WHEN TO RETHINK YOUR WORKPLACE STRATEGY:

A ROAD MAP FOR FACILITY MANAGERS

NELSON
WHITE PAPER

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A ROAD MAP FOR FACILITY MANAGERS

In recent years, corporate leadership and facility managers have embraced the office environment as a tool for increasing productivity and achieving financial objectives. Adopting an effective workplace strategy has become crucial to maximizing the potential of workspace, and with no two companies identical, a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. The result is a growing industry of workplace strategists focused on leveraging office space as an asset that enhances the employee experience, reinforces brand identity and culture, attracts talent, and ultimately results in a positive impact on the bottom line. For these reasons, investing in workplace strategy for your office is a quadruple win.

Workplace strategy can be thought of as a three-ply cord, comprised of the built **ENVIRONMENT,** company **CULTURE,** and **TECHNOLOGY.**

WHAT IS WORKPLACE STRATEGY?

By definition, workplace strategy is "the dynamic alignment of an organization's work patterns with the work environment to enable peak performance and reduce costs.[1]" In practice, a workplace strategy is a systematic evaluation of how space is being used in order to optimize effectiveness and efficiency in the workspace.[2] Workplace strategy can be thought of as a three-ply cord, comprised of the built environment, company culture, and technology. When these three "strands" carry equal weight and consideration during the development of a workplace strategy, the outcomes are optimal.

Work as we know it is evolving at a rapid rate, and it looks nothing like it did a decade ago. As the workforce changes, and the way we work changes, it's more important than ever for organizations to honestly assess
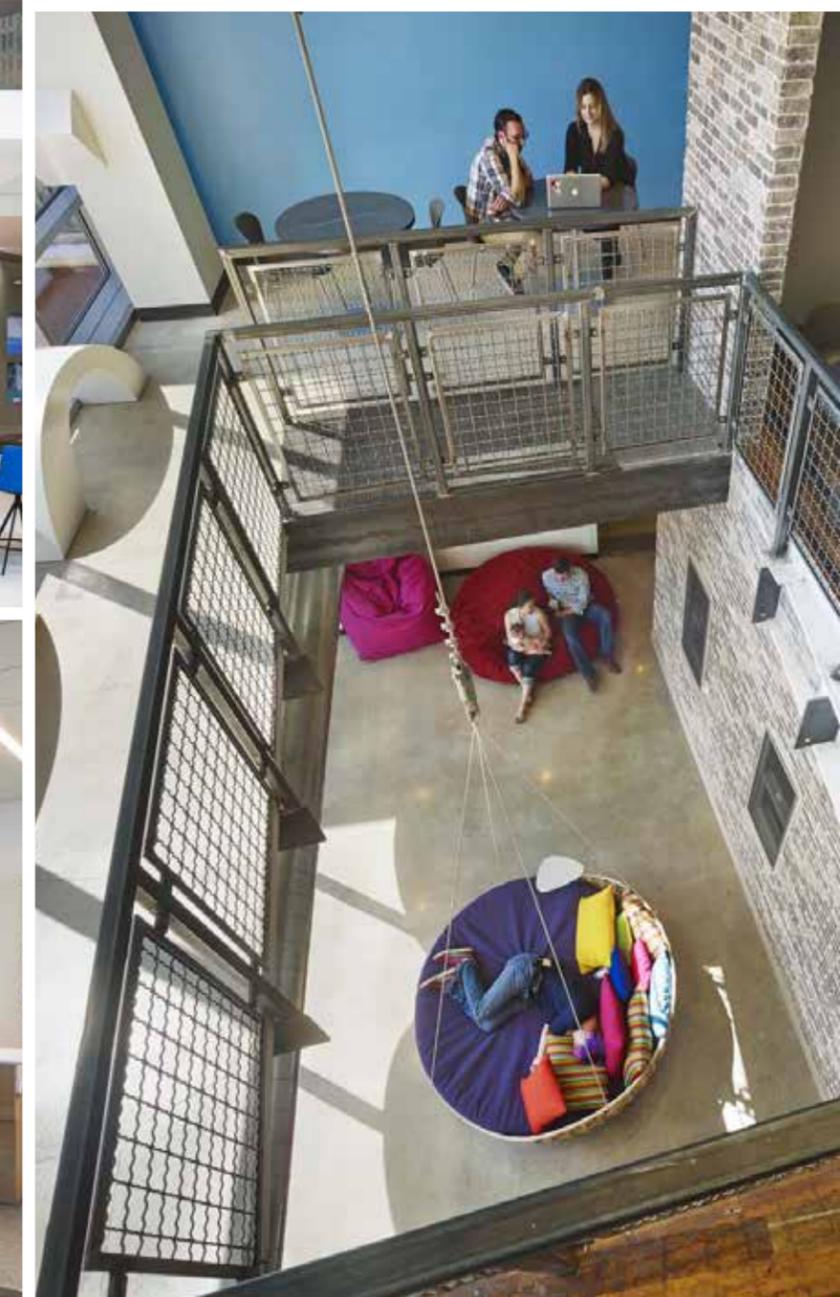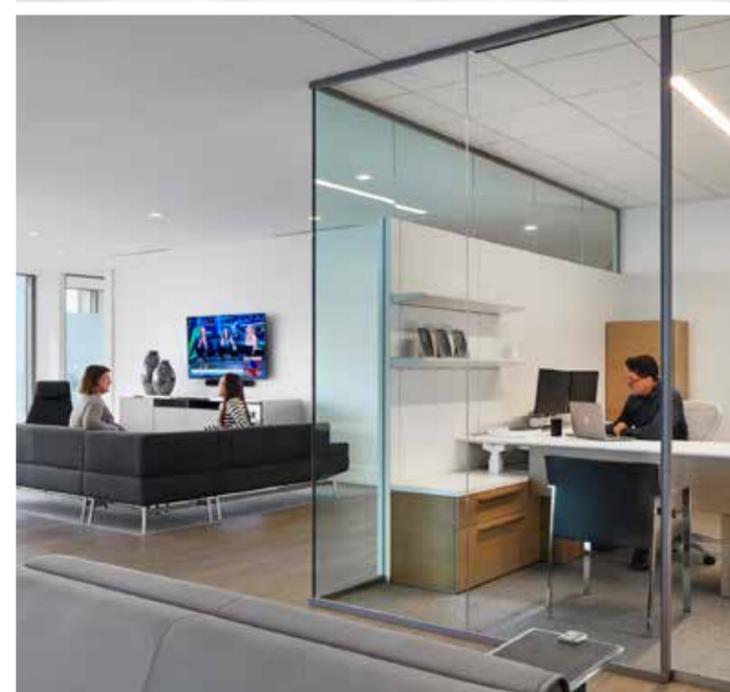
their workspace and whether it is helping or hindering their vision and goals. Appropriately responding to the internal and external factors that influence the effectiveness of your current workplace strategy will position your workplace as a strategic asset, and result in direct business performance benefits.

