



10 COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT WORKSPACES
KARDHAM



SUMMARY



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Definitions

Since the 2020 health crisis, the topic of the working environments has been in the spotlight more than ever. At a time when workplaces are less utilized with the development of home office, real estate is at the heart of corporate strategy for several reasons. On one hand, the decline in the number of people using workplaces means that we need to look at the quantitative ratio between the amount of space available and the actual space needed for the occupants. On the other hand, the high cost of real estate means that supply has to be adjusted, as it is unacceptable to use partially empty square meters. However, this quantitative dimension is tricky to deal with, since an excess of area generates unnecessary costs, while a lack of area results in a shortage of resources that employees need to work. Furthermore, with employee presence now varying from one week to the next, with peaks and lows in occupancy, it becomes difficult to find the right size. On the other hand, changes in the way people work - or hybrid work, to use the accepted term - are leading to a need for a more qualitative approach to space planning. Workspaces now have to respond to a level of use that is based much more on interaction needs. Spatial functionalities must therefore

satisfy this collaborative dimension. The design and operation of office space is so complex that it is difficult to get a clear picture of the situation. It is all the more difficult to be clear-sighted because of the preconceived ideas held by professionals in the sector and by employees. Participating in the transformation of organizations on the basis of preconceived ideas is unsatisfactory, and yet the various players involved in the transformation are subjected to them and/or feed them, even though those very preconceived ideas do not stand up to the academic literature. The aim of this white paper is to take a nuanced look at some of these preconceived ideas, rather than taking a Manichean approach. The misconceptions selected here are frequently spread around, and we will examine them to identify what is valid and what is less. Readers will find that these pages provide food for thought, which will naturally need to be considered in each context.



« Since the health crisis, the topic of workspaces has been the subject of much debate, and the least we can say is that many of those involved in this transformation, first and foremost organizations and their employees, are at a loss. We offer this summary with the aim of raising awareness of the need to take a step back when dealing with workspace issues. Giving in to widely-held trends and spreading preconceived notions about the harmful effects of certain types of layout - sometimes justified, often exaggerated - is not very relevant.

The ultimate aim is therefore to arrive at the idea that, beyond macro-trends and the cause-and-effect relationships that are often too easily put forward, only a contextual approach based on serious literature and thoroughly analyzed feedback from experience will enable us to think properly about the future of working environments. »

Nicolas Cochard
R&D Director at Kardham

**5 preconceived ideas
maintained by professionals
in charge of transformation**

In-house and external workplace experts are regularly bombarded with professional literature that is full of preconceived ideas. Employees are promised a bright future. And yet, the speeches are sometimes based on preconceived ideas held among professionals, which become almost truths because they have been read several times, on social networks for example. Furthermore, it's easy for trends to spread the word, while giving the impression that we're moving towards ever more modernity, which is never clearly defined. This first part examines some of these preconceived ideas in order to draw lessons from them.





PRECONCEIVED IDEAS



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Taking down partitions encourages communication and collaboration

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Tomorrow's offices will be exclusively collective



01


Taking down partitions encourages communication and collaboration

Over the last few decades, workspaces tended to embrace a more open-plan concept, leading to the gradual disappearance of enclosed individual offices, even though they still exist in many companies. Removing partitions is promoted as a means of facilitating communication and collaboration. It goes without saying that it is also, and above all, an economic choice because it saves space. The cause-and-effect relationship between the removal of partitions and people's ability to communicate and collaborate have never really been established. Furthermore, it's never quite clear what type of communication is involved. Is the aim to increase interaction quantitatively or qualitatively? The available studies struggle to show that opening up spaces leads to more interaction. If anything, the opposite has been put forward, with behavior becoming more sterile in open spaces. As space influences behavior, exposure to others tends to reduce interaction. By virtue of the principle of proxemics*, interaction situations are facilitated when the interaction is chosen in an environment that we control, whereas openness exposes us to others. This is why the open space environment has never been favorable to stimulating interaction, as it tends to inhibit its occupants, in a perfectly natural reflex.




Since it has not been proven that interaction is facilitated by opening up spaces, the idea is to design, alongside open workspaces, areas that will satisfy the occupants' need for privacy* des occupants. In these diversified spaces, interaction will be chosen and the feeling of control* regained.

What does research say?



This study, carried out on the Novartis campus in Basel, is based on the observation of face-to-face communication over 120 hours in two zones - open spaces and cellular offices - with more than 2,000 exchanges recorded. The researchers observed a threefold increase in interactions in the open office, although they also noted a decrease in the duration of exchanges (3min vs. 9min) and an increase in the amount of time without communication (29% vs. 5%).

R. Boutellier, F. Ullman, J. Schreiber, R. Naef, Impact of office layout on communication in a science-driven business, R&D Management, 2008.



