

Office Design Supports Business Vision

*Expanded from an article by M Moser in **Facilities Management Journal**
- the leading publication for FM professionals in the United Kingdom*





Break-out areas encourage staff to share knowledge, making offices more dynamic and productive.



OFFICE DESIGN SUPPORTS BUSINESS VISION

"People aren't speaking
with each other enough
– let's change that."

That was a simple observation by the new COO. He wanted his staff to be sharing ideas and developing business opportunities together, and that could be happening much more effectively. He recognised that in such a rapid business environment, more fluid communications were critical for gaining a competitive edge.

From the outset, key players expressed their requirements. The team leaders needed more space to consolidate their teams; the HR Manager viewed staff retention and morale as key issues; the office administrator was seeking more funding to address ongoing churn costs. The COO himself perceived that greater co-ordination in the workplace could improve productivity.

Real business matters were driving the firm towards new ways of thinking. M Moser was invited to join the team. Their task was to understand these business challenges and explore solutions in the context of workplace planning and design. Could the new offices become a tool for communicating the COO's new vision to staff, while easing some of the facilities, operations and financial pressures?

"Our office is like a new
car; we're going where
we want to go – faster!"

For the COO and his team, creating a new workplace environment that would support their business vision became a strategic priority. Shifting from a cellular to an open plan made business sense - proximity and reduced barriers would encourage staff to interact, and hopefully stimulate productivity. Likewise, converting to a wireless platform would provide staff with more options for getting work done, while creating opportunities to overlap uses, increase headcount (from 200 to 300 staff on the main level) and introduce more group amenities.

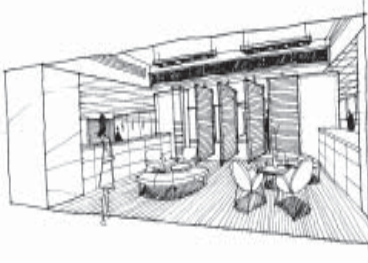
The tougher challenge was persuading staff that change was good. Dramatic workplace change can lead to uncertainty for staff; uncertainty undermines morale and productivity. In collaboration with the client, M Moser developed a staff communications plan to present the company's positive vision of workplace change and the benefits that staff would gain from new patterns of working together. The plan consisted of targeted discussion forums, re-branding exercises and practical training sessions.

Naturally, there were moments of doubt along the way. But in the end, the open dialogue between staff and management led to acceptance of the new workplace strategy. Buy-in happened because management proved its commitment to change and made the staff stakeholders in the process. The new offices now function as a foundation and tool for developing new ways of working in the organization. Throughout the process, the keywords for communicating the new vision and framing the benefits of change were **connectivity, flexibility and transparency**.

Connectivity

The workplace is a medium for channelling information. Data needs to be well-organised, easily accessible and readily available to use for business decision-making. This is especially true for many financial services firms, whose representatives interact with clients in immediate ways and rely on the ability to creatively assemble information.

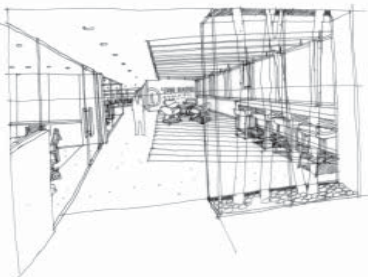
The previous layout for this firm's office was segmented and somewhat dark. The new office is open, bright and efficient. The technical infrastructure was converted to a wireless platform, which enables new hot-desking and electronic storage solutions. These innovations, in turn, aid to reduce the total space requirements. Physical storage is now localised in convenient, low-rise cabinets so staff can stay mobile, keep personal documents secure and maintain visual contact when they're in the office. A centrally located common area contains a large information board around which staff spontaneously gather. It's a calm eddy in an otherwise dynamic office, where staff exchange knowledge and socialise.



Flexibility

In today's business environment, flexibility is critical to office facility planning. Operations may expand or contract, forcing adjustments in the number of staff or amount of space a business requires. By keeping organisations nimble, office design solutions that anticipate the possibility for change provide a distinct business advantage. Previously, the expansion of the company's workspace had been incremental and ad-hoc, reflecting growth, but no growth plan. Rife with accidental adjacencies, territorial boundaries and a fragmented technical infrastructure, the former office occupied more area than necessary.

Now, various functions are consolidated, the team areas are almost entirely open and touchdown spaces have replaced dedicated workstations. Simplified space standards, multiple furniture combinations, a wireless-enabled environment and DECT phone installations allow more staff to work with greater effect.



Transparency

Transparency in the workplace can lead to more staff learning, improved morale and more productivity. For a financial services firm, physical barriers to interaction, limited common space and inadequate access to tools and information can be real obstacles to the achievement of business goals. These obstacles also have an indirect influence on the ability of staff to learn from one another, feel inspired by their achievements or cultivate a sense of common purpose.

The new office resembles a dynamic field of activity, where energy and information are readily transferable between individuals. Now, replete with touchdown spaces (work areas that are occupied on a temporary basis and can be electronically linked with personal profiles and data, as necessary) and breakout areas (common social areas that are work-enabled, but permit staff to interact more casually), the new offices are a productivity-enhancing influence. New, dedicated training facilities are three times larger, can be subdivided into smaller spaces for multiple groups and are equipped with audio-visual tools to facilitate the latest learning methods.





Data points make information easily accessible and readily available for decision-making.

SELECTED CLIENTS

3Com	DBS Bank	Mattel
Abbott Laboratories	Dentsu, Young & Rubicam	McKinsey & Company
Accenture	Deutsche Bank	Merck Sharp & Dohme
Adidas	Dow Chemical	Microsoft
Agilent Technologies	Dow Jones	MLC
Alcatel	Dresdner Bank	Moet-Hennessy
Allen & Overy	Du Pont	NCR
Allied Irish Bank	Dun & Bradstreet	N M Rothschild & Sons
AOL Legend	eBay	Nomura International
Associated Press	Edelman Public Relations	NordDeutsche Landesbank
AstraZeneca	Egon Zehnder	Norton Rose
AXA	Electronic Data Systems	O'Melveny & Myers
Bain & Co	EMC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
Banca Del Gottardo	ExxonMobil	Prudential Asia
Banca Di Roma	First Union National Bank	Qualcomm
Banca Intesa S.p.A.	Fortis Bank	Rabobank
Bank of America	G E Capital	Rio Tinto
Bank of Taiwan	Gillette	Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance
BEA Systems	GlaxoSmithKline	Sabic
Bechtel	Heidrick & Struggles	Salomon Brothers
Bird & Bird	Herbert Smith	Sanofi-Synthelabo
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BNP Paribas	Hewlett Packard	Sidley Austin Brown & Wood
Bristol-Myers Squibb	Home Depot	Siemens
British Council	HSBC	Sime Darby
BT (Worldwide)	Hypo-und Vereinsbank AG	Sony Pictures
Chubb Insurance	IBM	State Street Bank
Citigroup	ING Group	Sun Life
Cisco	Intel	Swiss Reinsurance
Clifford Chance	J Walter Thompson	Teleglobe
CMS Cameron McKenna	Jardine Fleming Securities	Tetra Pak
Coca-Cola	KLM Royal Dutch Airlines	Toronto Dominion Bank
Computer Associates	KPMG	UBS
Coudert Brothers	Linklaters Allen & Gledhill	Union Bank of California
Credit Lyonnais	Lloyds of London	Walt Disney
Credit Suisse First Boston	Lovells	Watson Wyatt
DaimlerChrysler	Manulife	Westdeutsche Landesbank

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