

GUIDANCE NOTE

Creating better workspaces

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Contents

1. Introduction	2
Workplace and workspace – a quick refresh	2
How to use our workplace guidance notes	3
2. Why workspace matters	4
Different perspectives on workspace	8
3. Good and bad practice in workspace design	10
Workspace archetypes	13
4. Positively influencing workspace design	14
Stakeholders in the workspace industry	18
5. What should I do next?	19
Your workspace health check	20
Learning more about creating better workspaces	21

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1. Introduction

The first Guidance Note in this series, 'Introduction to workplace', explained that workplace is comprised of three components: culture, technology and workspace. You can download it, and the other guidance notes in this series, from www.iwfm.org.uk/better-workplaces.

This, the fourth guidance note in the series, focuses on the spatial element of workplace – the physical spaces where people work. It focuses on workspace because it's the component of workplace that facilities managers (FMs) are likely to be most familiar with and have most influence over.

This guidance note explains why workspaces are important to individuals and organisations and explores the things that can lead to good or bad workspaces. It looks at different ways of viewing workspaces and debunks some of the common myths about workspace design.

The overall aim of this guidance note is to help non-designers have a positive influence on the design of the workspaces they are involved with or responsible for. It provides practical tips on how to think critically and ask the right questions during discussions about workspace design.

WORKPLACE AND WORKSPACE – A QUICK REFRESH

This is how we use the terms 'workplace' and 'workspace' in this guidance note:

- workplaces are the social places where people use the tools available to them to get their work done - a workplace contains and involves people
- workplaces can be fixed (for example hospitals and offices) or flexible (for example a work van or a temporary place of work)
- workspaces are the physical spaces or environments available for people to work in – spaces are empty and they become places when they have people in them.

Remember that words can be defined in different ways. These aren't the only definitions of workplace and workspace, but they are the ones that we believe allow FM to make the best contribution to organisations.



If you would like to provide feedback on this guidance note or have ideas for other workplace information, guidance or research please email research@iwfm.org.uk

HOW TO USE OUR WORKPLACE GUIDANCE NOTES

Our workplace guidance notes have been designed to be used as standalone resources or together as a series. Together, the guidance notes focus on the issues that organisations should pay attention to when changing existing workplaces or developing new ones.

- 'Introduction to workplace' explains what workplace is and the importance of viewing workplace in a joined-up way.
- 'Making better workplace decisions using data' discusses the role that data can play in helping organisations to make more informed workplace decisions.
- 'Selling your workplace vision' explains how to communicate the value of workplace authoritatively and persuasively and create a convincing case for change.
- 'Creating better workspaces' is about helping non-designers to have a positive influence on the design of workspaces they are involved with or responsible for.
- 'Leading successful workplace change' provides guidance on the processes of change and practical ideas for bringing about effective workplace change.

It can be helpful to think of these issues in sequence, from discovery through to design and delivery.

2. Why workspace matters

The idea that workspaces are important might seem really obvious – particularly if you work in facilities management (FM). After all, organisations collectively spend huge sums of money on providing workspaces for their employees and an entire industry has grown up around the creation and operation of workspaces in a range of different sectors.

However, the reality is that many organisations still take their workspaces for granted. At worst they may see their workspaces as an unwelcome overhead, the cost of which needs to be minimised. But even more enlightened organisations are often unaware of how their workspaces positively or negatively affect their people and their businesses overall.

The most obvious way that workspaces can impact on people and organisations is functionally. The physical spaces that we inhabit can enable or hinder the activities and tasks we're seeking to carry out. For instance, we may struggle to read a book in a poorly lit or noisy room but find that task easy in a quiet lounge with comfortable seating and lots of natural daylight.

People are generally pretty good at finding workarounds when spaces don't meet their needs: we adapt to our environment and/or adapt it to us in some way. For example, if we're struggling to concentrate on a book in a noisy room, we may choose to move somewhere quieter or opt to wear headphones.