This study examines the generally accepted premise that open-plan office design facilitates communication and interaction while promoting job satisfaction and effective teamwork, despite the many disadvantages this entails. The analysis is based on a subset of the post-occupancy evaluation by CBE's (Center for the Built Environment) database in Berkeley namely 42,764 samples collected since 2000 in 303 office buildings of different occupancy types. The researchers found that distraction by noise and loss of privacy are the two main causes of dissatisfaction in open spaces, and that the ease of communication and interaction in open spaces does not compensate the negative impacts of noise and lack of privacy.

J. Kim, R. Dear, Workspace satisfaction: The privacy-communication trade-off in open-plan offices, Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2013

02

Open spaces boost creativity and serendipity

Serendipity* is a term frequently used by those involved in transforming workspaces. Serendipity refers to the emergence of an idea with high added value, suddenly brought about by an impromptu encounter facilitated by the layout. From a spatial determinism*, open-plan workspaces encourage boost activity in both formal and informal circumstances. However, not all office workers are destined to be creative, and this promise implies some form of elitism. The cause-and-effect relationships between spatial characteristics and creativity have not been demonstrated. The physical space may provide satisfactory conditions for being creative, but it is much more the human environment that prevails. Beautiful creativity rooms at the heart of authoritarian management will probably see few new ideas emerge. Besides, isn't there a confusion between creativity, ideation, problem-solving and social support? In other words, the space can help to facilitate the exchange of ideas, and this is perhaps what is meant by creativity, since it is rarely defined. But open spaces tend to inhibit occupants. What's more, it's not certain that a creativity room booked for a specific time slot in advance is really conducive to creativity. Fortunately, creativity in the workplace has not waited for the design of 'inspiring' spaces with their supposed 'wow' effect before constructive ideas emerge.



The spaces most conducive to creativity are often informal ones, where unexpected exchanges take place, and an organization has everything to gain from promoting these spaces, as well as the informal times that are ultimately beneficial to it. This completes a varied spatial offer that puts occupants in different cognitive dispositions, depending on the spaces used, which can facilitate ideation and creative exchange.

What does research say?



This two-year applied research project examines the literature, followed by field studies, on the design and management of workspaces intended for interaction, creativity and innovation. Surveys were carried out in the offices of five organizations through the WorkWareCONNECT program. The researchers found that being creative is more closely linked to organizational culture, and that a lot of creative thinking takes place alone. They also note that the quantity and quality of space are important and that the physical conditions of interaction play a role in the quality of interaction (temperature, air, light, IT, furniture).

N. Oseland, A. Marmot, F. Swaffer, S. Ceneda, Environments for successful interaction, Facilities, 2011

This study - focusing on meeting times - analyzes the influence of the workspace on an organization's ability to share knowledge, which is essential for innovation. The studied site is one of the world's leading suppliers of document management and printing solutions for professionals. The building, in the Netherlands, has two floors with a varied typology of offices. 269 employees, including 139 in R&D, were monitored for a week and filled in a diary. The assumption that open spaces are associated with better communication, innovation and creativity was not confirmed, as the quality of communication was highly uncertain. The researchers found that flexible spaces can strongly encourage exchanges, provided that a dynamic is put in place to encourage employees to get together. They note that a high level of co-presence - more than ten people - can make it difficult to circulate information and knowledge. However, they observed that spatial design is supportive and that face-to-face spaces are essential to disseminate knowledge and information in a qualitative way, as well as small meeting spaces to encourage exchanges and to isolate from noise.

R. Appel-Meulenbroek, B. de Vries, M. Weggeman, Knowledge Sharing Behavior: The Rôle of Spatial Design in Buildings, Environment and Behavior, 2017

03


The new spaces break down silos

With the development of remote working, the social role of the office is undoubtedly becoming more pronounced. People come to the office to meet and talk, because they know the limits of working from home. The new open, unpartitioned workspaces are often promoted for their ability to enhance social links, in particular by breaking down the infamous «silos». However, here again, no link has really been established, and in accordance with the principle of proxemics already mentioned, open spaces are not very conducive to exchanges. The opening up of spaces does not break down silos so easily, and material boundaries often disappear in favor of reconstructed immaterial boundaries. On the contrary, in spaces dedicated to informal exchanges, social links are more observable, such as private discussions or laughs, which are rarely easy in open workspaces and yet are so important in society. The high added value of social spaces is therefore recognized, since behavior is less regulated than in spaces dedicated to production work. In workspaces where a team territory approach prevails, social links will be easier to establish between members of the same team, who will anchor themselves in this territory, ideally animated by a positive managerial dynamic and conducive to the establishment of rich social links.



