

Build Productivity & Profitability with Effective Workplace Design

What efforts come to mind when trying to increase revenues and productivity?

In this modern age, companies rush to technology to solve their problems. Or, they decide cutting back on their workforce is the only way to “optimize efficiencies.” Rarely, does an organization consider how redesigning its workspaces can accomplish the same objectives for half the expense of installing expensive hardware and software. And, you almost never hear of a company implementing a better way for its existing employees to be more productive...and happier.

Granted, there are times and situations that demand the installation of new technology and a reduction of workforce, but often both of these more drastic solutions can be lessened or avoided completely by simply redesigning “how” work is done and “where” work is done. In other words, companies should look at how they can improve workflow within their organizations before making expensive purchases or divesting themselves of their employees.

Design a Better Workflow

Workflow is simply how work is produced. It is a complex web of interactions and transactions between people that exists in every workplace. Workflow includes processes, roles, accountabilitys, rules, competencies, requests, offers, information, and materials.

An organization’s success—achieving the business strategy—depends directly on its ability to manage workflow effectively and efficiently. To do this, there must be a focus on people and how they work.

Organizations must assess how people, processes, and the workspace come together to create optimal efficiency and productivity. Workspace design shapes the physical environment, which affects workflow, which affects the ability to interact with each other, customers and vendors, and ultimately affects the bottom line. Effective workplace design enables people to engage in behaviors and activities that support the business strategy.

Some common workspace design considerations are:

- Does productivity depend on collaborative teamwork, autonomous work processes, or both?
- How do people communicate? How frequently?
- What are the adjacencies required for access to people, information and tools necessary to perform the work?
- How are tasks assigned and structured?

A recent BOSTI study of 13,000 people in 70 business locations found that there is a direct correlation between job performance and job satisfaction, and the ability of the workspace to support the way people work. Results indicated that team performance improved from six to 15 percent, while job satisfaction ratings increased by 32 percent.

Case Study: Financial Services

Many workflow process studies result in workspace design projects. Such was the case for a Greater Cincinnati financial services company that requested a workflow process evaluation to improve communication and profitability.

Background

The company had been experiencing problems with information back-up, long turnaround times for billing and contractor deployment, low satisfaction among customers and the workforce, de-

creased profitability, and a new competitive environment. Resulting project goals included: reducing gaps in communication, removing redundancies, minimizing the flow of paper, and maximizing staff utilization.

Process

The process that resulted included the following efforts:

- Develop a workflow map of the existing business processes to determine breaks, redundancies, and improvement opportunities.
- Measure current performance.
- Gather workforce opinions and observations.
- Identify characteristics of the workplace that affected overall performance yet received poor evaluations.

Findings and Recommendations

As a result of the study, it was determined that the company's workspace was not designed to enable and support team communication, even though their core business revolved around their ability to collaborate effectively.

It was recommended that the Company consider a contiguous workspace design that would foster improved communication and teamwork. Based on that recommendation, the Company decided to move into a new facility. In addition, the Company adopted a new organizational structure and new workflow processes to better support their goals and objectives. The workflow was then enabled by new technology.

Results

The company was able to increase financial performance by 127 percent. Additional productivity gains include:

- Increased customer transactions by 27 percent with the same staffing.
- Decreased time to deploy and receive contractor work from five days to three days.
- Shortened cycle time for invoicing from 20 to five days.

It is common to see productivity gains such as these resulting from workspace and workflow improvements.

Productivity centers on people and communication to drive processes and procedures. Fundamental flaws in workspace design can create barriers to the workflow process. Not properly addressed, these barriers translate into missed opportunities and missed profits.

Workspace and workflow improvements are complex and do not happen overnight. It requires careful investigation, planning, and execution. Managing change is a critical component for acceptance within the organization. The good news is that it can be accomplished in small steps with big returns.

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