This paper will broadly examine the most critical trends impacting the workforce today and in the foreseeable future. It will then lay out a road map for facilities and office managers to follow in initiating and implementing change. If any of the following trends are familiar to you because you have noticed a recent impact in your organization, then it may be time to rethink your workplace strategy.

TRENDS IMPACTING WORKPLACE STRATEGY EFFECTIVENESS

Work Styles
Our country is experiencing a shift in how we work. Group-based work is being adopted as a standard in many industries, and in 2020, it is expected to make up over 60% of work performed.[3] On top of that, organizations are flattening and dispersing their leadership. As knowledge work continues to increase in its complexity, organizations are implementing non-linear workflows. The traditional open office planning methodology does not support new ways people are working, compounding the importance of a strategy that simplifies workflow and enables new work styles.

Workforce
The incorporation of outsourced teams, contractors, freelancers, gig workers (paid for tasks), and the crowd (outsourced networks) – also known as the "alternative" workforce – into American business models has become mainstream, expected to increase to 42 million self-employed workers in 2020.[4] As organizations incorporate "alternative" workers, which include part-time and remote employees, workspace utilization and efficiency can dip if their inclusion has not been properly strategized. Another workforce factor to note is that Generation Z has officially entered the workforce, meaning it is now possible for five different generations to be working side-by-side.[5] A successful workplace strategy addresses the employee experience for all workers and is a powerful means to engage employees at all points of the generational spectrum.

War for Talent
As a country, we are experiencing the lowest unemployment rates in nearly half a century.[6] As the Baby Boomer generation continues to age out of the workforce, the American workplace will continue to experience an increasing shortage of talent. In 2020, the U.S. is projected to have a shortage of 1.5 million workers with college or graduate degrees.[7] Ensuring that your workplace offers resources and reflects values that are important to the employees you want to attract and retain will be crucial in the war for talent.

Employee Engagement and Retention
When employee engagement decreases, there is a rise in employee turnover. An engaged employee is the key to business productivity and profit[8] and is 87% less likely to leave an organization, showing 20% increased performance over their disengaged peers.[9] Leveraging your workplace as a tool to increase employee engagement not only reaps benefits from a

Workplace strategy focuses on leveraging a built environment that enhances the employee experience, reinforces brand identity and culture, attracts talent, and results in a positive impact on the bottom line.

Left: Confidential Technology Client—Seattle, WA

Previous (Clockwise from top):
AT&T Tower—Minneapolis, MN
Google—Cambridge, MA
Winslow Capital Management—Minneapolis, MN

