

# research

officeinsight

## NELSON Worldwide's Workplace Innovation Sessions

by Anna Zappia

The team at architecture, design, and strategy firm NELSON Worldwide has developed interactive sessions to understand an organization's unique needs as they come back to the office. These collaborative workshops are designed to spark innovation, ensure that cross-functional teams are working toward a common goal, and, ultimately, foster a user-centric design.

The sessions are ideal for companies seeking support as they navigate a new environment. "There really isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for all organizations. I think now, more than ever, there needs to be a custom solution and a flexible solution for each company," said Emily Hamilton, NELSON Worldwide's vice president, brand strategy and marketing.

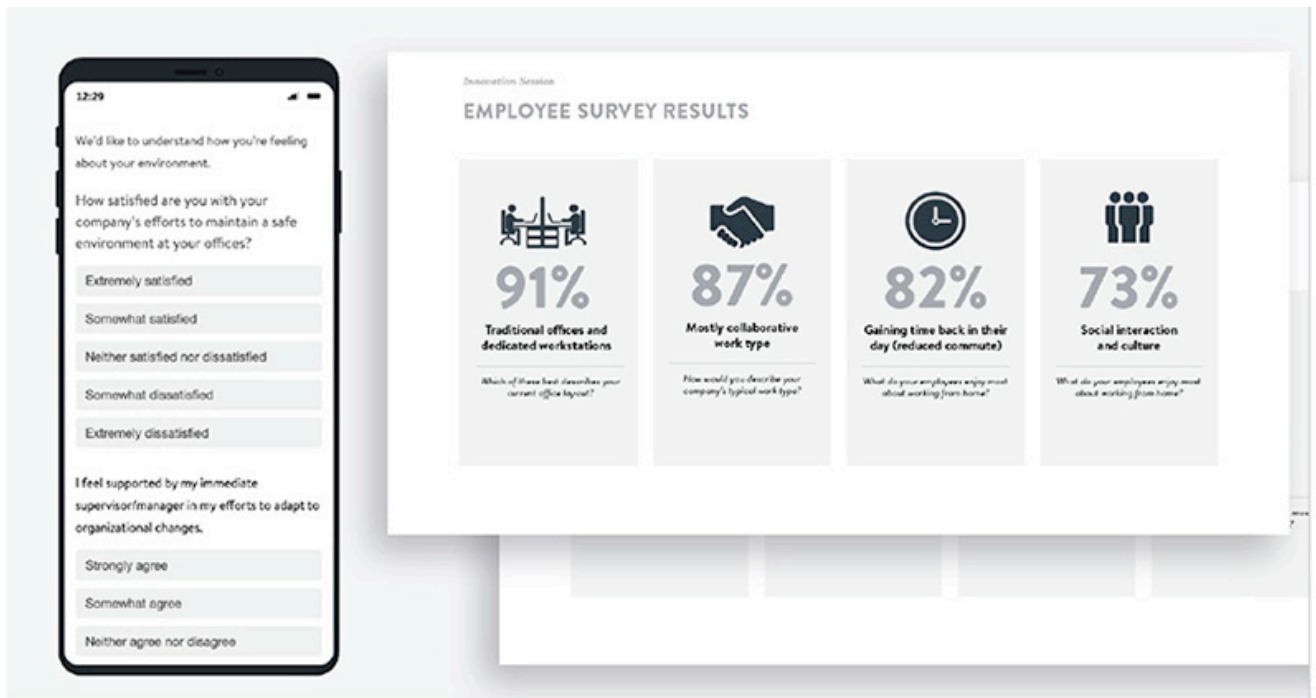
During this time of constant change, results are needed as quickly as possible. The innovation session is a sprint style event, usually taking just four weeks to complete. The month-long period gives the NELSON Worldwide group working on the session ample time to survey employees, hold the actual session, and then analyze the information



