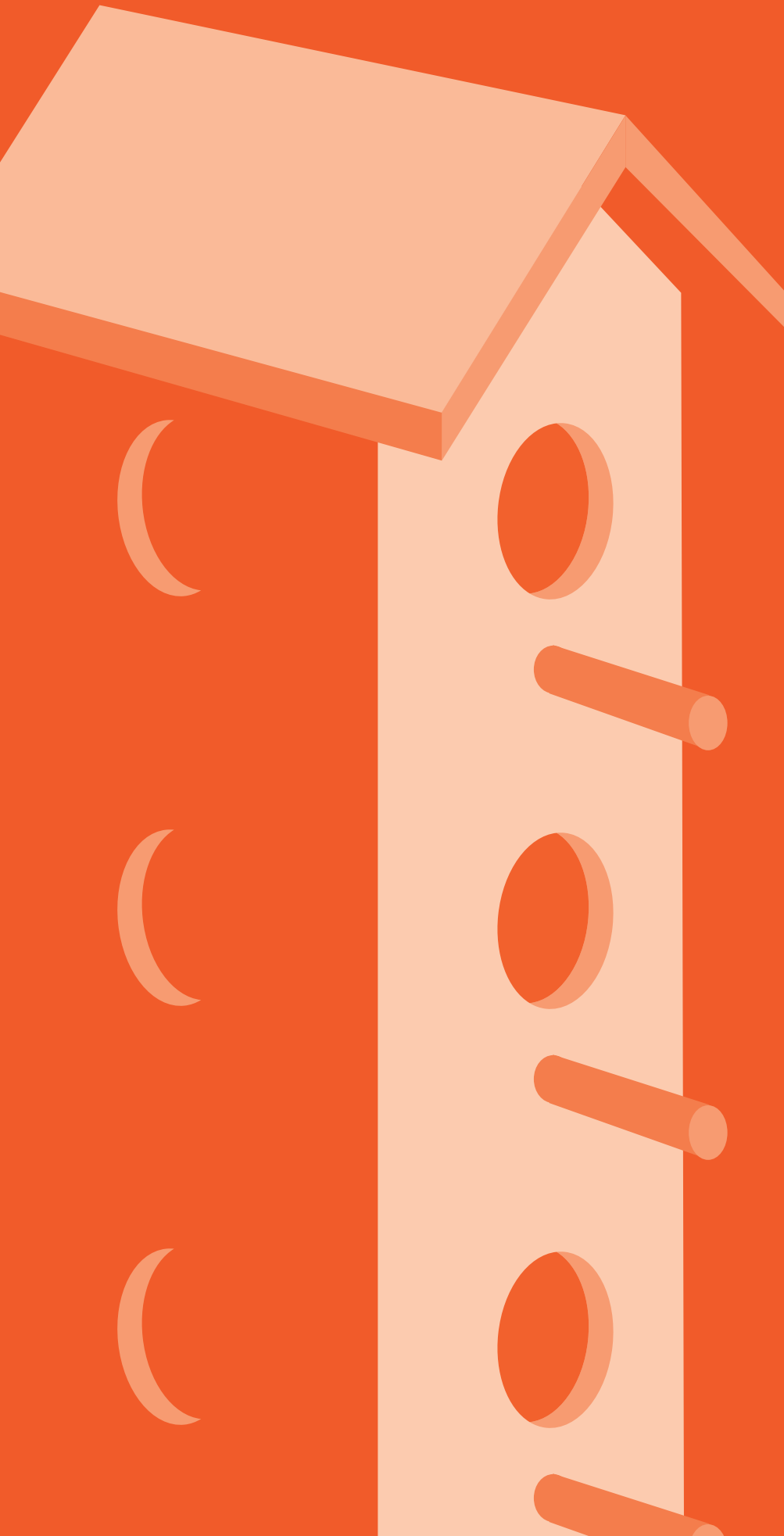


# HIRING AND KEEPING GREAT PEOPLE

Hiring and Keeping Great People...The Physical Environment and Corporate Culture





## Attraction, Retention and Effectiveness of Talent

In a 1998 survey of most admired companies, *Fortune* Magazine reports, "The single best predictor of overall excellence was a company's ability to attract, motivate and retain talented people." (1)

In the fast-paced global marketplace, the ability to attract, retain, and enhance the effectiveness of talent is a daunting challenge confronting managers throughout today's organizations. It is no longer enough for companies to pay well and offer competitive benefits to succeed in hiring and keeping quality employees.

