

Bringing People, Processes and the Workplace Together to Create High Performance Work Environments

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Project: Firststar Operations Center
Design: Design Details, Inc.

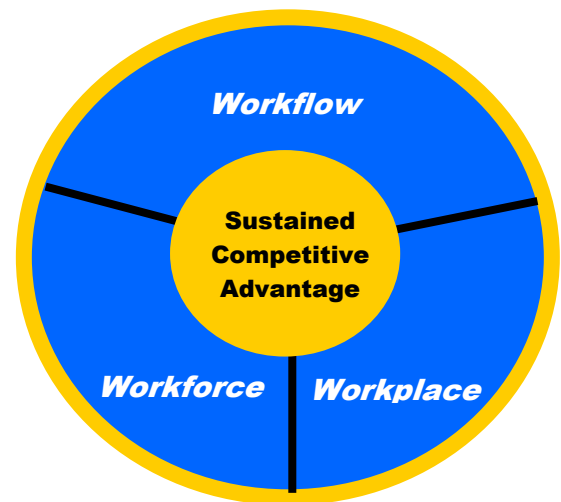
What elements come to mind when designing or redesigning office space?

Physical structure, location, look and feel, image, adjacencies, size and shape of individual and common spaces, conference rooms, restrooms, hallways, dining areas, security, furnishings, telecommunications, data, parking, and so forth?

A key issue often overlooked that needs to be addressed in the planning of any facility is how the workplace supports the business' culture, strategy, goals and objectives.

The convergence of the workforce, workflow, and workplace is vital to sustaining a competitive advantage in today's marketplace. Organizations must assess how people, processes and place come together to create optimal efficiency and productivity. Each of these factors must support the other to maximize effectiveness.

More and more companies are realizing that their real estate can be a real tool for them, rather than just overhead expense. "We believe that your place of business should be a resource that positively impacts the bottom line and not just another source of overhead," says Pam Irvin, Principal, Design Details, Inc. "It's no secret that a functional work environment needs to support the technology in today's work places. The workspace must also support the business processes and the communication and interaction needs of the people.



Space that is well organized and reflects the culture of the company not only helps to establish the company's image in the marketplace but also helps with employee recruitment, retention, and overall morale. In today's market that is becoming more important. People want to work in a place they're proud of and that reflects the culture of the organization. Our role is to design this into the space. We work with all levels of personnel to help determine how the space can support their vision."

Workflow

Quite simply, workflow is how work is produced via the complex web of interactions and communications between people that exists in every workplace. Embedded in this web are the work processes, requests and offers for work, conditions of satisfaction, accountabilities, business rules, information, materials and tools.

An organization's success in achieving its business strategy, depends directly on its ability to manage workflow effectively and efficiently. To do this, there must be a focus on people, how they work, and key behaviors required to achieve the business objectives that support the strategy.

To assess and improve an organization's workflow you must combine a clear knowledge of the overall strategy and goals with a thorough evaluation of the work processes. Developing a visual guide referred to as a workflow map can do this.

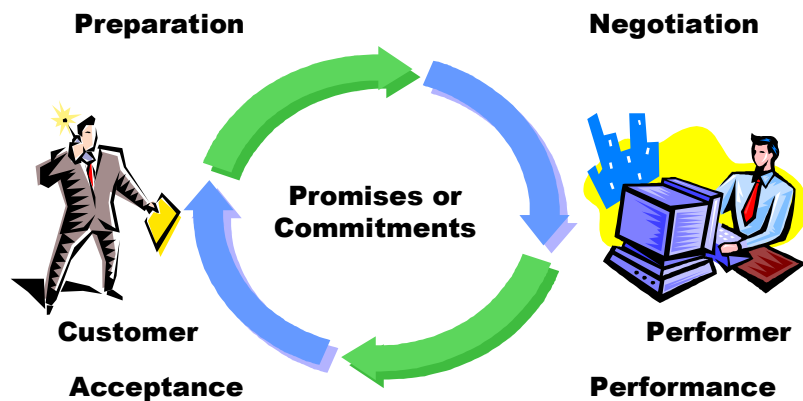
Using the Human Interaction Model (*see below*) provides a structured way of designing work around promises or commitments between people.

The workflow map provides an interpretation of your organization and the work, as never seen before. It illustrates not only information and material flow problems, but also reveals areas for improvement in organizational structure, departmental strategies, accountabilities, technology, communications, coordination of work and behavior.

Some common questions to ask are:

- What are customers complaining about?
- What is broken that your workforce has given up complaining about?
- Is your workforce empowered to negotiate about fulfilling requests?
- Are there interactions taking place that are as a result of unclear accountabilities?

After all, a company is judged by the offers it makes and the promises it keeps!



The Human Interaction Model provides a structured way of designing the work around promises or commitments between people

Workplace

Workplace design is the shaping of the physical environment, which affects the ability for interaction among the workforce, customers and vendors, and encourages or discourages specific behaviors. All of these factors affect workflow, which ultimately affects the bottom-line. Effective workplace design enables people to engage in behaviors and activities that support the business strategy. Despite wonderfully creative interior plans and the best of intentions, many designs are incomplete because they do not adequately address the issue of "workflow."