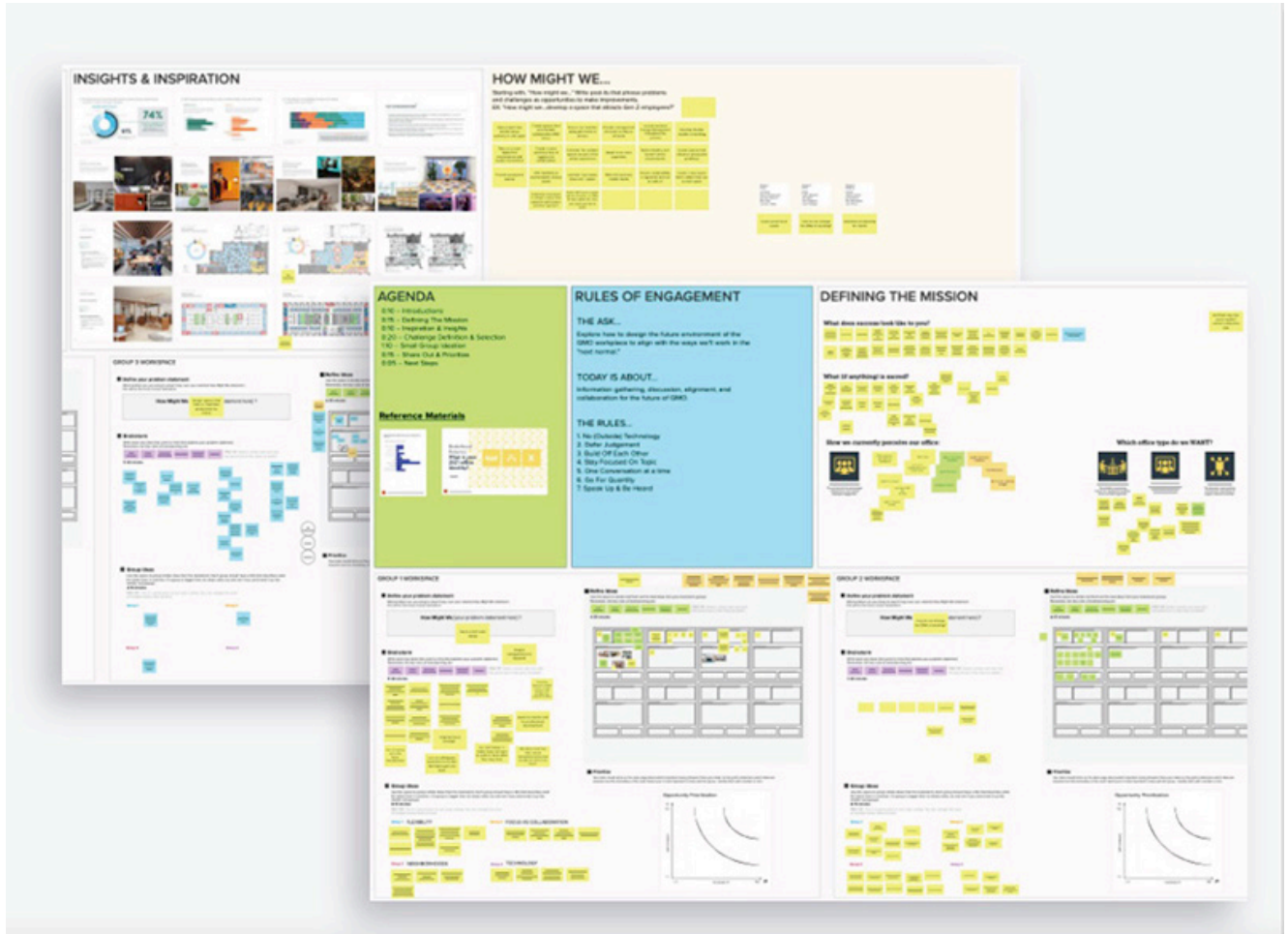
Emily Hamilton, NELSON Worldwide's vice president, brand strategy and marketing. Images courtesy of NELSON Worldwide



Holly Williamson, workplace design director, NELSON Worldwide.



The NELSON Worldwide team creates a custom survey for the client's employees to take before the innovation session.



Leveraging their branded MURAL platform, NELSON Worldwide's staff facilitates a series of interactive workshops.

gathered. It also allows the team to provide personalized attention.