"What are workers looking for? How can we hang on to the workers we hire?" These are legitimate questions, and they are questions on which the livelihood of your company may depend.



## The Environment Edge

National unemployment rates are the lowest they have been in a quarter of a century. (2) Low unemployment means reduced availability of “knowledge workers.”

“The next decade will really be the decade of the employee,” said Wallace J. Nichols, executive director of the American Compensation Association, a 23,000-member industry group in Scottsdale, Arizona. “Low inflation, low unemployment, continuing scarcity of qualified workers and an increase in real wages are all combining to put employees in the driver’s seat.”

While salaries and benefits remain central, if companies desire to attract, retain, and motivate employees, they must also create a work environment that gives the company a competitive edge. According to a recent study conducted by the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the quality of the office workplace is one of many important factors that can help attract and retain employees. The overall ambience of the office and the quality, appearance, and functionality of the office furniture make a statement about a company’s corporate culture.

The work space expectations of potential candidates are changing; prospective knowledge workers now come to the bargaining table with a new and different set of requirements. They seriously consider workplace aesthetics, and may demand visual and acoustic privacy.

Technology integration is key, especially for those who had a computer in their university dorm room, and wouldn’t think about going on vacation without a laptop stored in their luggage. There is also an ever-increasing emphasis on ergonomics, and meeting personal needs, as well as support of work processes.

*Younger workers just entering the workforce may look at ‘performance indicators’ in a new company, including the company’s reputation, their resulting social status and image, how the job will look on their resume, and the skills they will acquire.*

*Generally, younger knowledge workers view the designed workplace through two distinctive filters: instrumental and evocative. The filter employed depends upon the workers’ own personal needs and career goals. Those who view the workplace instrumentally regard their physical office as part of the technology, giving them the tools to get their work done, helping them to achieve recognition and advancement. Employees, or potential employees, who evaluate the workplace evocatively tend to see it for its emotional character. They like to work in the space, and see their office simply as a backdrop for work activities.*  
*Ron Goodrich*

Just as companies are striving to meet the needs of new consumers, new markets, and new competitors, they must also strive to meet the needs of the new worker. Companies need to think about competing for employees the same way they think about competing for market share. (3) Potential customers and market segments are mapped, researched, and surveyed for their preferences. Products are then developed with those specific needs and desires as guideposts. Companies need to begin to use these same disciplines to attract employees.

Francis Duffy, in his book *The New Office*, provides an invaluable source of inspiration and guidance on the integration of office design with elements of business management and organizational theory. It’s Duffy’s opinion that “forward-looking managers who want to drive their businesses as hard as possible to survive and succeed must relate the use of their office space to their overall business objectives. In other words, managers must treat office space not as something special or remote, but in exactly the same business-like way as every other managed resource.” (4) Office space is a resource... a tool that can be used to compete for knowledge workers.

## Attracting Employees

The old adage, "You never get a second chance to make a good first impression," certainly applies in the employee's evaluation process of a new employer. Candidates form an impression of a potential workplace from the moment they arrive, before the first interview ever starts. Within moments of walking in the door, they make initial judgments about their compatibility with the workplace. It is not at all unusual for a job seeker to ask to see his or her potential work area before making a job decision.

Perhaps the most telling result of the ASID survey mentioned earlier is that, while employees said the physical workplace was among the top three factors to influence their decisions to accept or leave jobs, it's human resource executives and executive recruiters considered the workplace to make little difference in these decisions. According to the survey, "Human resource executives and executive recruiters may be out-of-sync with employee views."

Design and facilities professionals, faced with the task of turning around this "out-of-sync" point of view, can point to the ASID survey results and other research that link improvements in the physical environment with productivity gains. To help make its case to the corporate community, the ASID study points out several examples of companies that are leaders in creating work environments designed to attract and keep employees including.