Cover: Boston Consulting Group—Atlanta, GA

WORKPLACE STRATEGY EFFECTIVENESS

(Diagram factors: Real Estate Costs, Culture, Technology, Premium on Innovation, Employee Engagement and Retention, War for Talent, Workforce, Work Styles, Wellness, Flexibility and Adaptability)
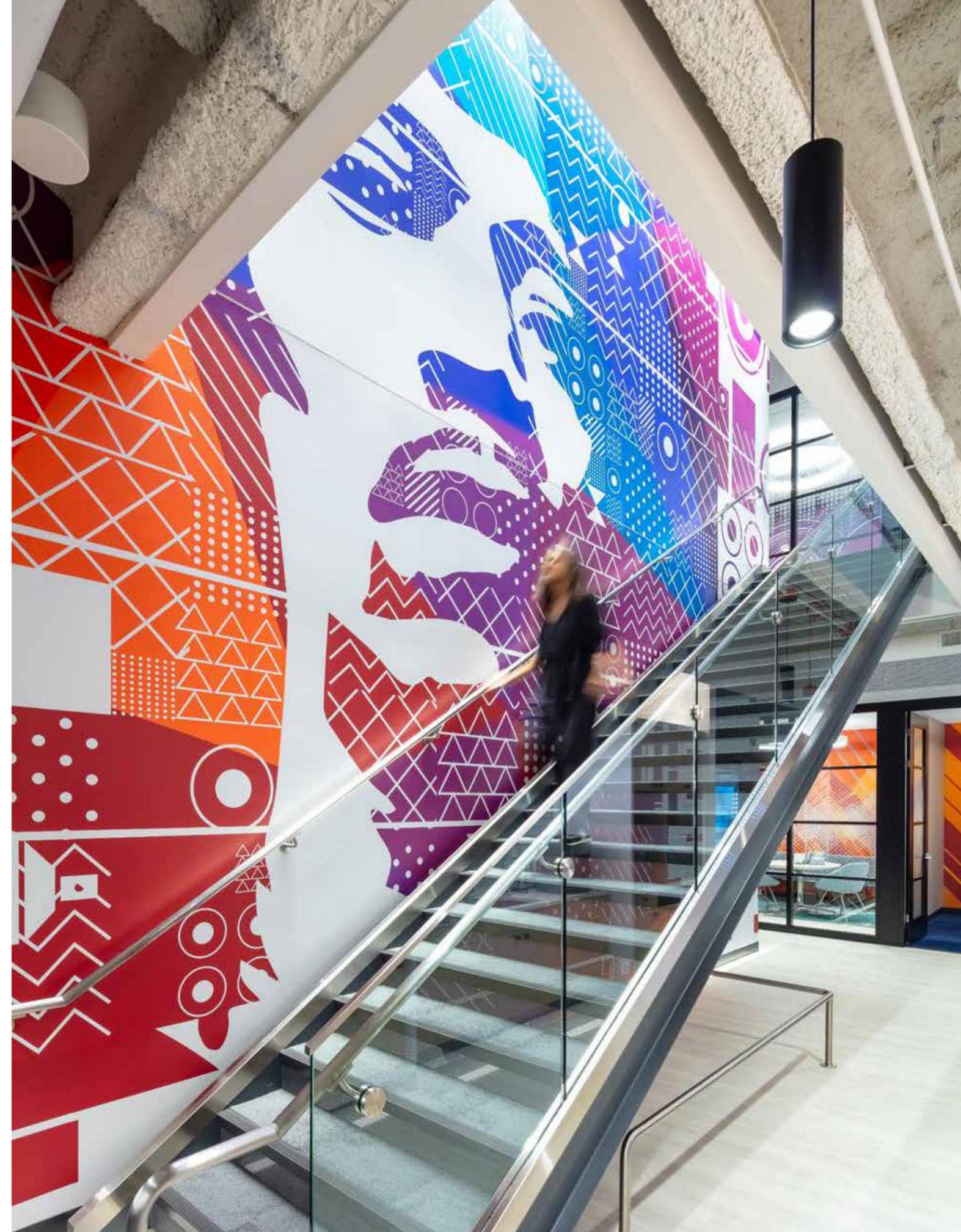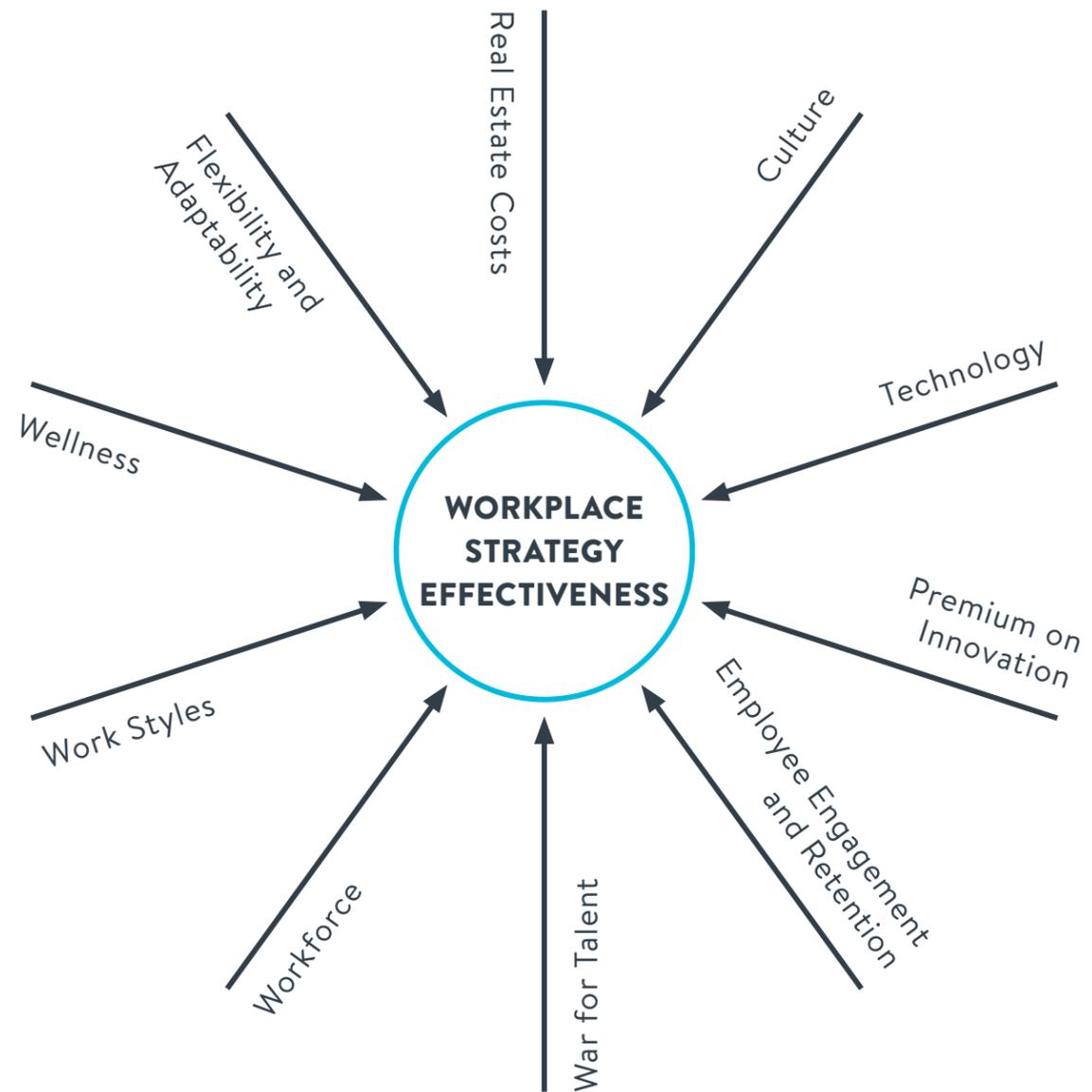
Many factors can impact the effectiveness of a workplace strategy, from hard measures such as financial objectives to softer considerations such as the quality of employee engagement and diversity of work styles.