"The team that is working during the session can really focus on that one client. If it was over a longer period of time, they would be in and out, working on other projects. This allows them to dive in and learn about the heart of the company," said Holly Williamson, workplace design director, NELSON Worldwide.

The process begins with a kick-off conference call during which a plan is developed. Challenges and goals are discussed, and a curated attendee list is prepared. Then, a custom survey is created and launched; it's a key component. All employees are asked to respond, and the results give management a better understanding of how their

staff feels, with insight into appropriate messaging that they can utilize.

The survey highlights shared experiences and cultivates an affinity for one another that is invaluable. "We're leveraging that company-wide survey to build empathy. In the past, companies used simple poll surveys with simple questions. Here, we're delving deeper to find out why they work the way that they do. We want to make sure we're recognizing where the company is at the moment so that the solution we are creating is specifically tailored for them," Hamilton explained.

Hamilton also noted that organizations often make the mistake of designing in a silo, and not getting buy-in from the entire staff. If they do

attempt to make significant changes, they'll often begin without a clear vision or any outside assistance. Clarity is crucial, so allowing a third party to gather information helps to eliminate any potential bias. "When you're coming from an internal standpoint, people may not be answering transparently. Having a neutral facilitator is really important to aligning on that mission and getting honest answers," she said.

NELSON Worldwide's experts share information about a variety of sectors, and present their perspective on what's next. "We talk about the trends we're seeing in other industries, whether it's retail, hospitality, or healthcare. We provide a high-level

## research

overview to help them understand what these physical environments might look like in the future, and what we expect to shift and change in the workplace,” noted Hamilton.

Leveraging their branded MURAL platform, NELSON Worldwide’s staff facilitates a series of interactive workshops, featuring group activities to hone in on, and prioritize objectives. They bring a panel of thought-leaders, while it is suggested that the client has

at least five employees who will actively participate during the session.

The groups start out with a dozen or so participants, and then each cluster is made smaller. In groups with fewer people, everyone can focus on almost any topic, from day-to-day challenges to what they like best about the company culture. “We’ll start the session with eight to twelve people, and then we’ll have these smaller breakout sessions. We’re able to give

everyone a voice,” noted Williamson.

Williamson said oftentimes they will brainstorm, but that not everyone is ready to see their proposal take shape at the office – holograms, anyone? Yet upper management tends to be most receptive to forward-thinking concepts. “We’re meeting with the visionaries of the company, so they’re thinking big about all of this, and sharing their ideas.”

By bringing together cross-departmental stakeholders, the



*Bringing together cross-departmental stakeholders allows the NELSON Worldwide team to better understand an organization.*