When Monster.com surveyed the impact of its new facilities which were designed to combine hard work with a sense of play, 90 percent of employees surveyed said the new office improved the company's competitiveness as an employer.

The physical expression of corporate culture is the buildings, office design, configuration, and furniture in the workplace. Corporate culture shapes and guides how people perform their work and serves as a framework for acceptable – and unacceptable – behavior within the organization. (5)

The workplace, including interior architecture and office furniture, work tools and technology, can convey whether or not a company values its workers. Extremely rigid adherence to corporate standards creates a uniform look which can plant the expectation of being a cog in a wheel, which many of today's workers reject. It is this view of office life that is the object of ridicule in Scott Adams Dilbert® cartoon strip.

*The interior of an organization has a significant impact on employee perception. The quality and adequacy of the interiors are directly related to the organization's image. Image is everything. Interiors can be a WOW factor that sets the organization apart from competitors – for both the customer and the potential applicant. A well-designed interior that reflects the values and principles of the organization will go a long way in establishing a connection between the employee and an organization's culture. Paul Barnette, Architect*

If most factors are about even in competing job offers, amenities can make the difference. It is not unusual for an employer to include design and decor choices as part of its offer for employment. Involved employees who are given a bit of control over their work space(s) are more likely to stay with the employer.

Although job search books and gurus may tell job hunters to be objective in weighing one job offer against another, people are subjective at heart about making these choices. Given a choice between a rigid atmosphere where your office is the same as everyone else's, or a job where you can choose your furniture, chairs, accessories, and lighting, many people prefer to make their workplace their own.

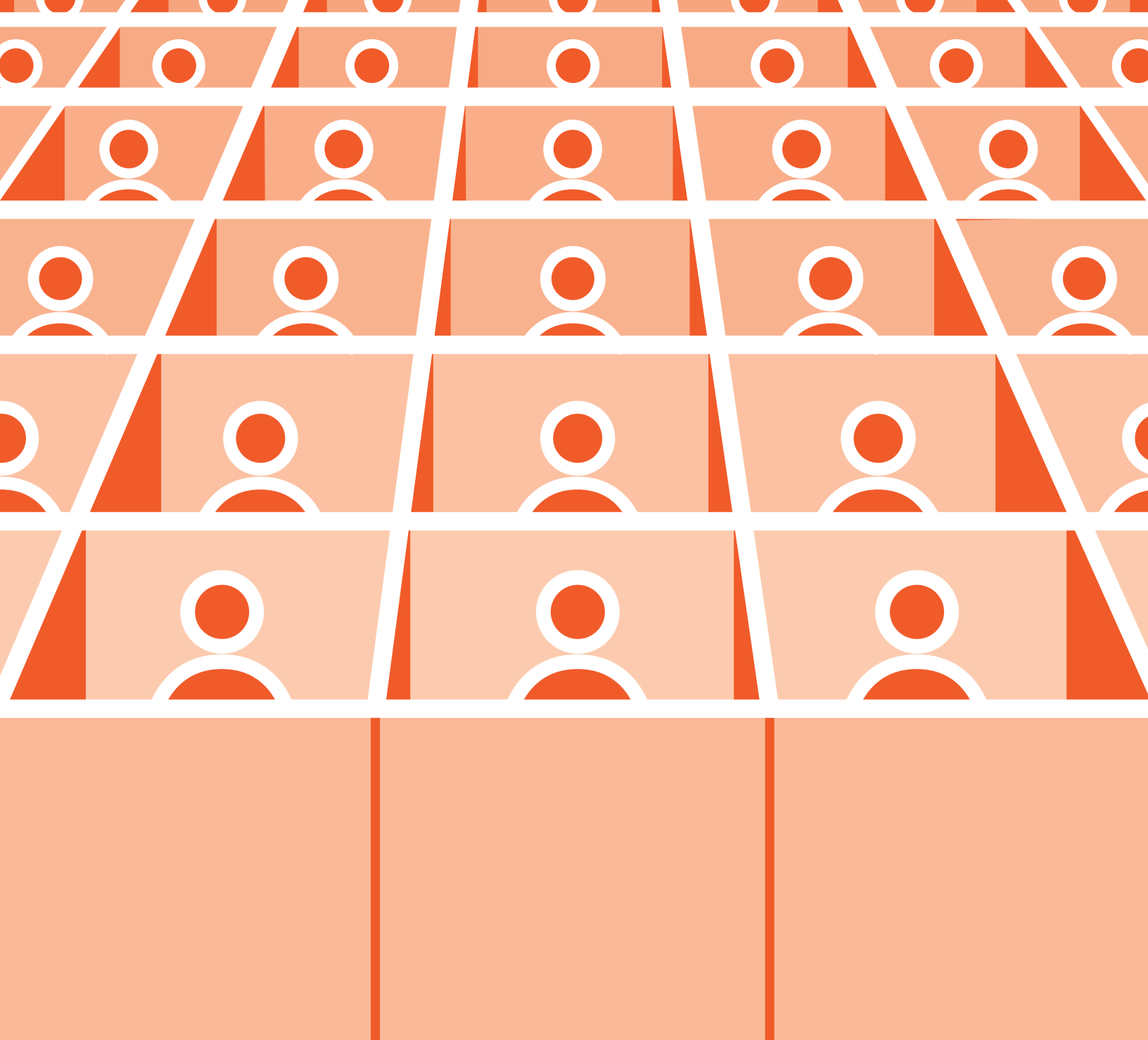
"Furniture that allows for individual preferences can provide the employee with a sense of control over the manner in which the work gets accomplished, and also conveys that the company values the employee," says facilities strategist and designer Bill Krebs of Work Change Enablers (WCE).