Nevertheless, the fact that people are generally good at adapting shouldn't excuse poor design or a lack of consideration for people's needs. Adapting to poorly designed workspace may not always be possible. It can also be stressful and time-consuming. As an organisation, how can it be good if employees are preoccupied with getting their workspace to work rather than focusing on their actual work?

The introduction of 'hotdesks'¹ in office environments is a great example of this. It may make sense to provide hotdesks for some roles, but expecting everyone to hotdesk, even if this isn't appropriate for their role, is likely to have a negative effect on some people's ability to work effectively. An organisation may save money on its workspace but ultimately end up with a disgruntled and less productive workforce.

Footnote:

¹By 'hotdesks' we mean desks that are not assigned to any one individual but can be used as and when needed

Workspaces can also play an important symbolic role in organisations because how they look, feel and function will send messages to people. For example, if an organisation's workspace is dilapidated and run-down, it may convey the message that the organisation does not care about its staff or has fallen on hard times – even if that's not the case.

The symbolic aspect of workspace design can be very powerful but is usually very subtle and is therefore often overlooked by organisations. This can have real-world consequences. In the above example, it may mean that people don't want to work for the company because they don't feel valued or the company doesn't seem to have much of a future.

An organisation's workspace can also reveal differences between what an organisation says is important and what it actually believes is important. If an organisation says 'we value our staff' or 'our people are our most important asset' – as most organisations do – but provide them with sub-standard workspace, then perhaps they don't value their staff as much as they say they do?

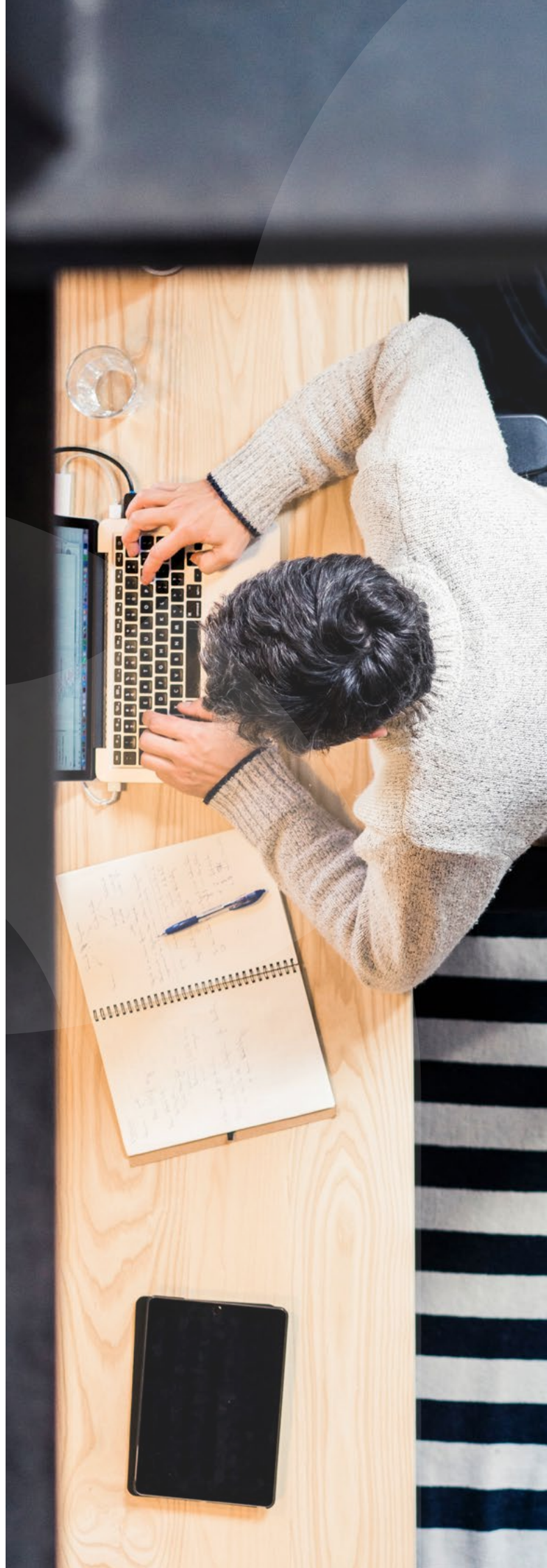
It's important to realise that people won't always view workspaces in the way that designers intended them to be viewed, because different people see things in different ways. The inclusion of a slide in an office environment could be viewed positively ('that looks like a fun place to work') or negatively ('what a waste of money') by different people. It's also important to realise that telling people the reason for something doesn't mean they will accept or understand it.