officeinsight

research

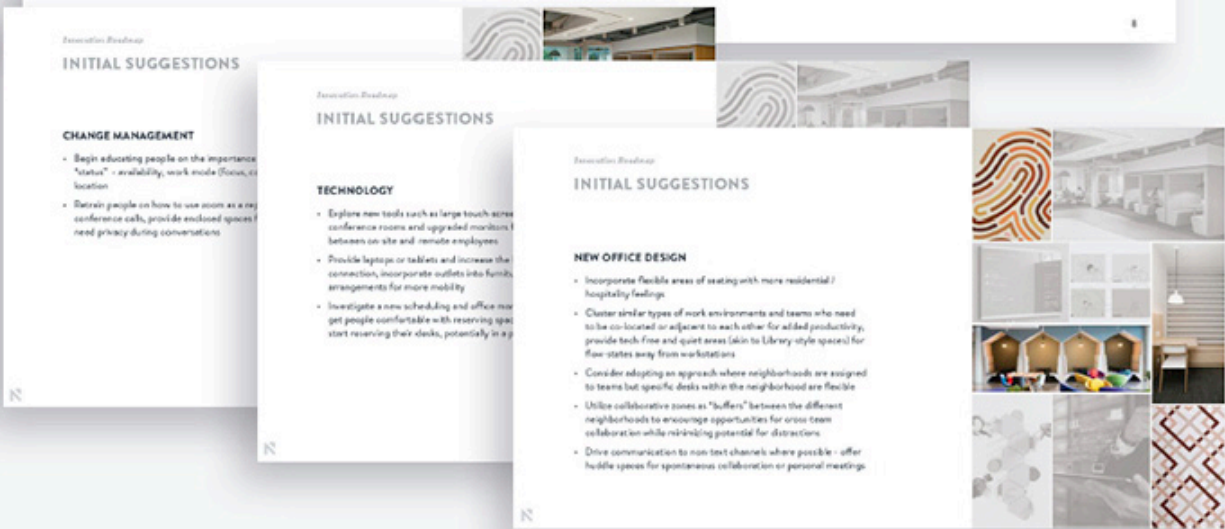
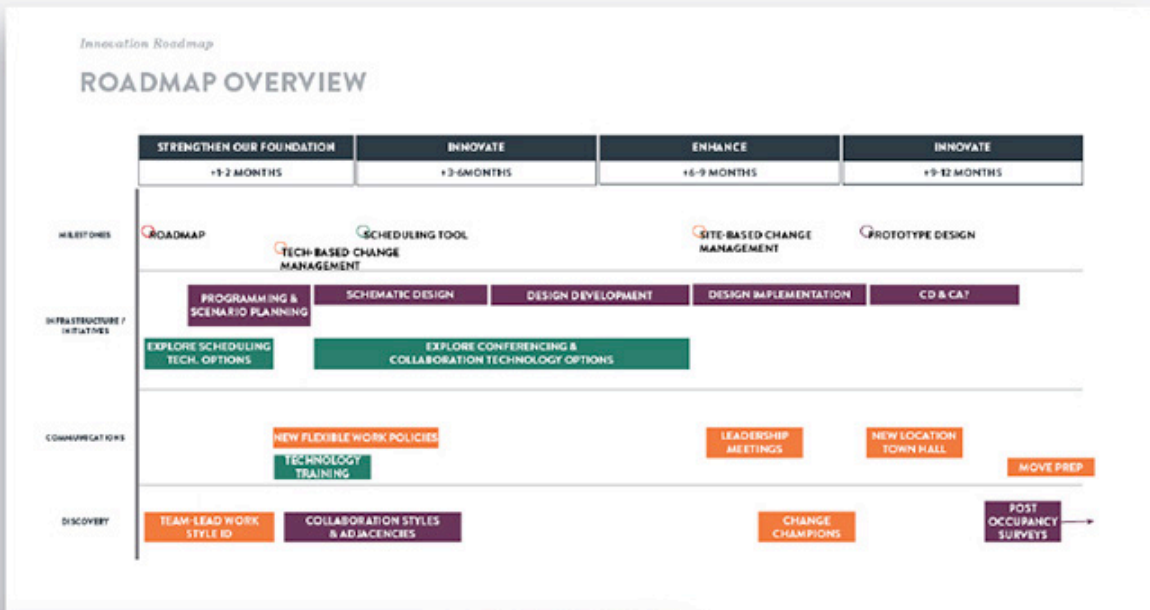
NELSON Worldwide team can better understand the workings of an organization from an integrated standpoint. “By showing what the design team is doing, or showing what the technology team is doing, the client can see how they complement each other. We’re showing all of the potential workstreams to come up with that holistic solution,” Hamilton added.

After all of the workshops are completed, a final recap is provided

in the form of an innovation roadmap. The roadmap details the survey results, implications from the sessions, and recommendations for next steps. All of this information is broken down into initiatives plotted across a timeline for easy implementation. “Once we get all of this data back from the client, we synthesize it and figure out the initiatives we need to get them on track. This roadmap of milestones helps everybody understand how

things move forward,” said Williamson.

The innovation sessions blend information and guidance in one package that allows firms to embrace change, and transform their workplace in the process. “I think now that companies are aware of how quickly things can shift and evolve, it’s really pushed the mindset, they are much more innovative. I think it is exciting to see some of these brands move forward,” Hamilton said. ■



The innovation roadmap details the survey results, implications from the sessions, and recommendations for next steps.