As evidenced from the ASID study, workplace conditions can make the difference between an interested candidate and someone moving on to the next job offer. Giving employees design and decor options can be an effective part of a company's recruitment package.

*The psychological principle known as Just Prior Condition (JPC) is important when considering the enhancement of a workplace. The JPC principle relates to a person's expectations. For example, if a person's workplace is changed, it is expected that it will be at least equal to or better than his or her previous situation. When recruiting new employees, expectations regarding the quality of their new workplace may need to be satisfied. But expectations are relative. An employee may feel "my current private office has old furniture, but I'd rather have privacy than new open plan furniture. In terms of my prior conditions, I'm worse off if I lose acoustical privacy, visual privacy, and more space." Len Kruk*

Although the condition and quality of the individual work space is important, so is the overall message that the work space communicates. Workplace quality – that first impression – expresses the basic culture of the workplace and can create a lasting impression for a potential employee, one that can be a pivotal factor in his or her decision-making process.

An office filled with low-quality furniture laid out in a "cube farm" fashion is simply not attractive to prospective workers; there is no element of individual choice nor does the physical environment allow control or personalization by the user. Furniture need not be trendy to be viewed as a "draw," but it should be of sufficient quality, and allow the user to assert himself or herself to indicate that the decision-makers in the organization value the person who will be working in that office.



## Employee Retention: Environment and Culture

Knowledge workers are hard to find, and even harder to keep. Employers need to understand how critical their facility is to be successful in this quest.

As a part of the ASID study, workers were asked if the physical workplace would have an influence on their decision to accept a position. A full 40 percent of

the respondents said it would. In addition, half said the physical workplace would impact their decision to leave a position. When it comes to accepting or leaving a position, employees least satisfied with their jobs and those likely to change jobs soon are likely to cite the physical workplace as an important factor in their decisions.

These results suggest that an unsatisfactory physical workplace is one of the factors contributing to employee dissatisfaction – a critical issue to CEOs struggling to keep good employees. Once companies have successfully recruited the best talent, they are then faced with the task of retaining them. Two of the primary reasons for employee turnover are job-related stress and lack of job satisfaction. (6)

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## Stress, Stress, Stress

The pace of work and the simultaneous rate of change are faster than ever before. Many workers feel under-appreciated, overworked and overstressed. (7) Overwork is a growing problem as the percentage of workers reporting they work a 50-hour week doubled between 1995 and 1998. The number of days lost due to stress has increased 36 percent in that same period of time. (8) Employees reporting job-related burnout rose from 39 percent to 53 percent from 1997 to 1999.

