Its understated cost effective design is more indicative of a startup than a mega-corporation.

Today’s employee is looking for “an experience” in all aspects of their lives, including the work place. Products and spaces need to focus on “user experience” which is sensitive to the desires of the user. Design needs to engage all senses including sound, smells, and the personal energy of the space which involves feng shui.

Recent WPI report in 2014 with over 90,000 respondents surveyed found that 89% of companies believe the customer experience (internal/external customer) will be the primary basis for competition compared to 36% in 2010 – this is a major shift.

In 2015 20% of start-ups had spaces designed with these trends, 2016 is already seeing 36% are designing this way, it’s not a fad. The next generation of workplace needs to be more engaging, offering multiple work zones, more focused on the “wellbeing” of the individual. More focused on biophilic design, an innovative way of designing the places where we live, work, and learn. We need nature in a deeply fundamental fashion. We need to feel we are embracing nature while not degrading the environment and minimizing our long term impact.

Not surprisingly, the move towards Wellness Certification is the focus of the wellbeing and happiness of the employee. Delos and Mayo Clinic have collaborated to create the Well Living Lab™. It’s the first scientific research center committed to researching the real-world impact of the indoor environment in relationship to health and well-being.

Experts from a wide range of scientific, medical and technical backgrounds use exclusively human-centered research to understand the interaction between health, well-being and indoor environments; offering an unprecedented degree of control over research variables through a modular, reconfigurable space that simulates a wide variety of real-world environments.

They leverage and expand upon the principles of the WELL Building Standard™, which sets performance requirements in seven concepts relevant to indoor health: air, water, nourishment, light, fitness, comfort and mind.



Americans spend more than 90% of their time indoors. Buildings and everything in them can affect human health. The purpose of the Well Living Lab is to study these indoor environments and foster the creation of healthier indoor spaces in which we live, work and play.

Outdoor spaces are a natural extension of indoor spaces and more than ever, we need to offer all the amenities and abilities of indoor spaces outdoors for efficient work to happen, especially in San Diego. We must capitalize on our outdoor areas. Outdoor space = the new workplace. One developer in Sorrento Valley is adding “tree houses” to existing buildings with glass walls and ceilings to more fully engage nature.

Amenity spaces are paramount to the success of a space. Creating spaces with high amenities must include hospitality design and furniture since work zone spaces are blurred together with personal time activities to include: squash courts, lap pools, golf simulators, gymnasiums, coffee shops, beer drinking and wine tasting rooms, pubs, grocery stores, deli and restaurants, interactive outdoor areas, nap zones, yoga and meditation rooms, lactation rooms, daycare and pet care facilities, retail, laundry and dry cleaning services. These are increasingly becoming highly normal in most workspaces.

Today’s offices are being designed for people to WANT to come to work to share a positive experience in a stimulating office with management that knows and values them.

Right behind the Millennials are Gen Z, Centennials, Post Millennials, all titles coined for this emerging group. Born 1994 -2010, around the turn of the century, Gen Z entered the workplace in 2016. They are 23% of the population. Centennials are growing up with a less idealistic and more pragmatic edge. They’re facing situations that the Millennials didn’t have to deal with until early adulthood, and as a result, Centennials are growing up more savvy, in graver times when everybody doesn’t win and when choices are limited and success is harder to come by. They are more resilient, less idealistic and more serious than Millennials. They are focused on integrity and financial stability. They are even more connected with tech than Millennials using mobile devices on average 17 hours per day. Digital is in their DNA, not for social networking but for searching for content. 45% of Centennials believe working with boomers will be challenging.

From Greg Horowitz’s website: Rainforest Strategies ***Human Potential:** We are driven to cultivate the full potential for good in every person. ***Prosperity:** We are driven to improve prosperity in families, organizations and communities. ***Sustainability:** We are driven to help organizations and individuals innovate because we believe organizations must generate economic, social, and environmental sustainability. ***Capacity:** We are driven to help people get better at solving problems and achieving their dreams. ***Velocity:** We are driven to accelerate the pace of these improvements

This is why more than ever; we need to understand the significance of our built environment and its impact on not only attracting and retaining talent but its ability to attract entire companies to come to San Diego.