

Workplace and the Employee Experience

Workplace Evolutionaries (WE) is a vibrant global community that aims to positively influence the future of the workspace and the people it supports. Spawned by a passionate group of workplace strategists, change managers, facility managers, architects, designers, office furniture experts, IT managers, HR professionals and academics, WE is a community of practice within IFMA.

Part of the core philosophy that unites WE members is an emphasis on the intersection between the workplace and the employee experience.

FMJ recently had a chance to hear from five WE members on this topic.

CHRIS HOOD

FMJ: What role does the workplace play in creating and maintaining a positive employee experience?

HOOD: I have spent my career in a discipline in which many managers are quick to volunteer that the physical workplace rarely ranks in the top 10 list of reasons why an individual leaves one company for another. In so doing they seem to be downplaying the value of investments in physical and technical infrastructure. Imagine not wanting to invest in the wellbeing, productivity and attitudes of people who represent approximately 80 percent of their cost structure and 100 percent of their ability to succeed as a company.

Furthermore, in the industry standard surveys of employee engagement, there is not a single question about the physical infrastructure.

Times are changing, though! More examples are coming to light of prospective employees skipping the interview

after getting a view of the cube farm or finding out that the technology platforms are archaic.

The workplace, and the strategy that defines it, do matter...a lot!

They matter to employees and to the organizations whose future success relies on doing the right work, the right way with the right people. This is something the workplace is highly capable of impacting, as evidenced by the recent spate of impassioned arguments by those advocating for either open or private work arrangements.

One way to take the emotion out of the debate is to accept that we are all different and that a solution that appeals to one may not appeal to another. This brings about the need for choice. There is mounting evidence that individuals who are offered a choice (even a suboptimal one) are the most satisfied. Choices need to respond to the spectrum of factors which might establish deeply rooted workplace preferences: generation, culture, experience, personality type, etc.

On top of the deep experience factors governing choice are a series of dynamics which may even conflict with one's core preferences, such as what work need to get done, mood, thermal comfort or accommodating coworkers. Today's best workplaces deliver great experiences by providing dynamic choices of space, technologies and services for which individuals and teams can vote with their presence.



Chris Hood is managing director and platform lead for occupancy services in CBRE's Global Corporate Services organization. He is responsible for the ongoing development of tools, practices and methodologies designed to ensure the future success of clients as they strive to develop innovative workplace solutions.

Prior to joining CBRE, Chris spent 30 years at Hewlett Packard leading the development of their Global Workplace Initiative, a program designed to integrate and deliver space, technology, collaboration and services solutions into a single efficient and effective package which best supports the way people work.

KATE LISTER

FMJ: What does research tell us about the importance of focusing on the employee experience?

LISTER: The research is clear. What employees of all ages want is choice about how, when and where they work. They also want to be trusted, to do good work and to feel that they are a part of a greater whole. Studies show that when employees get what they want, they're happier, more productive, more loyal, more engaged and even healthier. All of that translates into greater shareholder value.

What is also clear from research is that cookie-cutter solutions belong in the kitchen, not the workplace. People are different. They think differently, work differently and relax differently. How can we possibly expect them to thrive in a one-size-fits-all environment? We can't.

What's more, we can't expect what works in one industry, culture, region, division or group to work in another, nor can we expect it to remain static over time. Change is one of the few things we can count on in the future.

We will be working differently in the near future and certainly in the distant future. It's time for CRE and FM to think "agile," to design places and processes that can support whatever comes and can change with the times.

It's time to focus on people.

Over the past half-decade, the pendulum of what drives workplace strategy has swung from what's good for people to what's good for profits. The result, in many cases, has been noisy, inefficient offices that people don't want to occupy; some even making popular press headlines. And while the initiatives may have saved employers money, those savings have proven to be false economy when the detrimental impact on people is considered.

Employees may have been willing to play along with lousy workplaces when they were happy just to have a job, but those days are behind us, particularly for top performers.

People drive value. They are the reason organizations exist. And they are what will drive the future of work.



Kate Lister is president of Global Workplace Analytics (GWA), a consulting firm that helps organizations understand and communicate the business case for agile/sustainable workplace strategies.

Drawing on its proprietary knowledge base of thousands of academic and business insights, GWA helps clients engage stakeholders in the success of their workplace change programs. The firm's research has

been cited in the Harvard Business Review, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and dozens of other publications.

ARNOLD LEVIN

FMJ: How can we measure the impact of the employee experience?

LEVIN: A critical reason to measure employee experience is to understand its impact on organizational performance. Measuring employee experience as a result of a particular workplace strategy and design should be assessed through two lenses: the employee and the organization.

The shortcoming of employee satisfaction surveys is that they only look at one element of this impact: individual satisfaction. They ignore the many factors that can contribute to that satisfaction and miss how an employee's satisfaction potentially contributes to organizational performance.

Each perspective is contingent on the other. The additional benefit of measuring both is that the business can assess their congruence. This is critical for organizational performance and points to the problems associated with employee satisfaction surveys as a means to measure the success of any executed workplace strategy.

A good framework to accomplish this is through the components of the Organizational Congruence Model developed by the late organizational guru Jay Galbraith which theorizes that every organization has five basic components: strategy, structure, processes, people and rewards. For any organization to be successful, each of the components needs to align or be "congruent," otherwise organizational performance will be negatively impacted.

This provides a unique lens through which to measure the impact of the employee experience because it captures the issues that are meaningful to the employee (rewards and impact on hiring and retention). At the same time it captures how the employee experience impacts the organization and contributes to its success through examining the implementation of its business strategy, work processes and structure.



Arnold Levin is a workplace and design strategist with more than 45 years of experience across the U.S., Europe and Asia, working with a broad spectrum of clients (Microsoft, Bloomberg and GSK).

His use of research-based organizational methodologies that blur the boundaries between design and business helps clients face disruptive environments and enable innovation. Levin has held workplace strategy director positions at Gensler, Mancini Duffy and IA, and has worked for clients in the corporate, science and health care arenas.