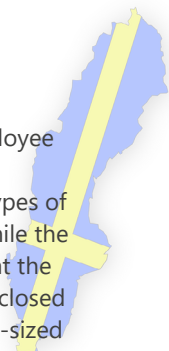
Although open-plan workspaces do little to encourage social interaction, spatial diversity can provide occupants with conditions that allow informal exchange, so valuable to an organization, especially in a hybrid working environment. Large, pleasant spaces have their merits, but small spaces scattered across the floors and conducive to face-to-face exchanges should allow for exchanges unexposed to a great number of people. A 2 people chat is also a good way of bonding.

What does research say?



This literature review looks at the impact of the physical work environment on the health and well-being of occupants, analyzing 50 articles published between 1995 and 2017. The researchers conclude that team territories favor social ties because of the psychological comfort* provided, whereas interpersonal relations are not facilitated by openness. Dedicated quiet areas are therefore essential to compensate for dissatisfaction. The authors also note that flexible environments are deemed to be socially favorable after a period of adaptation.

Susanne Colenberg, Tuuli Jylhä & Monique Arkesteijn, The relationship between interior office space and employee health and well-being – a literature Review, Building research & information, 2020



This study analyses the influence of different types of offices on employee satisfaction and psychological health. 469 employees rated their perception and satisfaction with office environments with different types of configurations, from the closed individual office to the flex office. While the individual office remains the most popular, the researchers found that the social aspects (interactions, exchanges) were negatively perceived in closed offices, and noted a high level of dissatisfaction in large and medium-sized open spaces with regard to noise and lack of privacy. The researchers did, however, observe good results in terms of confidentiality and social interaction in flex offices.

C. Danielsson, Difference in satisfaction with office environment among employees, In different office types Journal of architectural and planning research, 2009

04 Workspaces attract potential employees

Attracting «talent» is an omnipresent promise in the speeches of those involved in transforming workspaces. The quality of the workplace is an important factor for employees but has little impact on whether they stay or leave. As far as the ability to recruit is concerned, space has very little influence on candidates' choices and, once again, many candidates do not have the luxury of choosing their future job on the basis of the space. However, location is important, not to say decisive, and raises questions about the geography of offices and the center/periphery relationship. The fluidity of commuting routes is in fact an important dimension for employees, as it influences their overall quality of life. Employees often prefer a low-quality office that is well located, rather than the opposite. But when it comes to the workspace, which is important but not essential for job applicants, we should not forget that it still conveys symbolic values. A company's brand image is partly conveyed through its space, and there is also a logic of caring involved. A company transmits values linked, for example, to its managerial culture, its modernity, or its ability to take care of its employees. However, low-quality spaces do not necessarily convey the opposite values. In all cases, the symbolism conveyed by the space must be aligned with reality, otherwise there is a risk that the space will convey values that are not subsequently reflected by the company.



As space is partly a cultural object, it is important to integrate spatial issues into an overall strategy linked to corporate culture. A tailor-made approach is therefore needed to understand what the company is and what it is trying to convey through the spaces it provides for people to see and experience. Attracting talent is not primarily a question of space, but it can help to give first impressions, positive or negative.

What does research say?

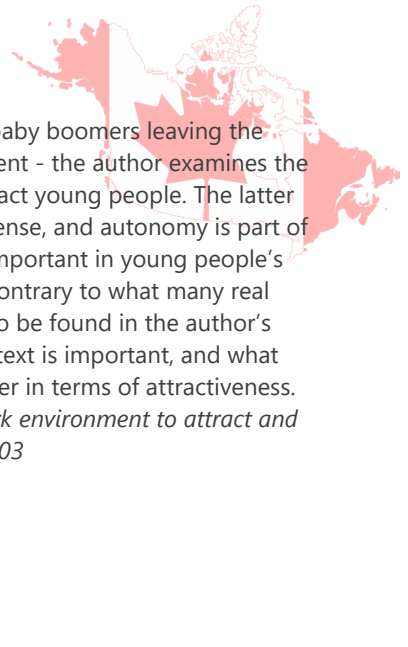


This literature review, carried out between March and July 2020, is based on the research carried out in the academic literature and by major consultant firms on the initial impacts of the Covid-19 health crisis on working environments. The researchers conclude that the standardization of workplaces is a risk, that localization must make geographical travel more fluid - to be conducive to attachment, commitment and performance - and finally that the attractiveness of the company's central location is stronger in a multi-spatial context and depends on autonomy in the management of one's workspace/time.

A. de Lucas Ancillo, MT del Val Núñez, S. Gavrilá, Workplace change within the COVID-19 context: a grounded theory approach, Economic Research, 2020

Taking a twofold approach - demographic, with the baby boomers leaving the workforce, and competitive, with the attraction of talent - the author examines the concrete elements of working environments that attract young people. The latter don't just want a job, they want a place that makes sense, and autonomy is part of that. Studies show that the working environment is important in young people's decision to accept a job, without being paramount, contrary to what many real estate professionals claim. Finally, there is a nuance to be found in the author's assertion that, beyond impactful statements, the context is important, and what works for one company will often not work for another in terms of attractiveness.

