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Letting go of old paradigms: The workplace of the future

See how the roles of flexibility, modularity and system security are driving emerging

by Jodi Williams and Jeanne Wood — *(Originally published in the January/February of BOMA Magazine.)*

Change, goes the cliché, is our only constant. It is self-evident to say that our world that the pace of that change increases exponentially. As real estate professionals, v examples where the tectonic shifts of “change” register as much and as deeply as t workplace, especially when it comes to design and operations. By monitoring the s field, it’s possible to understand where the industry is heading; what owners and l expect; and how best to future-proof real assets.

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It is impossible to understand the future of the workplace without understanding work is heading, so let’s start with some context. The traditional 9-to-5 workday sl

and new, more dynamic models have begun to take root, some with more success. Today's college graduates entering the workforce no longer expect a "job for life." They value their craft, not their employers. And, thanks to technology, they can practice that craft anywhere. It's no wonder that telecommuting, hoteling and "free address" scenarios have taken over the last decade, redefining what we mean by the workplace.

But, change goes deeper than this. Tomorrow's employer of choice will need to embrace new organizational models that allow employees to move in and out of their orbits, driving flexibility, modularity and system security even higher. Consider how a movie studio operates. The team is comprised not of full-time employees, but a collective of "free agents" under a studio banner. The team is focused on a project (making a movie) and is not tied to a place or the administration of a traditional organizational model. This is the coworking model taken to the extreme, but we can see the company of the future heading in that direction. It exists as a dispersed ecosystem scattered across multiple locations or time zones, existing in the ether or in some loosely defined neutral territory.

The ripple effect this type of scenario will have on building operations and management, reaching, and owners will need to embrace the "retail" sensibility of coworking companies like WeWork and Impact Hub. Commercial space will become more dynamic, more fluid and more responsive to the needs of an agile, easily distracted workforce—just as retail space has. Shared workspaces, play technology, hyperflexible lease structures to utility pricing and network security will be considered features to becoming expectations.

Layer on top of this the changing demographics of the workforce, the impact of technology and the move toward more flexible working arrangements and we have fertile ground for major change. For the first time in history, up to five distinct generations are working side-by-side, making their expectations of employers and workplaces more varied than ever. Many see this as a trend, of course, as there are commercial benefits to effectively harnessing the power of a diverse workforce—talent can be pulled from a deeper, broader pool. And, often the more diverse the workforce is perceived to be, the more of a competitive edge it has.

Brick-and-mortar offices and corporate hierarchies will never evaporate entirely, but they will need to come together and decisions need to be made. But, we can learn a lot from leading companies are adopting new structures and corporate models to attract and retain a diverse workforce. And, we can prepare to better meet future demands.

The Wellness Revolution

The last few years have seen a new emphasis on striking a healthy work-life balance and companies that invest in employee support and satisfaction succeeding in generating more engaged and productive workers. The data are compelling:

- A 2015 study by economists at the University of Warwick found that happiness led to a 12 percent spike in productivity, while unhappy workers proved 10 percent less productive.
- While job satisfaction in the United States has rebounded since the depths of the Great Recession, just 50 percent of workers report being satisfied with their jobs today. And, a staggering 70 percent of employees say they are either not engaged or actively disengaged with their jobs. According to Gallup's *2017 State of the Global Workplace* report, at a cost to the global economy of \$1.9 trillion in lost productivity.

- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that U.S. employ approximately \$225.8 billion annually because of employee health issues.

As a result, we spend an increasing amount of time designing workspaces that are flexible enough to support a framework for future wellness initiatives, whatever the types of facilities and amenities an owner provides—incorporating natural light, so centers and so on—can be instrumental in promoting health and wellness in the w right for you? That depends on a variety of things: leasing climate, company cultu Whatever you decide, be prepared to change it out or adjust based on employee or

While it seems likely that the wellness trend will be with us for the foreseeable fut tangible benefits remains elusive and many clients have been slow to adopt the ful movement. The most popular rubric, the WELL Building Standard from the Inter Building Institute, is a performance-based system for measuring, certifying and m of the built environment that impact human health and wellbeing. WELL is not a : for landlords and owners, however, and many are hard-pressed to point to a clear investment (ROI). In fact, the conversation has shifted from wellness ROI to VOI (investment), which focuses on controlling or reducing healthcare costs, improving and boosting productivity.

Physical wellness is not the only nascent focus of design: Wellbeing and mental he the agenda across society, with a growing recognition that we all need to look after emotional wellbeing in the same way we care for our bodies. Employers and prop must be more cognizant of this when planning workplace offerings; and designers wellbeing aspects of layout, design and finishes. Further, managers must be mind stress triggers, especially tenant safety (fire alarm testing, active shooter drills), cl chemicals, noise, light and air pollutants.

The Myth of Future-Proofing

While promises of future-proofing may be largely snake oil, laying in the right infr support smart technology is critical and among the most effective ways of promoti long-term viability. Easily modified, smaller floor plates, movable walls, adjustabl collaboration spaces and private break-out areas for smaller work groups or confic are among the simple steps to creating a space that can accommodate recurring w emerging trends.

Tenants or building owners should prioritize systems that are modular, standards practical, networked. Systems, such as individually addressable LED ceiling lights and access control systems and IP speakers, provide the ability for a tenant to evol without calling in a contractor for every minor modification. Changes can be easily implemented remotely through smart building integration. With systems using wi standards, the ability to grow and modify those systems over time goes a long way that future-proof claim.

Those looking to push boundaries should consider the introduction of smart techr the needs of their diverse workforces and impart a sense of control to employees. I intelligence or machine learning algorithms may displace manual user interfaces f email into categories, but also proactively controlling building systems, amenities

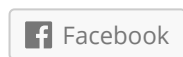
equipment. These same systems can, with careful planning in early stages, give tenants their environments, ushering in a new era of personalization for employees, who can control lighting and heating preferences for the areas immediately adjacent to their desks. And, by remembering those preferences, the building remembers them, offering an optimum experience for tenants asked and potentially translating into tangible savings for owners.

But, not all of this is ideal. We live in an era where Apple, Facebook and Google react before government panels on data privacy and regulations; and, as a culture, we have become more aware of the role technology plays in our daily lives. We may be approaching a tipping point where technology no longer encourages collaboration, but reduces it. To be sure, it is critical to address such nuances as monitoring space utilization versus employee tracking.

This is where thoughtful design and a deft touch return dividends. The right workplace should meet the needs of both the individual employee and the client. It should support growth and long-term market competitiveness, as well as cost reduction. And, it should be a place employees are eager to come into the office every day.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: *Jodi Williams is an associate vice president of Callis Architecture, planning and design firm. She works extensively with both public- and private clients to develop thoughtful strategies and in-depth engagement processes that balance design, sociology/psychology and business goals. Jeanne Wood, a director of Callis, works with large multinational corporate clients, as well as small boutique firms, understanding strategy and design impact business performance at both the project and portfolio levels. She works with executive leadership to determine clients' strategic direction for new initiatives.*

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