



User Effective® at your Fingertips™

In just about any component of an office building, something can be done to improve workflow, communications, employee satisfaction and other variables that impact profits.

The “Return on People,” targeting the success of the workforce, is the key to a structure’s success.

Removing barriers that impede workflow provides a solid, measurable return on investment.

In the case of old, obsolete or inefficient buildings, the removal of these barriers may be impractical, disruptive or just plain expensive. Moving to another existing building to escape problems may also generate unintended difficulties. And, it is unlikely that any existing building provides the most efficient match to an organization’s specific and current needs.

A practical alternative is to design and build a new building, balancing its size and features with its needs and budgets. In the context of the elements explored in this book, a build-to-suit office is an investment that provides important dividends for both employees and budgets.

Buildings have a significant impact on the effectiveness of an organization. A User Effective® building brings a whole new perspective to planning one of the most important aspects of a successful company’s long-term transition....finding a new home that “fits.”

User Effective® at your Fingertips:

Team performance and the Top Ten needs in the Office

1. Acoustic privacy
2. Support for meetings and spontaneous collaboration
3. Support for one-on-one meetings in individual workplaces
4. Support for administrative services and office chores
5. Sufficient storage for work-related material
6. Distraction-free group workspace
7. Break activity
8. Dedicated project rooms
9. Attention to ergonomics and physical comfort
10. Accommodation of technology

Top 10 Office Complaints

1. Temperature too cold.
2. Temperature too hot.
3. Poor janitorial service.
4. Not enough meeting rooms.
5. Not enough storage space at work stations.
6. Poor indoor air quality.
7. Lack of privacy at workstations or in the office.
8. Inadequate parking.
9. Problems with computers.
10. Too much noise.

Lighting and Illumination

The lighting systems in most modern buildings depend on technology left over from the era when most office work involved printed documents. The same lights that provide effective illumination for documents, however, cause significant problems for information displayed on computer screens, the new dominant office format.

When properly applied, high quality lighting in offices can reduce the use of electricity as well as reduce the excess heat generated by the lighting process. With the right amount and quality of light — not to mention reduction or elimination of glare — productivity increases. Just as important, appropriate lighting that replaces older systems has a direct payback in reduced eye and health problems linked to bad lighting.

Most importantly, the relatively small expense that lighting represents can yield an enormous improvement in productivity.

Windows and Daylighting

Although the majority of office buildings have windows, the majority of office workers do not benefit from them. For many years, windows have suffered as expensive building features, subject to drafts, heat loss, and unwelcome glare. A current trend revives interest in these old-fashioned features because, properly designed, they add a critical element to the quality of the work environment. The light provided by windows is a free natural commodity that boosts moods and energy, provides the most efficient type of illumination available and helps workers who are cooped up in indoor enclosures benefit from visual exposure to the outside world. The latest window technology also dramatically reduces the negative effects of direct sunlight at increasingly affordable prices.

Comfort Zones

Many modern offices are a breeding ground of discontent because of uncomfortable working environments that result from outdated or ineffective heating and cooling systems. Although the majority of people agree on the same range of temperatures as an appropriate comfort zone, the two top complaints from office workers about their environment are “too cold” and “too hot.”

Studies have shown that variations of only one or two degrees make the difference between one person’s comfort and another’s discomfort. Furthermore, most studies on the subject indicate a connection between a person’s ability to control their own environment and their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction matters a great deal, because it is closely linked to productivity. The ideal solution: individual temperature controls for each employee. This may not be cost effective — it is almost certainly not possible as a retrofit goal for existing buildings — but a variety of options are applicable for build-to-suit projects.

Indoor Air Quality and Health

Some aspects of the indoor environment in offices provoke more than grumbling, they produce sickness. Sickness in the workforce is a significant issue because it adds to the cost of doing business. Workers that are not healthy do not work up to capacity and those that are absent because of illness produce no work at all, even while being paid.

Indoor Air Quality is increasingly implicated in the rate of illness in offices, and much of this impact is directly related to the age and inefficiency of buildings and HVAC systems. Retrofits and maintenance are practical tactics in some cases, but the expense and disruptions that accompany major HVAC alterations may outweigh their benefits.

In the short term, pushing more air through existing ventilation systems may keep some problems at bay. Long-term, however, the only effective solution is starting from scratch with well-designed new structures that can take advantage of the latest technology.

Office Noise

Noise represents one of the biggest barriers to effective work practices in modern offices. Although some office equipment may be getting quieter, there is also an increasing amount of it in the average office, adding to the existing environment of meetings, casual conversations, and phone calls.

The current trend to place more office workers in open plan layouts adds additional weight to this problem, which is fundamentally linked to the design of interior space and the material used in its construction. Existing office spaces can be made quieter with the careful placement of partitions and added insulation, but these alterations only provide partial solutions. New office space can be specifically designed with the right acoustics for the intended use, segregating necessarily noisy activities from those that require isolation.

Office Size and Layout

There may be no such thing as an ideal office layout. In many modern business processes, changing work practices are the norm, requiring different uses of space over time. But there are basic needs that remain the same, including specialized spaces that match the needs of the activity taking place in them.

Existing office structures rarely provide the right mix or adaptability for any one tenant, making their use of space a continual compromise, reducing productivity.

New space represents an ideal opportunity for any organization to create the right atmosphere for effective work. The right number and size of meeting rooms, private offices, and open plan space can be developed, with each matching the known needs and anticipated growth.

Privacy

In office environments, privacy is a subjective concept. A private office may provide more privacy than a cubicle, but it is only as private as the occupant and office activity permit. On the other hand, bullpens or other shared workspace provide much less privacy than a private office, but occupants here can develop a consistent personal space and a sense of privacy by establishing and heeding rules for distractive behavior.

