

STEPPING OUTSIDE THE CUBICLE

Tips for Reorganizing Your Workspace



QUICK TRIVIA QUESTION: WHO IS ROBERT PROPST?

Although you may not know the man, you're probably quite familiar with what he invented in 1968 – the office cubicle.

Originally intended to improve both productivity and corporate culture, the partitioned office system quickly backfired – creating a bleak environment employees loathe (case in point: Dilbert). So if the aerial view of your workspace still resembles a rat maze, it may be time to step outside the cubicle and consider reorganizing your space.

DO YOU NEED TO REORGANIZE YOUR SPACE?

If you're not sure, take this quick quiz. It's based on the findings of the U.S. government's General Services Administration's list of "Hallmarks of the Productive Workplace":

1. Do your employees have sufficient space to complete their work?
2. Is your workplace healthy, providing clean air and water, enough light (natural or artificial), and an environment free of distracting noises and smells?
3. Is the workspace flexible enough to quickly adjust to industry-related changes?
4. Are workers able to maintain comfort by adjusting light, temperature, furnishings, and acoustic levels to their needs?

5. Do you provide connectivity so that all workers (both on and off-site) can access the same networks and data to communicate easily?
6. Are your technology and physical plant (heating, cooling, water, plumbing) systems reliable?
7. Does the workplace atmosphere (including décor) mirror your company's brand, image, and mission?
8. Does your workspace promote a culture appropriate for the type of work you do?

If you answered "No" to one or more of these questions, your workplace may benefit from an update. But even if you passed the test, here are some other reasons to modernize your workspace:

- The old "cubicle and conference room" design actually hinders the flexible teams and spontaneous collaboration needed in today's work environment.
- A recent survey by a prominent architecture firm showed that half of all employees would work an extra *hour per day* if they had a better workplace.
- Investing in your own space lets clients and employees know they're associated with a growing, successful company that cares for its employees and customers.

- A well-designed workspace can improve productivity, job satisfaction, employee retention, and profitability.

PLANNING FOR REORGANIZATION

If it's time to cross over from the dark side of the divider, here are some points to consider before you start swinging sledgehammers:

- **Define the image you want to project.** What would you like employees, potential and current clients to think and feel when they step inside your workplace? Use this as a backdrop against which improvements will be made.
- **Size up your current space.** What really goes on in your workplace each day? Take a step back and examine how your space is used right now:
 1. **Layout.** How well does your existing floor plan function? Shadow different types of employees to determine whether the layout helps or hinders them in their efforts to get work done.
 2. **Usage.** How evenly is your space utilized? Stop by cubicles, offices, and conference rooms every half-hour to uncover areas that are chronically empty or overcrowded.
 3. **Workarounds.** Do employees use their space, furnishings, and equipment as intended? Examine your environment to see if it supports or thwarts employees work processes.
- **Involve your staff.** Getting employee feedback on dysfunctional workspace elements is vital to your efforts; however, asking employees what they want may lead to unrealistic demands (not everyone can have a corner office with a built-in coy pond). Gather employee input throughout the

redesign process, but remind them that the new design will be beneficial (not perfect) for everyone.

- **Look 5 or 10 years down the road.** Do you have plans to expand, merge, or move? Any of these will impact the amount you invest in a current workplace redesign.
- **Determine your goals.** Once you've identified your biggest issues, decide which ones you want to attack. Choose four or five priorities to address, such as increased collaboration, improved productivity, or more efficient use of space.



ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS THROUGH SMART DESIGN

Whether you're looking to improve employee retention or accommodate a mobile workforce, here is the latest thinking on the best (and worst) design solutions. If you're looking to:

1. Increase employee productivity and retention

- **Nix:** the executive corner offices (with coy ponds)
- **Switch to:** interior executive offices, placing non-execs around the perimeter
- **Rationale:** give rank-and-file workers, who spend more time at their desks, the views and natural light

2. Promote spontaneous collaboration

- **Nix:** random seating and open, scattered collaboration areas
- **Switch to:** small "iso pods" – enclosed mini-conference rooms
- **Rationale:** workers can quickly gather without leaving their immediate work area or reserving a large conference room

3. Accommodate a mobile workforce

- **Nix:** traditional, one-size-fits-all offices
- **Switch to:** office space allocated by need; drop-in office spaces
- **Rationale:** workers who stay local need more office space; reducing office sizes frees up additional room for "hotel" workspace – designed for visitors from other offices

4. Balance privacy with collaboration

- **Nix:** open desk spaces with little separation
- **Switch to:** modified cubicles with lower cube walls
- **Rationale:** enjoy the best of both worlds (privacy and visibility); minimize noise while maximizing collaboration

Sources used:

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