Some organisations recognise the symbolic role of workspace and try to use this to their advantage. Big technology companies are the most obvious example of this. For instance, Uber's new campus in San Francisco will have a transparent façade that is intended to epitomise 'a new chapter of transparency' for the controversial ride hailing company².

However, the symbolic nature of workspace also creates a risk of falling into the trap of becoming preoccupied with how good workspaces look (their aesthetics), as opposed to how well they work for the people who use them. The classic example is when people say they'd like an office like Google, without considering whether such a workspace would be right for their organisation.

Footnote:

²<https://missionbay2020.com/vision>





DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON WORKSPACE

Over the years, a number of different models have been developed for understanding and communicating the impact that workspaces have on people and organisations. More often than not, these models have been developed in relation to office environments, but many of them are equally applicable to other types of workspaces, such as hospitals, schools or factories.

One of the best-known models was popularised in the 1990s and 2000s by workplace consultants DEGW. Their three 'Es' model suggested that workspaces could be assessed in terms of:

- efficiency – getting the most out of workspaces, in terms of utilisation, density of occupation and operational costs
- effectiveness – the degree to which workspaces enable people to do what they need to do
- expression – the messages that workspaces send to staff, customers and other stakeholders.

DEGW suggested that while efficiency is usually the easiest the thing to measure, effectiveness and expression are actually the most valuable things to measure because they have a more significant impact on an organisation.

Their simple model is useful because it underlines the fact that workspaces can affect organisations in a number of different ways and that conversations about workspace should therefore be more than just about cost (efficiency) alone.

The three Es model can also be used to show how design solutions can affect each of the three Es and the potential trade-offs that can ensue. For instance, increasing the density of occupation in an office environment may be good for efficiency, but any financial savings may ultimately be outweighed by the negative impact on effectiveness, via employee performance and morale.

A number of authors have since developed DEGW's original model. In their book 'Spaces for Innovation'³, Kursty Groves and Oliver Marlow added the two additional Es of empowerment and evolution. In 'The Elemental Workplace,' Neil Usher uses six Es: efficiency, effectiveness, expression, environment, energy and ether.

Regardless of which model is used, the underlying principles remain the same: workspaces are multi-faceted and need to be designed and managed to reflect this; focusing on one facet alone is likely to result in problems.

Footnote:

³ Groves, K., & Marlow, O. (2016) "Spaces for innovation: The design and science of inspiring environments." Frame Publishers.

⁴ Usher, N. (2018) "The Elemental Workplace: How to create a fantastic workplace for everyone." LID Publishing.

3. Good and bad practice in workspace design

The spaces we work in haven't come about by accident. They are a product of a range of different stakeholders, influences and decisions. These vary from workspace to workspace, but by looking at workspace projects more critically, it's possible to identify good and bad practices in the way workspaces are created.

When it comes to creating new workspaces, a common mistake that organisations make is to jump to conclusions about what workspace is right for them. It's easy for organisations to become fixated with 'off-the-shelf' workspace solutions, particularly when they are wrapped up in the latest business fads or fashions, such as agile or activity-based working.