H. Earle, Building a workplace of choice: Using the work environment to attract and retain top talent, Journal of Facilities Management, 2003



05

Tomorrow's offices will be exclusively collective

With the development of home office and, it is true, with the increased need for collective interactions, the office of the future is often promoted as a place for the collective, sometimes to the detriment of individual functions. The post-covid office is undoubtedly a place with a high collective value, as exchanges are more fruitful with physical co-presence. Less frequented workplaces create a need for on-site co-presence. However, reducing workspaces to their collective dimension alone runs the risk of neglecting individual needs that are still very much present. Office workers do not all have the same tasks and the same amount of interaction in their working day. Furthermore, even workers with high interaction needs have a significant proportion of individual tasks. Moreover, interaction situations are more effective when individual moments are adequately provided for, which can be called *sollaboration**. Finally, for many reasons (personal, family, housing), workers may prefer to come to the office to work individually, and it would be a pity if the workspace does not provide the best conditions for them. If office work is now more collective than it used to be, individual workstations must remain and add a nuance to discourses that sometimes lead too much to the all-collective approach, which does not always correspond to the actual work observed.



Thinking about tomorrow's workspaces through a collective perspective is important, but this must not make space a constraint, as it must remain a functional resource*. A balance must therefore be found based on real work and on a contextual approach. Spatial resources must be seen as capable of satisfying the undeniable growing needs of interactional situations, without neglecting the unchanging needs of individual production.

What does research say?



This study, which combines a review of the literature and a survey of employees using fictional hybridization scenarios, proposes to identify the locations - at home or in the office - in which people find themselves in situations of communication or concentration. The researchers make the following observations:

- Working at home is recognized as being more conducive to concentration, although there are nuances, as many cognitive disturbances occur through interactions that are not initiated. It is also more difficult to find moments or areas of retreat at home unless you disconnect. The authors also note two nuances: on the one hand, women are less satisfied because of the link between telework & the domestic environment, and on the other, individual variables are strong, with a random ability to concentrate depending on the individual.
- Working in an office is recognized as being more conducive to communication, but with nuances, as density and co-presence in the office strongly determine satisfaction. Meeting areas determine the richness of informal interactions, even if the spatial offer is often under-exploited and therefore needs to be explained further.

Rianne Appel-Meulenbroek, Astrid Kemperman, Amke van de Water, Minou Weijs-Perree, Jan Verhaegh, How to attract employees back to the office? A stated choice study on hybrid working preferences, Journal of environmental psychology, 2022

This study identifies the importance of the links between employee perceptions, task characteristics and the ability to prevent the distractions and overstimulation inherent in open spaces. The research was carried out in two open spaces in Sydney, in a public company and a private company, with 54 and 61 employees respectively subject to questionnaires. The result was that open space must be compensated with spaces that avoid hyperstimulation when the task in hand requires it. According to the researchers, employees react negatively to open-plan office designs, particularly if they are subject to interaction and their work requires high levels of concentration. It also appears that the ability to isolate oneself for complex tasks, which helps avoid different stimuli, leads to more positive evaluations of open space. Finally, the researchers note that the increased communication and social interaction promised by the open space increases satisfaction and morale, nuancing the dissatisfaction relative to the endured hyperstimulation.

A. Maher, C. Von Hippel, Individual differences in employee reactions to open-plan offices, Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2005

5 preconceived ideas
from **occupiers**

When employees are faced with changes to their workspace, many preconceived ideas circulate, linked to the perfectly natural fears that change entails. Not all reactions are negative, of course, but some are, often fueled by beliefs that are sometimes unfounded. However, it is necessary to examine these beliefs because they are likely to be present and it would be a mistake to ignore them. On the contrary, we need to review them in order to understand them better, which is one of the pillars of change management. Academic literature helps us to understand the factors that influence these preconceived ideas, which are often linked to people's psychosocial relationship with their space.



PRECONCEIVED IDEAS

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Open spaces
are noisy

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The unassigned office
dehumanizes
the worker

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The new workspaces'
only goal is to
reduce cost

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The ideal office is an
enclosed individual
office

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We are
underperforming in
new workspaces



06

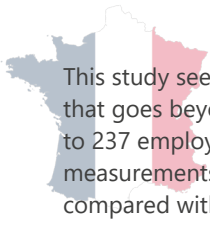
Open spaces are noisy

Noise is a permanent problem in spatial transformation projects, even more when open spatial forms are considered. The fear of being subjected to an uncomfortable noise environment reveals a fear of an overall lack of control over one's working space. Moreover, through noise-related fears, occupants more generally express fears of seeing their environment deteriorate when it is promised that it will improve. And yet, beyond those fears, studies show the discrepancy between a posteriori noise complaints and noise volume measurements. Office spaces, even open-plan ones, are generally silent, and some people deplore this, especially when teleworking is implemented. Much more than the volume of noise, it is the cognitive disturbance that can be the source of concentration problems. This disturbance is also psychological, due to a lack of control over the environment. Acoustic solutions are necessary, but they are not the only solution to the problem, which must also be tackled through co-living rules that encourage people to limit cognitive disturbance and through a high level of environmental satisfaction* among occupants.