Source: Brittany Jones

performance and productivity standpoint, but it pays to retain your employees. Conservative estimates put the cost to replace one employee at 1.5 times his or her salary.[10] There are significant costs associated with recruiting and training new employees, and a harder-to-quantify cost of the lost expertise and productivity associated with turnover. If high turnover rates are impacting your organization, it may be a sign that your workplace strategy has lost its effectiveness.

Premium on Innovation
The link between collaboration and innovation has radically impacted workplace planning for the last decade. A study by Knoll[11] notes that innovation is enabled by operational excellence, including speed of group decision-making. If innovation and speed of decision-making are of high value in your organization, then workplace planning should provide adequate collaborative spaces and tools to accommodate the various types of in-person and web-based group work occurring in your office.

Technology
Technology is one of the three main contributors to the success of a workplace strategy. With technology evolving at an exponential speed,[12] the importance of continually revisiting how well your technology and infrastructure are supporting your workforce and organizational goals cannot be overstated. Your workplace planning can be spot on, with your culture and policies coordinated to a tee, but if your technology is out of date or hard to use, your workplace strategy will fail to bring the fullness of its possible returns.

Culture
Organizational culture largely influences the success of any organization, and greatly affects the success of a workplace strategy.[13] If your organization is undergoing any changes that impact organizational culture, or if company culture is competing against the efforts of your built environment or technology initiatives, then

your workplace strategy will fall short. Recalibration is necessary to get all three arenas on the same page and working as a cohesive whole.

Real Estate Costs
As companies continue to shift from the suburbs to urban areas, occupancy costs in the city are rising.[14] As organizations grow, merge, or take on new functions, additional square footage comes at a premium. It also is not uncommon to hear clients say they are "out of space" in their current facilities in this booming economy. An effective workplace strategy increases workspace utilization by identifying opportunities for increased efficiency and is a major cost advantage to an office move or increasing leasable square footage.

Flexibility and Adaptability
Today's workplace is "becoming less formulaic and static" as it attempts to support greater adaptability and more fluid workflows and schedules.[15] A successful workplace strategy not only accommodates fluidity on a task level, but also at an organizational level. If you are noticing that small changes require big responses, you could benefit from a workplace strategy that aims at minimizing your organization's effort to adapt to change, reducing environmental impacts and investment costs in the process.[16]

The traditional open office planning methodology does not support new ways people are working.

The vital first step in establishing a workplace strategy is assembling the RIGHT TEAM.

Wellness

There is a growing focus on wellness in office environments as we become more aware of how individual health factors into employee effectiveness and performance. Employers agree that a healthy employee is a happy employee, and the result of this understanding has been corporate policies that encourage mental and physical health—i.e. flex-work policies, gym memberships, healthy snacks and drinks, etc.— which are of critical importance in attracting the millennial workforce. Additionally, the introduction of WELL building standards in 2014 has equipped organizations with knowledge of how to incorporate these wellness perks into their built environment.

This list of trends is not exhaustive. Ultimately, if your workplace, organizational culture, and/or technology are negatively impacting your employee's productivity and ability to perform, then it is time to rethink your workplace strategy.

A healthy employee is a happy employee; corporate policies that encourage mental and physical health are of critical importance in attracting the millennial workforce.

Nomad Tower—New York City

WHAT ARE THE STEPS IN DEVELOPING A WORKPLACE STRATEGY?

After identifying the need to create a new workplace strategy or revamp an existing one, the following steps will help you navigate through the process:

1. Assemble the Right Team

The vital first step in establishing a workplace strategy is assembling the right team, which should be composed of an interdisciplinary body made up of individuals internal and external to the organization. Internally, the team should include representation from corporate leadership and management, human resources, information technology, and real estate/facilities. Failure to include the right stakeholders can have negative implications on the result of this process. Inviting employees to be a part of the strategizing process not only provides valuable insight, but also enhances their ownership and trust in the changes themselves, which helps gain their buy-in once the changes are implemented. Including external strategic partners, such as interior designers, architects, and workplace strategists/consultants early in the process is a value-add as they will offer outside expertise and valuable insights from their previous experiences with other businesses.[17]

2. Discovery Phase

Once your team is in place, the next step is to enter the discovery phase, where the goal is to gather as much information as possible about how your space is used and who is using it. Goals of this phase are to evaluate the effectiveness of any workplace strategies that may currently be in place, to determine current space needs (how much and how they function), and to begin developing planning and policy models that can address any inefficiencies found during this exercise.

Initial Assessment of Current Workplace Strategy: To fully understand how well your current workplace is doing its job, a thorough examination of data and metrics pertaining to your workspace is critical. This would include, but is not limited to, evaluating the mix of alternative workers versus full-time employees, any mobility programs that may be in place, and developing a firm understanding of space utilization. The diversity of your team members will be a huge asset to this process, because each department will be able to lend information and insights to help paint a full picture of the strengths and weaknesses of your workplace. Also, a plethora of workplace analytic technologies exist today that collect data on employees' space usage habits. Wearable technology as well as building systems and sensors track how many people enter and exit specific rooms, and your IT personnel can analyze this

A successful workplace strategy should be **MEASURABLE,** so take the time to determine how success will be measured once it is implemented.

data.[18] Your employees are imperative to this process, and many organizations opt to hold departmental focus groups or deploy surveys to gain a clearer picture of their perspectives. The accumulation of this information will create a comprehensive understanding of when, where, and how often people are working throughout your workplace.