This is human nature. People generally look for easy (path of least resistance) solutions to complicated problems, even if the solution in question isn't necessarily the right one for them. They also like to conform to what is perceived to be the 'norm'. It's therefore unsurprising that organisations see what their peers are doing to their workspaces and often feel obliged to imitate them.

Knowing what other organisations are doing with their workspaces has never been easier with the rise of social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Pinterest and Medium. They are powerful channels for quickly spreading workspace fads and fashions, and provide a convenient platform for companies and consultants to market furniture and technology solutions that cater to them.

Social media also tends to emphasise the aesthetic or visual side of workspaces, rather than how they actually work (or don't work) in practice or the thinking that's gone into them. Arguably one of the reasons why Google's offices became such a fad was because of the way they looked and were portrayed in the media. The big business takeover of co-working is another good example, where we can see particular design aesthetics overshadowing the community-based intentions of early co-working ventures.

Jumping to conclusions about workspace can be particularly problematic when it occurs at senior leadership level because senior leaders often have the power to push through their ideas – regardless of how appropriate they are for their organisation. It's not uncommon to hear stories of chief executives imposing a new workspace on their organisation, based on their own ideals, and for it to have not worked as intended.

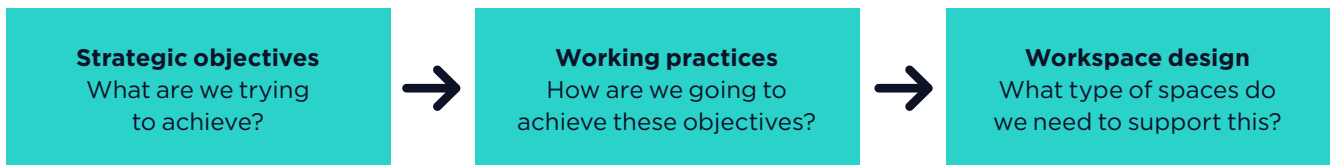
The problem with going into 'solution mode' is that the needs of the organisation and its people tend to be overlooked. This can leave people feeling 'done to' and marginalised, and design teams end up making assumptions about what people (and the organisation) need. In essence, they create workspaces around the needs of 'imagined' users⁵.

A more sensible way to approach workspace design is to:

- 1 Start by understanding what the organisation is trying to achieve – its strategic objectives and priorities
- 2 Then consider how people in the organisation will need to work in order to achieve those objectives – their working practices
- 3 Finally, determine what workspaces (and associated technologies) will be needed to support and enable those working practices.

Footnote:

⁵Ivory C and Alderman N (2009) "The imagined user in projects: articulating competing discourses of space and knowledge work". Ephemera. <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/sites/default/files/9-2ivory-alderman.pdf>



Reframing the discussion about workspace design⁶

This approach might seem like common sense, but it's amazing how many organisations forget about or pay lip service to the first two stages. Often without even realising it, they put the (workspace) cart before the (organisational) horse.

One reason they do this is because the first two stages – but particularly the second one – require time, effort and potentially some upfront expenditure. However, this upfront investment is likely to be insignificant compared to the capital cost of changing an organisation's workspace and, if done properly, should lead to better outcomes.

Another reason why the first two stages are often missed is that they involve asking (sometimes awkward) questions about an organisation and its culture. Such questions are critical to understanding where an organisation is heading and what it aspires to be, but this can be akin to holding a mirror up to the organisation and many leadership teams are not willing to do this.

Instead they can fall into the trap of seeing workspace as a 'silver bullet' to their organisation's cultural issues. Workspace can indeed be a catalyst for cultural change, but the often-heard rhetoric of 'change your space, change your culture' is misleading because it implies that changes to an organisation's workspace can by themselves change the way people think and behave at work.

The reality is that culture change takes time, effort and commitment at all levels of an organisation. Workspace can play a role in encouraging and supporting this – for instance, by signifying a change in leadership style or by providing people with different settings to work in – but relying on workspace alone to solve your organisation's problems can be a very risky and costly strategy.