The issue of noise has a strong psychological dimension that needs to be addressed by increasing occupants' sense of control over their space. This can be done at an early stage by involving future occupants in the design process, since complaints are reduced when people co-create their space. Ensuring psychological comfort through personalization, ownership, autonomous management and territoriality increases satisfaction levels and reduces negativity.

What does research say?

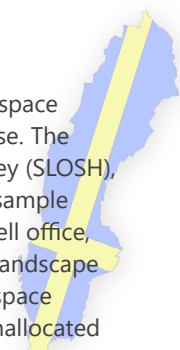


This study seeks to develop an assessment of noise pollution in open spaces that goes beyond the simple measurement of decibels (dB). A questionnaire was sent to 237 employees of seven French companies working in open spaces and acoustic measurements of ambient noise were taken at various locations. The questionnaire was compared with the measurements. The results show that the average values measured are a maximum of 56 dB, in line with the thresholds set by the standards and that the issue of noise has a strong psychological dimension. The majority of employees surveyed consider that the noise in their workspace is high or very high (56%) and that it is annoying or very annoying (58%), with the actual intensity of the noise only partially explaining the intensity of the perceived noise. The more employees feel unable to control their environment and have privacy, the more they claim to be annoyed by ambient noise.

M. Pierrette, E. Parizet, P. Chevret, J. Chatillon, Noise effect on comfort in open-space offices: development of an assessment questionnaire, Ergonomics, 2015

The aim of this exploratory study is to investigate the impact of office space design on conflicts, with a particular focus on gender sensitivity to noise. The study, based on 2010 data from the Swedish Longitudinal Health Survey (SLOSH), covers a sample of 20,291 people, with 9,132 respondents and a final sample of 5,229 employees working in offices. 7 office layouts were studied: cell office, shared office (2/3 people), traditional open space (no walls, break-up landscape with plants or screens), small open space (5/9 people), medium open space (10/24 people), large open space (more than 25 people), flex office (unallocated workstation), combi office* (allocated workstation but variety of spaces). The researchers found that spatial form has a strong impact on sensitivity to noise, with increased sensitivity to noise as workspaces become more open - more pronounced among women - with size effects predominating.

C. Bodin Danielsson, L. Bodin, C. Wulff, T. Theorell, The relation between office type and workplace conflict: A gender and noise perspective, Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2015



07

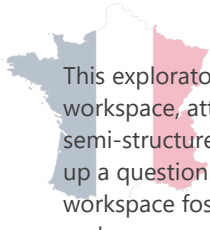
The unassigned office dehumanizes the worker

Flex-offices have been on the rise in large companies for some years now, and teleworking is accelerating this trend by virtue of the sharing of workstations, which is quite legitimate given the low occupancy rates. However, the idea of sharing workstations is still difficult to justify for occupants, who see it as a form of dehumanization of the worker. A psychological factor comes into play, as the lack of physical space can be linked to some extent to the fear of a lack of social space, or lack of a reference point. With sharing, employees fear that they won't find a place when they arrive, and this gives rise to the idea of a battle to secure a desk. It's almost a feeling of wandering that drives these understandable reflections, given the importance of spatial reference points in people's lives. The flex office almost always obeys to a logic of team territories that decreases the fear of being lost and not being able to find your colleagues. The initial loss of reference points is always followed by a reconstitution of new reference points that regroups the occupants. Dehumanization is undoubtedly an exaggerated term when it comes to offices, but it reveals the psychological discomfort that exists when the spatial reference points of individuals in an organization are changed. Supporting change therefore involves moving from a highly individual paradigm to a more collective paradigm of recreating reference points.



Thinking about workspaces in terms of sharing workstations is not only a financial imperative, but also a functional one, with a greater need for collective spaces. While the flex office is well-suited to hybrid working, an overly high level of sharing ratio runs the risk of producing negative effects linked to perceived overcrowding, particularly at peak occupancy times. Sharing must therefore be considered in a reasonable way, otherwise there is a risk that the financial benefits will be outweighed by the significant human costs involved (disengagement, demotivation, discomfort).

What does research say?



