



## Enter the Workplace

The needs and expectations of employees are changing, and it's essential for organisations to recognise and act on them.

— By Steve Palfrey

The times they are changing. In society, in families, and in offices.

Take companies. A shift has become more pronounced in recent years. Cubicles seem antiquated. Closed offices are outdated. And organisational structures have become flatter.

Concurrently, companies are embracing new ideas in workspaces. Graffiti-painted walls are in. Communal areas are essential. And gyms, cafes and yoga rooms are major talent draws and retainers.

It's here that workplace advisory teams come into play. They facilitate new conversations about the spaces we are working in more frequently than ever before. From productivity, wellness, and safety, to engagement, recruitment, and brand health, the understanding that

a workplace directly contributes to business results is their domain. And corporations, CEOs, and talent managers are listening across Hong Kong.

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### **Decentralisation: The new classic?**

According to CBRE, the rents of Grade A office buildings in the Hong Kong CBD area have increased by 18% in the past three years. That positions the SAR among the most expensive in the world and is prompting many companies to approach

their workplace strategy differently simply for cost-savings.

One such trend in Hong Kong is decentralisation, which is allowing corporations to re-examine their workplace strategies. Gone are the days business application was primarily process management.

Today, how we design our workplace lies in the fundamental changes in technology marked by things like email, video conferencing, messenger, cloud technology, flexible hours, and working remotely. Hence, companies are adopting and embracing more agile, flexible and relatable spaces to enable effective technology applications.

Take the financial industry as an example: banks are adopting the idea of coworking spaces to drive fintech innovation and collaboration. From our conversations, fintech firms and departments see agile space as an incubator capable of spurring innovation and providing a necessary edge to maintain competitiveness.

Beyond fintech though, the broader debate is whether open plan is effective. Hot-desking and open plan are easy to adopt and sell but is it for everyone? The short answer, not yet.

Why is this? Simply put, the effectiveness lies in, and usually works in, activities-based companies. For instance, HR and Finance typically need privacy to handle confidential information.

### The expectation game

However, while these barriers to agility will remain, we are encouraged by wider shifts in the workspace.

Employees today care about their lives in their workspace. Many see the workplace as an extension of their daily life and are searching for intangible satisfactions beyond lucrative salaries.

In Hong Kong, the workforce, especially the new generation, is much more front of mind about health, wellness, and their carbon footprint and being part of a social community. Against the backdrop of the intensified battle for talent, the ability to stay relevant to the new generation of employees while creating the stickiness through communicating their brand identity and corporate image has become a critical task.

In modern industrialisation, offices are designed in a way that is open, transparent, reflective of organisation culture, and client-based with more communal areas embedded. Our client, a leading supplier of plastics, is a great example. The company has designed its workplace in which their end-products with different features are blended in throughout its office, well connected to its corporate brand and yet localized in the country it operates, enabling employees, clients and suppliers to be emotionally connected to the brand.

### Transforming their vision into reality; how to facilitate change

It is human nature to be change averse. Blame our need for comfort zones for that fact of life. But there is flexibility in this arena. We typically find that a smaller proportion of end users are early-adopters for change. The remaining will be brought along on the journey.

### The four steps to creating a work destination

1. Know your users and what they need to be effective
2. See your office as the centre of a network of places where work gets done
3. Meet your people's basic functional needs first
4. Design for delight: building on the foundation

From our experience, companies that excel at change management are those that listen to their employees openly, walk them through the processes gently, and engage them early. They remind and reinforce them and show progress.

The success in building a better workplace lies in a great vision and tremendous organisational transformation effort. When done well, it can be a highly rewarding one that will position you well for the next chapter of your business journey. 



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