Analyze Current Space Needs: After acquiring space usage data and determining the effectiveness of the existing workplace strategy, it is possible to assess adjustments that need to be made to align your work environment, culture, and technology with the all-encompassing values of your organization. Research suggests that "if many work spaces are not used or are unoccupied and work is still getting done, then an organization needs to determine where the work is being performed, and how the existing workplace might be changed to better support employees as they work.[19]" External partners, such as interior designers, architects and workplace consultants, can be helpful in identifying workplace trends by industry and recognizing opportunities for improvement. Their expertise will also be beneficial as future workplace strategies are explored and applied to your specific scenario.

3. Formulating Future Workplace Strategies

The process of formulating possible solutions for your workplace should include consideration of the tangible elements, such as employees, adjacencies, and the allocation of space and technologies. Intangible elements such as business processes and policies should also be considered. As the team is weighing potential strategies, projecting coinciding business models and financial justification at this juncture will help in prioritizing investments and will provide insight into the return on investment. A successful workplace strategy should be measurable, so as a team, take the time to determine how success will be measured once the new strategy is implemented.

Workplace strategies are not one-size-fits-all solutions pre-determined by organization types or industries. These strategies are as unique to the organization as the company's brand, culture, and employees. Your design team or workplace strategists can help you sort through many options to determine the best solutions for your company. Several of the most popular current trends impacting workplace effectiveness include the following space types:

Activity Spaces: The modern office is one that allows employees to work throughout the entire office, not just their primary workspace, or assigned desk. The addition of activity spaces throughout a floor plan to provide alternate destinations for group or individual work is becoming the norm. Driven by a desire for organizational innovation (people moving around the office increases likelihood of serendipitous interactions), or increased employee engagement, the inclusion of "a variety of spaces for a variety of work[20]" offers choice and autonomy to the employee – a factor proven to enhance the overall workplace experience.[21] Contrary to popular belief, activity spaces can be open or closed, private

WORKPLACE STRATEGY PROCESS MAP

After identifying the need to create a new workplace strategy or revamp an existing one, defining the process is the next major step.

Source: Brittany Jones
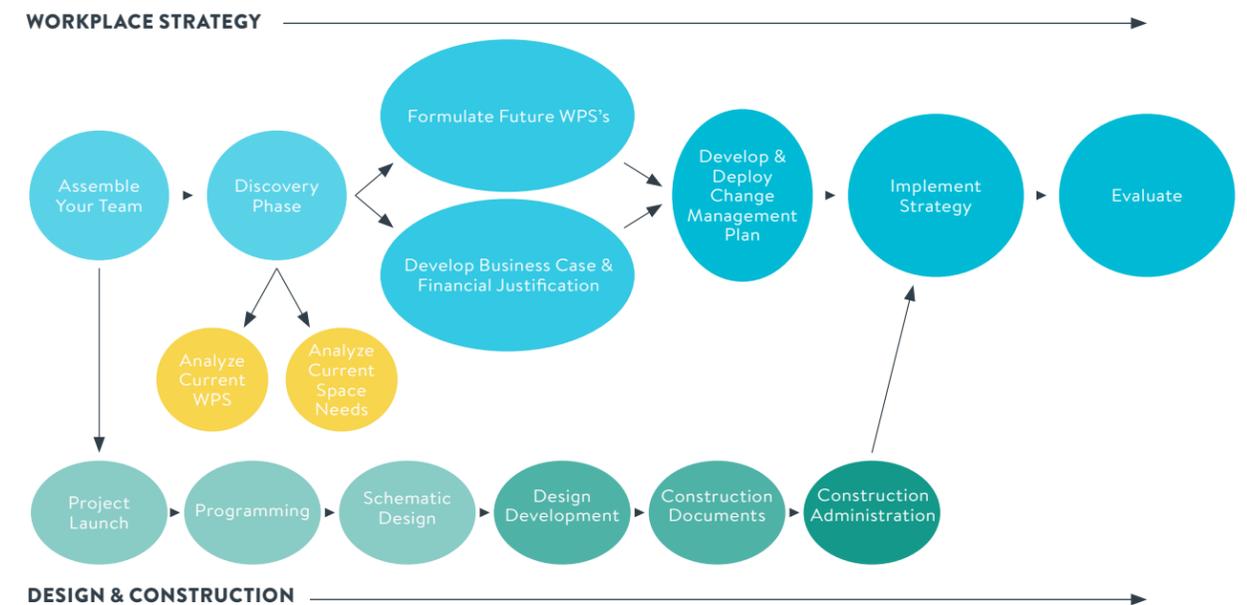
or public, and the most effective offices provide a variety of activity spaces to accommodate a range of work styles. The following list summarizes common space types for consideration:

> Refuge: For focus work among one or two

> Enclave: For small group interactions among three or four

> Team Meeting: For teams of five to eight

> Assembly: Spaces for conferences, lectures, or training

> Community: Areas for informal socializing, eating, or collaborating[22]

Effective activity spaces convey visual and ergonomic comfort. They provide intuitive and appropriate technology and adapt quickly and easily to the needs of the users.