Recent research by BOSTI (a Buffalo NY organization with a 32 year history in workplace research, planning and design) found that the top two workplace qualities, with the strongest effect on individual and team performance and job satisfaction are:

- The ability to do distraction-free solo work
- Support for impromptu interactions

The workplace must be designed to enable these types of work, which in turn allows the workflow to support the business strategy.

Before planning your offices, there are some common workplace issue that require consideration:

- Does productivity depend on collaborative teamwork or autonomous work processes?
- 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?
- What are the key behaviors you want the employees to exhibit?
- What is the culture of your organization? How will this be reinforced by the facility?



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Workforce

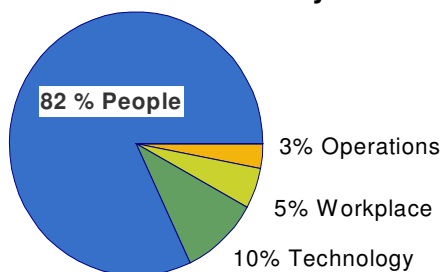
People costs are by far the largest factor in white-collar work in achieving an organization's goals. Maximizing effectiveness through improvements in the workflow and the workplace make good economic sense, and lead to a more satisfied workforce. As we become more dependent on the intellectual capital of our employees, improving recruiting and retention rates becomes more critical and in the end is more cost effective.

A recent BOSTI study found that over a 10-year period 82% of costs are spent on people expenses. "Research indicates that the workplace impacts employees in 3 primary areas including:

- Job satisfaction
- Individual performance
- Team performance

This study suggests that the benefits of appropriately designed offices are substantial, as are the costs of poorly designed ones. And there is symmetry...non-supportive design has negative effects (costs) on work and workers, and design appropriate to the work has positive effects (benefits)."¹

Primary cost of doing work over 10 years*



* According to Bosti survey 2001

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.

Case Study

It's not unusual for workflow process studies to result in workspace design projects. Such was the case for a Financial Services Industry client who requested a workflow process evaluation to improve communication, efficiency and profitability.

Background:

The company had been experiencing problems with miscommunication, miscoordination, long turn-around times for billing and contractor deployment, low satisfaction among customers and the workforce, and decreased profitability. Project goals included: reducing gaps and overlaps in communication, minimizing the flow of paper, and maximizing staff utilization.

Process:

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

¹ Michael Brill, Sue Weidemann, and the BOSTI Associates, Disproving Widespread Myths about Workplace Design (Jasper, IN: Kimball International, 2001)

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 the core business revolved around its ability to collaborate and communicate effectively.

Recommendations to the Company encompassed a holistic approach including not only a new organizational structure and new workflow processes but also a move to a new facility with contiguous workspace designed to foster improved communication and teamwork. The workflow was enabled by new technology to further the competitive advantage. These changes created an organization that was faster, more agile, and prepared to better support the business goals and objectives including major growth and improved customer satisfaction.

Results:

The Company was able to:

- Improve financial performance by 127%!

- Increase productivity by 27% with the same staffing.
- Decrease time to deploy and receive contractor work from 7 to 3 days.
- Shorten the cycle time for invoicing from 20 to 5 days.

“We frequently see outcomes such as these resulting from workflow, workspace and workforce improvements. Until this customer addressed all three, these results were not possible,” said Jackie Messersmith, President of Workflow Dynamics, Inc. “So often businesses look to technology-only solutions to improve their bottom line without consideration to process, place or people. They end up with a lot of money expended and disappointing results. Technology should be viewed as a tool to support and effect change. However, for change to be sustainable you must look at your entire organization – what we refer to as taking the roof off – and make sure that these three dynamics are working in unison to achieve your business strategy each and every day.”

Assess your workplace...

Column A

- A place I go to work
- An expense
- A liability
- Not enough worksurface or storage
- A place my boss wants me to work
- A place I need to leave to think
- A source of frustration
- Outdated; cluttered; not maintained
- A place of stress
- An embarrassment
- A necessary evil
- Piles of paper and wires everywhere

Column B

- A place that works for me
- A resource
- An asset
- A tool that supports my work
- Where I go to do my best work
- A place that helps me be creative
- A resource for my work; (A source of joy)
- A reflection of my company's image that I want to portray
- A place of high energy activity
- A recruiting and retention tool
- A place I look forward to going
- A support for my computer and other tools

_____ Total

Scoring:

Total your answers in Column A.

- 0-2 Congratulations your office is working for you in most aspects.
- 3-6 A tune up could help your staff be more effective.
- 7-12 It is time to reassess your workplace and how it supports your work.

Workflow Dynamics, Inc. specializes in helping organizations to better understand and leverage the interplay between workforce, workplace and workflow to increase productivity and profitability. For more information, contact us at 513-233-3569 or visit us on the web www.workflowdynamics.com.

Design Details, Inc. provides interior design and move management services to corporate and healthcare clients, creating unique workspaces that support client's goals and business objectives. For more information, contact us at (513) 793-0404.