Footnote:

⁶From Pinder, J; Parker, J; Austin, S; Duggan, F; Lansdale, M; Demian, P; et al. (2009) "The case for new academic workspace". Loughborough University. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/6037>

WORKSPACE ARCHETYPES

Although every workspace is unique in some way, there are only so many ways that physical space can be configured to meet the needs of a particular function or activity. These design configurations are called archetypes: examples that represent typical ways of doing things. Space archetypes are evident in all areas of the built environment, such as healthcare, education and retail.

Archetypes are useful because they provide a shortcut to understanding how a workspace could be configured and how alternative or competing designs differ from each other. They do this by exemplifying the key characteristics of a given design. Archetypes are therefore a really useful communication tool, particularly when engaging with people who are not designers.

However, archetypes need to be used very carefully, and at the right time, because otherwise there's a risk of people becoming preoccupied with spatial solutions and ignoring the needs or problems that the spatial solution is intended to address. This can result in 'off-the-shelf' workspace solutions being used inappropriately, which can be a very costly mistake to make.

Let's bring the idea of archetypes to life by considering the field of office design. Over the last century there have been numerous ideas about what an 'office' should look like, reflecting different ideas of what office work is and how it should be organised. Offices can therefore take many different forms, from an enclosed space for one person, to the classic Dilbert-style cubicle still common in the United States, through to more open spaces accommodating hundreds of people.

Neil Usher, the author of the blog 'workessence'⁷, distilled these different forms into a list of 14 design archetypes, that vary based on:

1. the degree of enclosure or openness
2. the variety of work settings within the space
3. the degree that desks or other work settings are assigned or shared.

His list and descriptions of each archetype underlines the point that when two people talk about an 'office', they may be talking about radically different things. It's worth bearing this in mind next time you see someone in the media criticising a particular type of office design, such as open-plan. See if you can work out which archetype they are referring to and whether their criticisms are justified or not.

Genre	Sub-genre	Description
Enclosed	Individual Cellular	Individual private offices for all staff
	Mixed Cellular	Private offices for all staff, from 1-10 people
	Mixed, Manager-centric	Perimeter private offices for 1-10 people, with open plan desking
	Mixed, Employee-centric	Inboard private offices for 1-10 people, with open plan desking
Open	Assigned	Fully open plan, assigned (1:1) desking
	Trading Floor	Fully open plan, assigned (1:1) specialist desking
	Hotdesk (or Ratio)	Fully open plan, non-assigned desking
	Mixed	Fully open plan, some assigned and some non-assigned
Agile	Landscape (Bürolandschaft)	Assigned desking, with range of alternative work settings
	Activity-Based, zoned	Range of unassigned work settings, with neighbourhoods
	Activity-Based, free	Range of unassigned work settings for various activities, free access
	Lounge	Range of unassigned work settings, no formal desks
	Scrum	Desking arranged for assigned scrums (8-12), with support spaces
Flexible	Co-work	Private offices for 1-25 people, access to shared space and amenities

Now pause and consider your own workspace:

- which of the above archetypes best represents the design of the workspace?
- is the design appropriate, given the nature of your work?
- if the design is not appropriate, which archetype could be more appropriate and why?

Footnote:

⁷<http://workessence.com/alltheworkstyleswehaveeverloved/>

4. Positively influencing workspace design

The purpose of this guidance note is to help non-designers have a positive influence on the design of the workspaces they are involved with or responsible for. This is important because it's all too easy for non-designers to feel excluded from the design process, even though they have valuable skills and knowledge that can contribute to better workspace solutions.

Facilities managers are a case in point. A longstanding complaint amongst FMs is that they are not involved (enough or at all) in the creation of the workspaces that they manage. The result is that workspaces are sometimes more difficult and expensive to manage and/or do not function as well for the people who work in them.

In reality, while some FMs are peripheral to workspace decision-making (or excluded completely), others play a central role in creating or changing workspaces for their organisations (or their clients), working individually or as part of project teams. Sometimes they will assume the role of an 'intelligent client', acting as the interface between the organisation and designers.