Two factors that can significantly impact the effectiveness of your activity spaces are *privacy and proximity*.[23] It is imperative to provide workplaces that accommodate all work being generated within the organization, and often times, it's the private spaces for heads-down, focus work that get overlooked. Distraction is one of the biggest challenges facing effective focus work, and evidence shows it is detrimental to satisfaction in the workplace.[24] Carefully considering acoustic and visual privacy in all environments, and strategizing adjacencies during the planning phase as they relate to each space function will help to minimize distractions that decrease productivity and engagement.

Amenities: Another way to encourage employees to work throughout the office is through work-focused amenities. The term "work-focused" is key, because there are plenty examples of amenities that serve to distract from the "work" part of work (i.e. game rooms). Recent research indicates that amenities that directly support the work process of an organization increase employees' effectiveness and experience the most.[25] According to the U.S. Workplace Survey 2019, examples of amenities that held the greatest value were innovation hubs, maker spaces, and quiet/tech-free zones, whereas the least valuable amenities were lounges and cafeterias. When contemplating the right amenities for your office, it is important to strike the right balance for your employees, because too little or too many can negatively impact employees' abilities to work where and how they choose, adversely affecting the return on investment for these spaces.

Coworking: Coworking spaces (think WeWork, Spaces, Industrious, and the like) have been popping up all over the place in the past five years, and there is anticipation that their saturation in urban city centers will continue to rise. At their inception, coworking environments provided workspace, amenities, and technology for individuals and small groups. As mid and large-sized organizations increasingly embrace mobile and alternative workers, many are partnering with coworking spaces to provide choice and amenities to their employees that they perhaps cannot provide within their own environment.[26] Other workplace strategies implementing coworking include sub-leasing coworking space for off-site teams or as satellite offices, generally in the research and development, innovation, or human resource sectors. Benefits to this strategy include employee collaboration and connection, increased job satisfaction, improved space utilization, and real estate cost savings due to environments/amenities not requiring duplication within the workplace.[27]

Tech + Tech Spaces: In today's technological climate, the world feels smaller than it ever has before. Never has it been this easy to collaborate across continents through sharing and transmitting information virtually. The impact of these advancements on mobility is obvious, and modern workplace strategies are increasingly considering the usage of these new technologies and the power they hold to contribute toward the overall aims of a company. To be clear, this is not just scattering videoconference-enabled screens throughout the office. Gathering key information upfront will ensure you are providing the right spaces and the right technology. Thoroughly integrating both technology and policies that do not simply allow – but also encourage – virtual collaborations and communications are no longer the exception, but the norm, as organizational structures place more value on quality results and efficiency in the decision-making and innovation process.

Unassigned Workspaces: Also referred to as hoteling, or free address, an unassigned workspace strategy is one where users do not have a primary workspace. Research continues to examine the implications of unassigned seating in the workplace as the number of organizations adopting this model steadily increases.[28] Because there is a link between employees' ability to personalize their space and their engagement,[29] unassigned workspace runs the risk of disengaging employees and must be rolled out strategically, usually starting with a small pilot group. Determining the right ratios of unassigned-to-assigned seating in a workplace is an exercise in balancing cost benefits against the level

As organizations increasingly embrace mobile and alternative workers, many are partnering with coworking spaces to provide choice and amenities to their employees that they cannot provide within their own environment.

Confidential Workspace Provider—Scottsdale, AZ
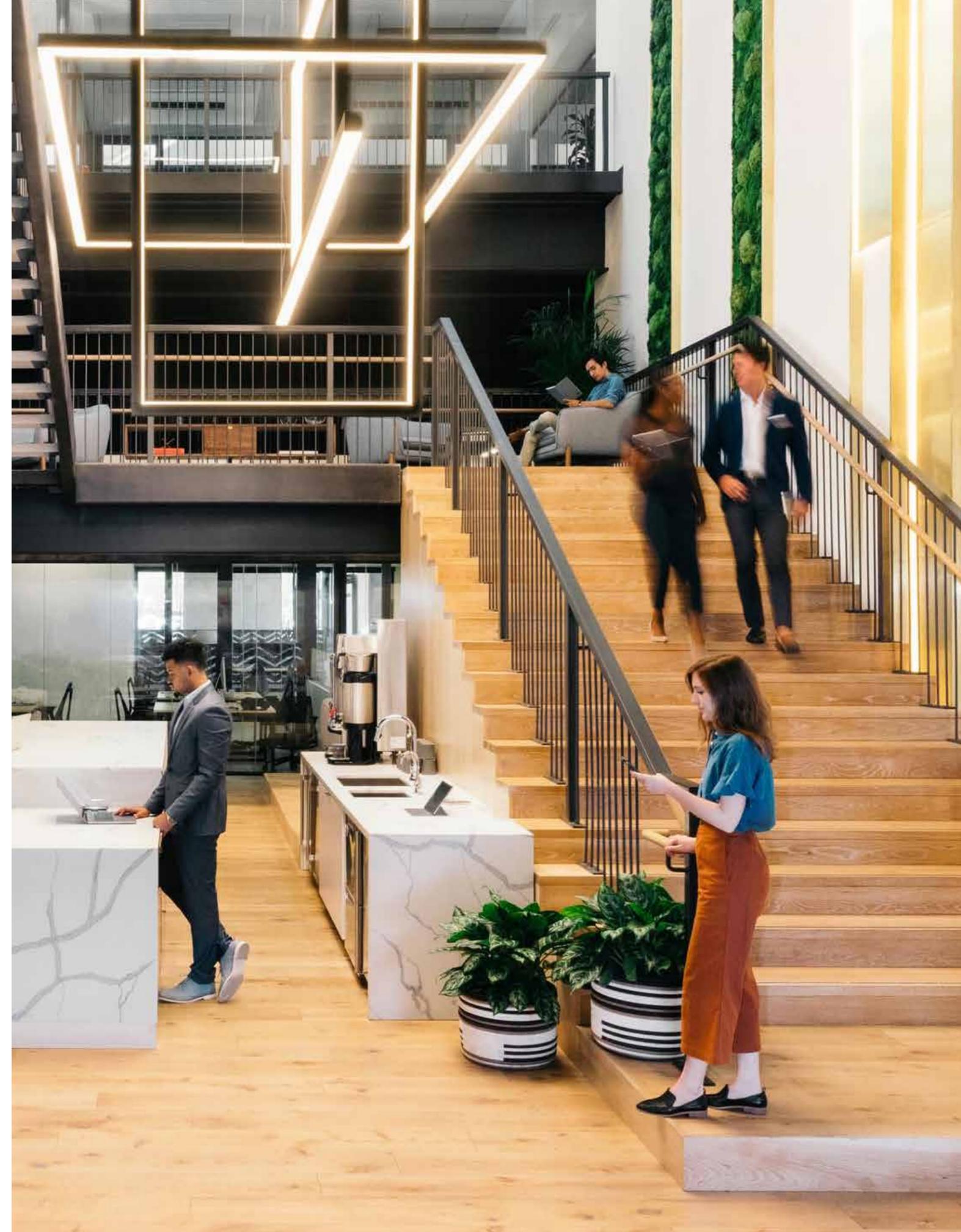
of employee engagement. Utilizing industry standards as a benchmark can be helpful when starting to find your goldilocks zone, and currently free-address ratios are sitting between 1:2 and 1:4.[30] When in doubt, start with a smaller mix of unassigned stations to test the waters. If your organization is struggling to embrace unassigned workspaces, the following factors may be to blame:

> Culture: Consider everything about your organizational culture that may be hindering the adoption of unassigned space – how do your employees work? How do they collaborate? What are your company's overall goals? Are there other opportunities for personalization throughout the office?

> Management: How are you helping employees to transition into the new environment? Are there procedures and policies in place to help minimize distractions? How does one claim a desk for the day? How are you facilitating this process? Is everyone from the CEO to office interns following cultural protocols?

> Resources: Do your employees have access to everything they need to perform their jobs?

> States of Mind: Are you celebrating employees and their achievements? How are you addressing their needs to retreat when work depends on it?[31]

You know your unassigned seating strategy is working when you see your employees working throughout the entirety of your office. While unassigned workspaces need to be implemented delicately and intentionally, they offer tremendous benefits from interoffice connectivity to space utilization and reduced employee footprints.[32]

Holistic Wellbeing: Strategies considering the holistic wellbeing of employees and how the workplace impacts their physical, mental and social health are gaining importance in today's workplace.[33] It's no surprise given that mental illness is the leading cause of worker disability in the United States.[34] Strategies geared toward wellbeing tend to consider aspects of workload that may induce stress, workspace

ergonomics for the individual (rather than a one-size-fits-all approach) and workplace safety and health. Policies and environments are crafted to support these ideologies for employees. Benefits include employee empowerment, autonomy, and engagement, resulting in overall general happiness and job satisfaction.[35] Research supports that "every dollar dedicated to creating a mentally healthy workplace is estimated to generate $2.30 in organizational benefits," proving a financial benefit as well.[36]

Remote Strategies: Because the built environment is only one of the three strands that impact the efficacy of workplace strategy – the other two being culture and technology – company policies and procedures can also drive workplace strategy. Examples of some of these alternative strategies would include:

> Adopting flexible work schedules

> Enabling telework policies

> Qualifying coworking + satellite offices[37]

4. Developing and Deploying A Change Management Plan

Lack of investment in a change management program to help transition your workforce is one of the primary reasons why strategies stall or fail to meet their intended goals. Change resulting from modifying workplace strategy will fall anywhere between minimal and extremely disruptive, dependent on the level of investment and shifts required. Regardless of where your change falls on that spectrum, people-focused management throughout the change process is pivotal when implementing a new workplace strategy. The most fail-proof change management plans are dynamic, flexible, and detailed. Help your people conquer their fears of change by including them during the process, educating them on others' successes, and training them on their new spaces and tools. When in doubt, over-communicate! Adequate communication results in successful change management. Use supportive
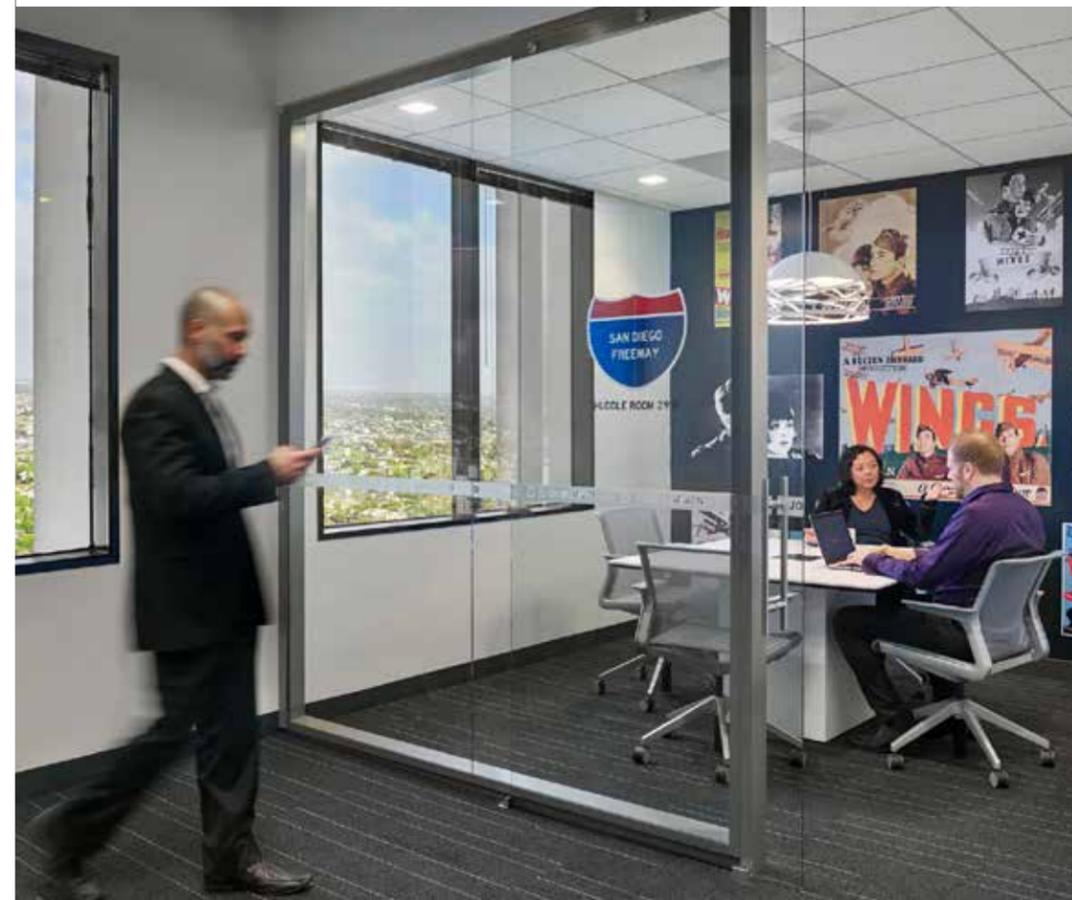
Unassigned seating strategies encourage employees to disperse throughout the office and choose the setting that supports their current task best.