This exploratory study analyses the link between the personalization of the workspace, attachment to it and its perceived quality. The researchers conducted 22 semi-structured interviews in a commercial office building, which were used to draw up a questionnaire distributed to 116 people. The results show that personalizing the workspace fosters occupant satisfaction, facilitates attachment, emotional relationships and a sense of control, and can be done collectively. The personalization of the workspace contributes to the expression of identity, but also to well-being. Employees can take full ownership of their work environment and create an emotional relationship by personalizing and controlling it. Employees working in open-plan offices, which offer the least privacy, have the lowest scores in terms of personalization, attachment and perceived quality of the workspace.

I. Ajdukovic, D. Gilbert, D. Labbouz, Confort au travail : Le rôle de l'attachement et de la personnalisation dans la perception de la qualité de l'espace de travail, Psychologie du Travail et des Organisations, 2014



This study analyzes the effects of a 'New way of working' (NwoW) project on organizational processes. The author, who worked for three months in a Belgian insurance company engaged in such a project, analyzed - via 29 semi-directive interviews and in situ observation of work practices - three constituent elements of the NwoW reference framework: the layout of the workspace (Bricks), the technological infrastructure (Bytes) and the changes (expected and actual) in behaviour (Behaviors). As a result, a NwoW transformation project is highly disruptive to organizational balances and needs to be fully supported. Among the main observations made by the author are the reinforcement of certain power asymmetries, the weakening of team cohesion and the circulation of information linked to a spatial-temporal redistribution of employees, are three points to bear in mind when implementing a NwoW project. It is important to train employees and make them aware of the risks inherent to a digital environment, it is essential to redefine the place and role of middle management in such working contexts, and the reappropriation of working principles and workspaces by employees is a key factor in the success of the NwoW project.

G. Jémine, Un chantier de modernisation des contextes de travail : le « new way of working » dans une compagnie d'assurances, Université de Liège, 2016

08

The new workspaces' only goal is to reduce cost

Workspaces such as flex offices, based on the desk sharing concept, have a strong financial interest, which often leads people to say that it is the only output. There's no point in trying to hide the financial consideration, because everyone knows that it prevails in real estate strategies, and that's perfectly normal. Optimizing property resources also has its virtues in terms of a company's overall strategy, particularly its CSR approach. However, most projects embracing flexibility have other intentions. In many projects, the reduction in area is also associated with a reallocation of surface based on collective needs that eat up square meters. Some flex office projects are even carried out on a constant surface basis. However, if a company is looking to cut property costs by reducing floor space, it will need to take a more global approach to the transformation. The teleworking, management and Quality of Work Life dimensions will have to be part of the consideration. With the development of teleworking, it is easier for employees to understand the need to optimize office space, but the teleworking-flex office equation is not enough to consider this concept, since it ultimately involves a cultural change that financial considerations alone cannot address.



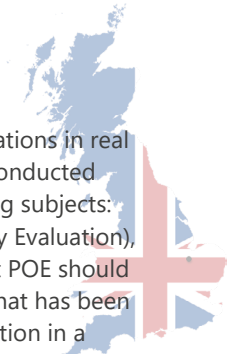
Moving to a flex office requires a clear vision from the company's leadership. Communication on the financial objectives is necessary to ensure that the legitimacy of the approach is understood. However, some form of compensation is essential to guarantee a win-win project. Even before the topic of the areas involved, the transformation must be supported by clear objectives that convey the idea that the transformation is driven by an overall strategy and not just by the quest to reduce costs.

What does research say?



This literature review looks at the links between workspace and performance. The researcher notes that, despite office buildings that often reflect the brand's identity, the consequences of interior layouts are often poorly understood. The best solutions therefore lie in combining spatial, economic and human dimensions. Reducing floor space too much can have an impact on final performance through a lack of motivation and dissatisfaction. A wrong spatial strategy can lead to significant indirect costs. As the direct financial gains are known and the indirect costs much less known, it is possible to reduce property costs by improving resources.

JA. Veitch, How and why to assess workplace design: Facilities management supports human resources, Organizational Dynamics, 2018



This study analyzes the interest of carrying out post-occupancy evaluations in real estate projects. Between June and September 2016, the researchers conducted 10 in-depth interviews with architects based in the UK on the following subjects: experiences with and obstacles to implementing POE (Post Occupancy Evaluation), potential solutions, and future directions. The researchers believe that POE should ideally be conducted for every building project so that the value of what has been produced can be measured allowing to gather a data base of information in a continuous learning process mindset. The researchers note that there is little culture of POE within the architectural profession and the real estate industry, despite its obvious benefits. It brings value to the business because it builds confidence by acknowledging imperfections so that they can be adjusted, and it can be used to improve the quality and long-term sustainability of the built environment by allowing more information to be fed back from the field, a source of competitive advantage. Finally, it can enhance the value of the asset through a long-term vision of the building.