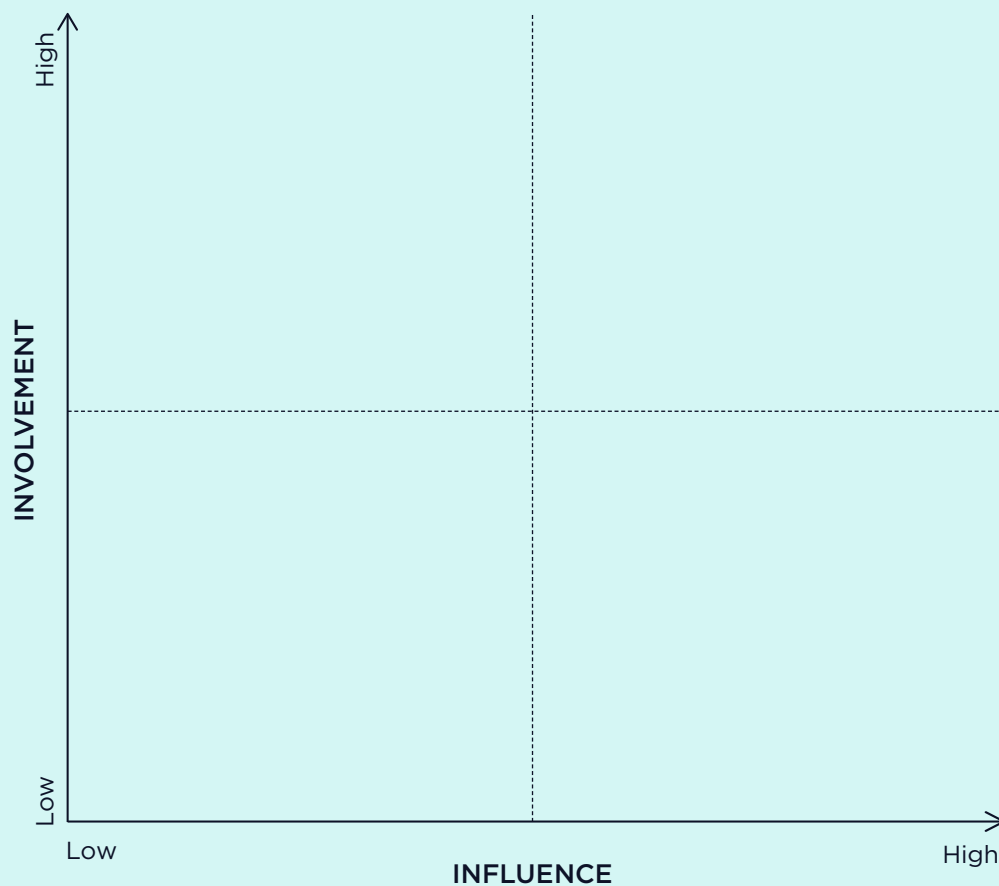




ACTIVITY

Think for a moment about your own situation (or that of your team).

- How involved are you in creating/changing workspaces in your organisation?
- How much influence do you have over the creation of these workspaces?
- Does your involvement/influence vary depending on the client or size of project? If so, why?
- Think of some example projects. Plot your level(s) of influence/involvement on the matrix below.
- Where do you think you should be positioned on the matrix and why?
- What might you do to change your position(s)?



Challenging groupthink can be difficult, particularly if the group in question contains individuals who are more senior or more experienced than you. But it is possible if you approach the issue constructively and maturely. Sometimes just asking simple questions can encourage a group to pause and reflect on whether they are making the right decisions. Such questions might include:

1. have we considered all of the alternatives?
2. do we have robust evidence to support our decision?
3. what could be the potential negative consequences of this decision?