In general, studies show that the amount of privacy varies as much by type of space as by the degree of control an occupant has over the space and intrusions from outside. To some degree, a clear sense of territory is as important (or more so) than an effective visual or acoustic barrier. Elements that produce a strong territorial message also can enhance an occupant's sense of private space, and a sense of privacy to go with it.

Another general rule of office privacy: the more routine the work, the more likely interactions are not harmful. In fact, they can help prevent stress and boredom rather than decrease work effectiveness.

In work requiring teams and groups, participants generally accept less privacy as a trade-off for improved communications and other necessary interactions. Conversely, in work requiring concentrated individual effort or confidential communications, participants generally prefer isolation— both visual and acoustic.

The most functional office layouts permit a mix of both interactive and isolated workspace. Here, the goal is the ability of participants to move from one type of activity to another and match the space to the activity, either allowing or restricting interaction as needed.

Flexibility

If change is a fundamental reality of today's business structure, then office space should provide the adaptability to match the change. Space that is hampered by fixed structural elements, lack of connectivity, poor HVAC service, or other limits represents a barrier to growth.

Ideal office space should provide quick and affordable changes, permitting the shift of personnel and the reassignment of teams as strategy dictates. Especially with communications technology — wireless networks, local computer networks, and the Internet — work space must take into account both the current standards and those that are on the horizon.

Safety and Security

In recent years, violence and crime in the work place have shifted from being abstractions to a cause of daily concern. From international terrorism to armed robbery, offices are no longer considered safe harbors by those that work in them.

Organizations must deal with employee paranoia as well as more concrete economic pressures (such as increasing insurance costs) that are linked to security and safety in their buildings. Although there may be no direct threat from terrorists in the average office, there is an ongoing battle to limit liability from more localized problems, including vandalism, theft, computer hacking and sexual assault. Slips and falls, injuries with office equipment, fire, and other safety issues add importance to this subject.

Buildings themselves can provide an important defense against both crime and accidents. Lighting, floor surfaces, access points, sensors and alarms are just a few of the practical tools that can be employed.

Sustainability and Green Buildings

It is easy for building owners and managers to be cynical about the green building movement. Not because of a lack of concern for environmental issues, but because sustainability in the building industry has a reputation for costliness. Green buildings, especially those designed with industry standards (such as the LEED™ rating system); do typically cost more than comparable structures with the same amount of space. However, they also offer substantial rewards. Environmentally compatible offices are universally admired as providing high quality working environments, offering a more tangible ROI for the energy-saving features they employ.

Decision Factors: Building a User-Effective® Office

“In terms of dollar outlay over the 40-year life cycle of an office building, 2–3 percent is generally spent on the initial costs of the building and equipment; 6–8 percent on maintenance and replacement; and 90–92 percent is generally spent on personnel salaries and benefits. These data suggest that if an investment in physical planning and design could be made that would favorably influence organizational effectiveness and therefore reduce personnel costs, total life-cycle costs could be substantially reduced.”

--Jean Wineman (Behavioral Issues in Office Design)

Building Impacts

Executives identify and rank key decision factors when deciding to build a new office structure, as reported in a recent national survey [Center for the Built Environment]

1. **Site and Building.** Where and what to build, including the appropriate functions for a new building, its size, and how it is to be configured.
2. **Infrastructure.** Types and components for HVAC, telecommunications, electrical, lighting, acoustics, and energy efficiency.
3. **Image and Add-ons.** Specific design related to the corporate image, and additional features desired, including parking, security, meeting facilities, and access to transportation.
4. **Flexibility and Alternatives.** Design features incorporating flexwork, hoteling, telecommuting, teamwork, and future strategies.

5. **Sustainability.** Occupant comfort, recycling, environmentally-friendly functions, energy savings, LEED™ certification, and corporate image.

Building Needs

When analyzing the need for a move, including the decision to lease or build to suite, the most important evaluation criteria are:

- functionality
- cost and ROI
- corporate philosophy and culture
- competition in the market
- market cycle of the corporation
- location

Return on People (ROP)

Executives and managers increasingly rely on the concept of ROI— Return on Investment—to support decisions for equipment purchases, software upgrades, mergers and acquisitions, and many other critical elements related to being in business and generating a profit. ROI provides a key analytical tool for comparing leasing options, tax liabilities, depreciation, and productivity, among others. But in most modern businesses, the majority of assets are not linked to physical objects, but people, ideas, and information. Plus, most of the cost of running a business is not associated with material things, but salaries. Therefore, it makes sense to invest in the appropriate support to make this people-based asset perform most effectively. This includes training, salaries, support services and high quality management, as well as the physical environment in which people work.

Effectiveness Defined

In some offices, some work may involve the processing of forms, other paperwork, or client information, activities that can be measured in terms of output per unit of time.

Much of the time, however, the work of modern offices is less easy to measure, making productivity a complicated factor. In general, the effectiveness of an office may require the analysis of several key areas in order to determine the effects of changes.

profitability the difference between revenue and cost

quality how closely output comes to specifications or expectations

efficiency the relationship between performance and resources used during performance

productivity the relationship between output and the resources used to produce it (time, materials, etc.)

What Influences Productivity

Various studies estimate that employee productivity can be increased between 10 and 20 percent due to the features of high quality buildings. The features of buildings have an important effect on how their occupants perform, but the effect varies from feature to feature and even from person to person.

Among the factors affecting individual productivity:

- technical competence
- motivation and personality
- job satisfaction
- attitude
- leadership
- organizational structure
- workflow
- equipment, technology, and technical support
- personal relationships
- type of occupation
- indoor environment