R. Hay, F. Samuel, KJ. Watson, S. Bradbury, Postoccupancy evaluation in architecture: experiences and perspectives from UK practice, Building Research & Information, 2018

09

The ideal office is an enclosed individual office

For many employees, the closed individual office is the ideal workspace in which they would like to work, even though the trend for a long time has been to break down barriers and, in recent years, to share workstations, particularly in large companies. The closed individual office takes up a lot of square meters and is gradually being phased out for this very reason. When a preference is expressed for the closed individual office, it is a preference and not necessarily a rejection of other types of workspaces. Moreover, by virtue of the principle of proxemics, preference is naturally expressed for a protective environment that is easy to control rather than one that is exposed to others. That being said, some employees also express a preference for open spatial forms in which they feel they can work better with others. The preference often expressed for the closed individual office is also linked to the prism of performance in individual tasks to the detriment of collective, interactional performance. Yet performance in organizations is also determined by the collective dimension. The main argument in favor of a closed individual office is linked to concentration, but there are several arguments that qualify its value. Work is done more in interaction than it used to be, cognitive disturbance, particularly digital disturbance, exists just as much in a closed individual office and the square meters consumed in a context of low occupation linked to teleworking must be questioned.



The closed individual office remains an ideal because the work situation it offers is appreciated. You are alone, with no exposure to others, and interactions are more selective. The new open and shared workspaces can provide moments that come close to these conditions. Individual or shared bubbles are interesting options that can temporarily recreate similar conditions to those of a closed individual office. They have been proven to be useful for comfortable telephone calls and videoconferences. A particular care must be taken to ensure that these bubbles are not privatized as there is a risk of restoring closed individual offices in degraded mode.

What does research say?



This study, which analyzes the influence of office design on organizational culture, is based on a survey of 202 Australians from different organizations. These 61 men and 141 women, who work in offices with at least four employees - without individual desks - completed an online survey comprising three sections: demographics, layout and organizational culture. The researchers found that spatial form influences organizational culture and the social dynamics at play in relation to the space. According to their study, opening the space while providing team territories reinforces the feeling of belonging to a clan, with the lack of privacy being compensated by a positive social dynamic. The individual office responds better to individual needs but less to collective needs and can be an impediment to performance in certain contexts.

S. Zerella, K. von Treuer, SL. Albrecht, The influence of office layout features on employee perception of organizational culture, Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2017



This study compares the satisfaction of Dutch employees in four types of offices: individual closed, closed shared, combi office and flex. Conducted in 87 different working environments, the analysis is based on the responses of 11,799 employees to a questionnaire related to performance. The results show that flex offices come last in terms of satisfaction and perceived productivity, but that people working in individual closed or shared offices are less satisfied with the general aesthetics. Respondents are more satisfied with communication in combi and flex offices but are dissatisfied with privacy, concentration, confidentiality and productivity, compared with individual or shared offices.

I. De Been, M. Beijer, The influence of office type on satisfaction and perceived productivity support, Journal of Facilities Management, 2014

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We are underperforming in new workspaces

The new workspaces, characterized by their openness and increasingly with desk sharing are far from unanimous among employees, who often feel, that they will perform less well there. There are two main reasons for this legitimate criticism. Firstly, there is the natural psychological disruption associated with change. In the case of the workspace, there is a link between the question of the worker's identity and his or her place in the company, in both the tangible and intangible sense. Secondly, performance and projections into future spaces are often viewed by employees through the prism of the deterioration in their individual working conditions. Reluctance and even resistance exist both before and after the move. This is why post-occupancy surveys should be carried out more than six months after the move. In the first few months, negativity is still very much in evidence, and occupants tend to see what's wrong more than what's right. Over time, the processes of space appropriation and department territories will take effect, often leading to a return to high levels of satisfaction. Moreover, the earlier the support is provided before moving in, the easier these processes will be. Perceived performance in new workspaces is often very positive once this period has elapsed, because just as residential moves, it's never the day when you actually move in that you feel at home.



New workspaces are not always viewed favorably. The future occupant often identifies more easily with what he loses than what he gains. It is precisely these potential gains that need to be worked out, based on future spatial possibilities. The new workspaces are characterized by a varied spatial offer that allows several working situations. The challenge therefore lies in the occupants' ability to use these spaces at different moments of the day, in order to guarantee different working conditions to meet their performance requirements. Behind these spatial potentialities there are also values of autonomy in the management of one's daily itinerary in the workspace.

What does research say?