Top: Husch Blackwell—Chicago, IL
Left: Dow Jones—Los Angeles, CA

communication to get your employees excited about the change, and to prevent anyone from feeling shocked or surprised once the changes are implemented. A change manager, or change management team, should be designated during this stage, and may consider partnering with the design team and/or external consultants to develop visual tools that allow this information to be conveyed graphically and in a format that is exciting for employees.

5. Implementation

Research supports two significant tactics during implementation of workplace strategy that correlate to success: a top-down approach, and test pilots. Applying a workplace strategy using a top-down approach means that top-level executives and managers are the first to employ the new strategies. Since these are the individuals that drive change in the organization, their adoption is critical. Experience shows that if this tier of your workforce accepts the new strategy, it will be accepted more efficiently by the rest of the staff.[38]

Testing strategies in confined areas before executing them across your entire organization has also proven a helpful approach, as it allows you to pilot the execution of a strategy and test its success on a smaller scale. It also enables the strategizing team to study and measure results, and to adjust the strategy as required based on those outcomes. Once the strategy has been proven, it can then be implemented company wide.

6. Post-Implementation Evaluation

The final stage of the workplace strategizing process is a post-implementation (also called post-occupancy) evaluation. The goal here is to test measurable outcomes that you developed as you formulated your workplace strategy earlier in the process. Using similar techniques to those employed during the discovery phase, a post-occupancy evaluation should capture and analyze new data around workspace utilization, workflow, performance, and overall employee engagement. Workplace analytic technologies can help paint a picture of foot traffic and space usage.

Common examples include wearable devices (Bluetooth, RFID, MEMS sensors, etc.) to help with studying individual human behaviors, and computer vision programs (such as iOffice) to aid in monitoring habits of groups of people and foot traffic patterns. Many organizations choose to supplement these technologies with employee focus group interviews or surveys.

Proven Impacts of Organizational Workplace Strategy: The growing interest in workplace strategies is due to proven impacts of how these strategies align the built environment with an organization's objectives. Some of these valuable impacts include:

> Cost savings through space optimization[39]

> Enhanced innovation and communication[40]

> Improved performance and productivity[41]

> Recruiting and retaining employees[42]

> Increased health and wellness[43]

> Reduction of the company's carbon footprint[44]

> Heightened flexibility and adaptation capabilities[45]

CONCLUSION

Is it time to rethink your workplace strategy? The short answer is a resounding YES. Humankind is experiencing accelerating change, meaning knowledge is doubling and technology is evolving at exponential rates.[46] Scientific evaluation of how the workplace ecosystem impacts the success of businesses will continue to become more sophisticated. With that in mind, workplace strategy should be viewed as a cycle, not merely a one-time process; a cycle that continues to be revisited. Regular assessment of your workplace strategy is an effective means in anticipating changes in how and where work is being completed, allowing you to make the best use of your real estate capital as it relates to your employees.[47]

Organizations are catching on to the reality that workplace strategy drives organizational success. A strong workplace strategy is holistic in its approach, human-centric, data-driven, and flexible.[48] When done well, it allows an organization to leverage its workplace as an asset, supporting its own values, mission, objectives, and goals in such a way that all stakeholders win.

Workplace strategy should be viewed as a cycle, not merely a one-time process; a cycle that continues to be revisited.

Left: ECMC—Minneapolis, MN

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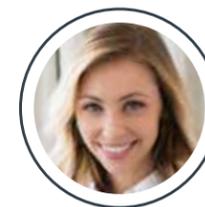
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Brittany Jones has extensive knowledge of the corporate, retail, hospitality, and educational market sectors. Brittany's wide range of client experience has enriched her understanding of effective workplace strategies that respond to each individual organization's unique culture and needs. She currently focuses on corporate interior design in Atlanta, supporting all phases of projects from concept to construction.

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