

Modern offices and new ways of working studied in more detail

Although the locations and facades of many office buildings have changed little over the last decades, the opposite is true for the inside of office buildings. An increased use of colours and innovative furniture design has replaced the grey office look from pre 2000. European offices, in particular, are creating more open work environments, following a trend already common in the USA, although with a different type of layout. However, the largest change is not obviously visible in the physical appearance. The so-called new ways of working that many western organisations have introduced (or intend to implement in the near future), have harnessed increased use of computer technology to support flexible use of shared workspaces. Besides the obvious real estate cost reductions that shared workplaces offer, these activity-based work environments should expedite the changes in employee behaviour that new ways of working desire. But this shift in behaviour of end-users is not as natural for all types of employees as management at first might have expected.

In practice this had led to the finding that modern, flexible offices do not always deliver the expected growth and benefits in various measures such as productivity, communications and user satisfaction. This has encouraged academic and practice-based researchers to study new ways of working in more detail. Which aspects of the activity-based office are leading to employee satisfaction and (perceived) productivity increases and which are causing the problems that have arisen? How do employees use flexible workplaces and does this influence their opinion on their suitability and comfort? Is the concept behind activity-based offices flawed or is it the implementation process and lack of change management that is causing employees to fight the change? The answers to these questions (and more) are provided by the studies described in this special issue on the modern work environment and new ways of working.

The first paper, by Rob Harris, introduces the changes occurring within occupier businesses and the implications for the modern office market. He explains the increased diversity of work settings that modern offices offer and the paper paints a clear picture of what the modern work environment beholds and its importance for Corporate Real Estate (CRE) management. Next, Mari Ekstrand and Geir Hansen discuss the principles of the new ways of working concept in more detail. Through a longitudinal case study, they describe how an organisation implemented change, which goals were aimed for and how several cultural and organisational aspects challenged their goal achievement. The third paper, by Sandra Brunia, Iris de Been and Theo van der Voordt, specifically dives into employee satisfaction with new ways of working. Analysing employee questionnaires of the two best and two worst buildings of one organisation that implemented new ways of working in all their buildings, they were able to sum up critical success factors for both the CRE itself and the implementation process. Last but not least, Jan Gerard Hoendervanger, Iris de Been, Nico Van Yperen, Mark Mobach and Casper Albers show that an actual shift in end-user behaviour (switching between different work settings) is not self-evident in these modern offices. Interestingly, their logistic regression shows that this might be an explanation for unsatisfied employees.

In total, this issue provides the reader with important insights in a beneficial implementation of modern flexible offices. The interest generated by the call for papers on this subject was so large that later this year we will publish a second special issue on the same topic. New Ways of Working is generating a lot of debate and researchers are investigating various aspects of the topic, which will provide you with four more papers to look forward to.

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