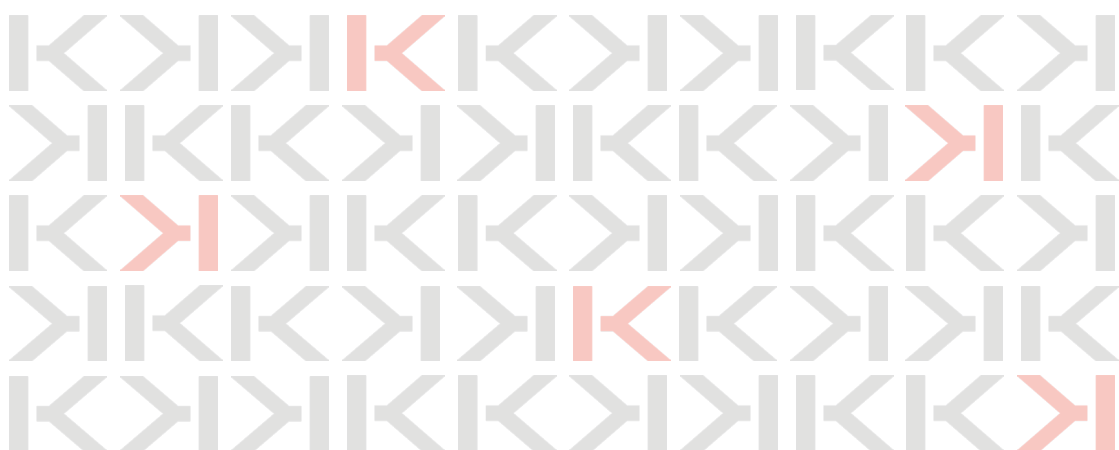


This study assesses cognitive performance using a variety of objective space measurements, combined with noise level measurements. Performance on tasks was measured in a 901 employee administration office in Sweden, comparing several groups in closed individual offices, open-plan offices and ABW (activity based working)*. The researchers found that open-plan offices had a negative impact on cognitive performance. In their four case studies, 68% of employees never changed work area in the course of an average day, and 14% changed only once. A noisy environment can lead to a 14% drop in productivity, or 247 hours a year. Noise levels are 15dB higher in open spaces. However, the providing of quiet rooms reduces stress and cognitive exhaustion and increases productivity by 16%.

H. Jahncke, D. Hallman, Objective measures of cognitive performance in activity-based workplaces and traditional office types, Journal of Environmental Psychology, 2020

This study analyzes the links between one's emotional attachment to the workspace and the stress level in the event of transformation or change, which have a profound effect on individual emotions. A questionnaire was submitted to 229 people. The researchers conclude that taking into account the combination of the emotional attachment & stress is a relevant way of explaining the emotions that come into play in projects to transform working environments. Feelings of insecurity are ubiquitous when workspaces are changed, and attachment is correlated with stress levels in the event of transformation. Moreover, avoidance and bypassing strategies are implemented during this adaptation period in response to environmental stress, which severely slows down the ability to adapt. High anxiety is then coupled by a low sense of perceived performance. However, people who benefit from strong social support are the least stressed and have the fewest negative emotions.

M. Johnstone, JA. Feeney, Individual differences in responses to workplace stress: The contribution of attachment theory, Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 2015



Many preconceived ideas circulate among all the stakeholders involved in a project to transform organizations through real estate. On the one hand, the promoters of the transformation promise significant gains, while on the other, employees argue about the losses and deterioration they will suffer. Admittedly, both sides tend to exaggerate their arguments. It is difficult to carry out smoothly a transformation when preconceived ideas pollute the quality of discussions, which are unquestionably necessary to manage such a project. So, in a constructive spirit, getting the facts right undoubtedly makes it possible

to set the terms of the debate calmly on the table. From this point of view, academic literature is a relevant support because it provides a nuanced view of the topics to be dealt with and objectifies the narrative. Those involved in transforming organizations therefore have everything to gain from serious acculturation, which allows for solid reflection and avoids giving in to ubiquitous easy solutions.

DEFINITIONS

PROXEMICS

A psychosocial concept that refers to the individual and social distances required for comfort.

PRIVACY

Sociological term referring to the need for intimacy and privacy.

FEELING OF CONTROL

The ability to act or influence one's environment or a situation.

SERENDIPITY

The ability to make an unexpected discovery by chance and to grasp its usefulness.

SPATIAL DETERMINISM

When a spatial functionality is associated with a use that is coherent with the functionality.

PSYCHOLOGICAL COMFORT

Psychological comfort is defined as a lasting feeling of positive emotions and affects.

SOLLABORATION

Refers to a satisfactory collaborative situation, provided that individual working conditions are satisfactory.

FUNCTIONAL RESOURCE

Means/element available to meet one or more uses.

ENVIRONMENTAL SATISFACTION

Environmental satisfaction is based on affective and cognitive elements, as well as on the physical, social and human characteristics of the space experienced (Moffat, 2016).

COMBI OFFICE

The combi-office is a hybrid concept that preserves the allocation of a workstation in a smaller space.

ABW (ACTIVITY BASED WORKING)

ABW is a concept that put activity at the heart of space design.