Another reason why critical thinking is important in workspace projects is because of the powerful role that 'conventional wisdom' can play in influencing decisions. Conventional wisdom is when one way of doing something becomes generally accepted as the 'right' way. It explains why we end up with business fads, why organisations copy each other and why many workspaces basically look the same!

A great example of the power of conventional wisdom is the spread of 'activity-based working' – a concept that's often perceived to be 'new' but has actually been around for decades. Done right, activity-based working is where organisations provide employees with a variety of different work settings to support different work activities and empower their employees to use those settings as and when they need to⁹.

Activity-based working has become the starting point (and end point) for many organisations when they create new workspaces or change existing ones. This is often underpinned by an assumption that most 'modern' organisations are now using activity-based working, when in reality it's not the dominant solution lots of people take it to be⁹. It's right for some organisations, but not others.

This example also underlines the important role that evidence can play in challenging conventional wisdom around workspace design. If decision-makers and/or designers are making assumptions about workspace that are ill-founded, then providing them with compelling evidence can be a useful way to encourage them to revisit their assumptions.

Evidence-based design is by no means a new idea, but it's surprising how many organisations do not use evidence when making decisions about their workspace – even when evidence plays a critical role in their other business activities. As a non-designer, one of the powerful contributions that you can make to the design process is to ask what evidence is underpinning particular design decisions.

Evidence can certainly provide the basis for more informed conversations about workspace design – particularly between designers and non-designers – but you need to think critically about the quality of evidence people are basing their decisions on. Is it the right evidence? Is it the right quality? Are people interpreting it correctly?

The ability to think critically about evidence is particularly important in a world where we are surrounded by information about workspace and workplace more generally. We receive information from colleagues and from suppliers and consultants, but we also actively seek information when trying to solve problems, for instance by searching on the internet.

It should now be clear that having a positive influence on workspace design does need to be about assuming or emulating the role of the designer. You can have a positive influence by representing your organisation, making a genuine effort to understand people's needs, thinking critically and using evidence effectively. These activities are really important – so don't be led to think otherwise.

Footnote:

⁹https://www.leesmanindex.com/The_Rise_and_Rise_of_Activity_Based_Working_Research_book.pdf

STAKEHOLDERS IN THE WORKSPACE INDUSTRY

As with any industry, the workspace industry is comprised of a range of different stakeholders, each with different and sometimes competing motives and agendas. We can think of it as an ecosystem or community of mutually dependent parties, including real estate agents, property developers, architects, interior designers, consultants, furniture manufacturers and fit-out contractors.

You may engage with some or all of these parties at some point during the course of your work. Understanding their motives and agendas can help you to think more critically about what they are saying to you (or trying to sell to you) and whether it's in your (or your organisation's) best interest or not.

For instance, if you're a furniture manufacturer or fit-out company, your primary driver is likely to be selling furniture to clients. You can dress it up however you want, but selling furniture is how you make money and therefore stay in business. The other things you do, such as consultancy or design, are likely to be in service of that.

That's not to say that you've not got your client's interests at heart. You may want to create a fantastic workspace for them and their people and deliver a solution that you can be genuinely proud of. But the reality is that whatever your client's problem is, workspace will be the solution you offer because that's the business you're in – whether that's really the right solution for them or not.

Let's take another example: consultants. It's not unusual for consultants to have a preconceived or preferred solution to organisational problems – Six Sigma, lean thinking and agile working spring to mind. Such solutions are tried and tested, and therefore less risky and easier to deliver for the consultants involved. But that doesn't mean they are appropriate for every organisation.

These examples are obviously stereotypes and, like all generalisations, are not a perfect representation of the real world. You may be in one of these groups and argue that your motives are different to those described. However, the reality is that stereotypes often contain more than a grain of truth.

It's also important to realise that the motives and agendas described above are not wrong in themselves. They make absolute sense for the party in question – after all, why would you not want to sell furniture if that's how you make money – but the point is that they may not always be in an organisation's best interest.

The next time you find yourself engaging with suppliers or consultants in the workspace industry, ask yourself the following questions:

1. how does the supplier or consultant make their money? How might this influence the advice they provide me with?
2. what solutions have they provided for other organisations and have they had a positive impact?
3. do they have a standard solution that they've used with multiple organisations? If so, how can we be sure it's the right solution for our organisation?

5. What should I do next?

We recommend that you:

- 1** Give this guidance note to colleagues (including clients and senior managers) who you think might be interested in it. Make sure you have a follow-up conversation about it and what it means for the workspaces in your organisation or your client's organisation
- 2** Complete the workspace health check below for your own organisation or a client organisation. This will give you a high-level indication of how suitable your organisation's/client's workspace is for them and the areas for potential improvement.
- 3** Find out more about how your organisation (or client's organisation) goes about developing and delivering new workspaces. What works well and what works less well? How might its approach be improved?

YOUR WORKSPACE HEALTH CHECK

This thinking tool has been designed to help you reflect on the suitability of your organisation's workspace.

As with any health check, this tool requires you to reflect on your own situation critically and honestly. Remember, sometimes honest truths can be uncomfortable!

You might find it helpful to complete this health check individually within your team and then come together to discuss your responses.

To complete the health check, think about a workspace you need to understand better. It might be an entire building or a specific part of the building. Read each statement and pick a point on the corresponding scale that feels about right for you. Try not to overthink the statements!

Let's take statement 6 as an example. If you think that your workspace really makes people feel valued, you might pick a point somewhere to the right hand-side of the scale.

Functional

- 1 It helps people to do their work
- 2 It's easy to use
- 3 It supports different needs
- 4 Everything works as it should do
- 5 People can adapt it to their needs

Symbolic

- 6 It makes people feel valued
- 7 It reflects what the organisation is about
- 8 It displays positive messages
- 9 People talk positively about it
- 10 It's a nice place to be

Once you've put a mark on each scale, draw a line down through the marks so that you can see the profile of your responses.

Then take stock of the overall picture and ask yourself:

- what are the strengths and weaknesses of the workspace?
- are there any obvious areas for improvement?
- what could you do to explore these weaknesses further?

LEARNING MORE ABOUT CREATING BETTER WORKSPACES

There are a number of ways you can learn more about creating better workspace through IWFM. We have a number of resources on the subject, including the following good practice guides and guidance notes.

- 'Space planning management'
- 'Agile Working Change Management'
- 'Customer Experience'
- 'Introduction to Workplace'
- 'Making better workplace decisions using data'
- 'Internet of Things'

These are available to download from our website at:
<https://www.iwfm.org.uk/insight/>

We have partnered with workplace specialists 3edges to provide a one-day CPD course on 'Creating better workspaces' as part of our 'Workplace Leadership Programme'. The course can be attended individually or delivered for groups 'in-company'.

Multi-course discounts are available. To find out more about our courses or to book a place, visit:
www.iwfm.org.uk/professional-development/academy

The ideas and approaches in this guidance note also form part of our 'Level 6 Diploma in Workplace Leadership, Insight and Change'. This is the first workplace qualification of its kind. If you would like to learn more about the Diploma, including individual and in-company options, contact:
qualifications@iwfm.org.uk



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We exist to promote excellence among a worldwide community of over 17,000 and to demonstrate the value and contribution of workplace and facilities management more widely.

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Our Vision: As the pioneering workplace and facilities management body, our vision is to drive change for the future. To be the trusted voice of a specialist profession recognised, beyond the built environment, for its ability to enable people to transform organisations and their performance.

The IWFM was established in 2018. It builds on the proud heritage of 25 years as the British Institute of Facilities Management.

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This guide has been produced as part of a partnership between IWFM and Ricoh.

About Ricoh

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Headquartered in Tokyo, Ricoh Group operates in approximately 200 countries and regions. In the financial year ended March 2019, Ricoh Group had worldwide sales of 2,013 billion yen (approx. 18.1 billion USD).

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