Designers and facilities managers know from experience that space design and the work environment can help dissipate work-oriented stress; poor space design has the opposite effect. Companies that want to retain their employees and keep them productive are learning the value of investing in the type of workplace that reduces stress. For example, Nortel Networks' new facility was designed to encourage interaction and create a sense of community. Surveys showed that 50 percent of employees reported increased job satisfaction after the transition. (9)

In 1994, ad agency Chiat/Day was among the first to have "virtual officing." The idea behind the virtual office was that telecommuting would allow people to work anywhere, anytime, and that they would use the outgrown building only for teamwork. As it turned out, most staff members needed or wanted to work under the same roof.

To combat the employees' overwhelmingly negative response, today the offices are now a "Chiat town" of private and group work spaces and public "streets" and meeting places that provide for every kind of company activity. The virtual office "sounded good in theory, but ultimately violated human tenets," said Lee Clow, the company's chairman. "People need a sense of place and belonging." The management team at Chiat/Day found that workers without space had increased their stress level, rather than reducing it.

## Fight Back

A key to combating organizational stress is having time and space for “recovery” where an employee can reflect on the causes of the stress and develop coping mechanisms.

From the provision of individual acoustical privacy to an on-site coffee bar, the concept of the “safe haven” is being recognized as not only a tool to combat stress, but also to increase employee retention. (10)

The concept of the safe haven for the individual employee can be extrapolated to the “village haven,” or community work space, where employees can get together to share ideas or work in ad hoc teams or “hot groups.” (11)

*Offices that are designed to incorporate the “safe haven” principle improve job satisfaction. The following “Five Cs” provide the guidelines for creating such environments.*

### 1 Control

The worker has the freedom to make decisions about his/her work space; selecting (within organizational guidelines, standards, and budget) furniture and accessories that suit their specific needs and tastes. This is not a license for the worker to get whatever his or her heart desires, but an opportunity to fit the interior environment to his or her own work style and personality.

Implicit in the “control” attribute is flexibility; the employee can make modifications that allow personalization of his or her work space. Employees can then work efficiently with tools and equipment where they want and need them. This promotes individuality and creates the variety in the workplace that helps make an employee feel wanted and special. Organizational management experts caution that a “one size fits all” approach undermines an employee’s sense of control and negatively impacts his or her performance. (12)

Allowing a degree of control in the office environment reduces the negative effects of organizational stress. Giving employees a modicum of control over their physical environment need not be cost prohibitive; for instance, they might be allowed to choose between two chairs at the same price point. Or they could be allowed to choose the work tools that allow the worker to arrange his/her own work meaningfully.



### 2 Comfort

The worker must make his or her safe haven comfortable so that when recovery or concentration time is needed, he or she can feel relaxed in his or her work space. Relaxation is an important part of one’s workday as effective workers oscillate between periods of high and low stress. The low stress period allows recovery and enhances workers’ personal productivity and ability to address other work challenges. (13) Workstations that reduce noise and ergonomic seating afford a sense of comfort and increase the employee’s ability to “close out the outside world” when it is time for an intensive task that requires total concentration.

“Many people fail to realize the relationship between the functional comfort required to be effective and the furniture elements,” cautions Bill Krebs, facilities strategist and designer. Adjustable keyboard trays, mouse platforms, and ergonomic chairs allow the worker to focus on the task at hand, rather than the physical discomfort.

### 3 Convenience

The more amenities that are available, the more likely workers will want to remain with their employers. That is one of the motivating factors behind the national trend for larger companies to provide services such as ATMs, in-house child care, take-home food service, and dry cleaning.

John Hancock has been a pioneer in this area and attributes improved productivity to the provision of amenities.<sup>(14)</sup> Amenities often preclude the employees needing to leave the workplace to run errands, increasing their time on the job. In addition, the convenience of access to seemingly mundane services like printers, fax machines, and mailboxes enables workers to be more productive. Companies are learning what their staff members need to get the job done and still maintain a life outside the office.

*Interiors are being designed to reflect mood, establish image, provide flexibility, support teaming, and embrace "Main Street" activities. Some companies like Bristol Meyers in Princeton, New Jersey, offer a Main Street – a small village shopping center featuring food services, bakery, credit union, shoe-shine stand, hair dresser, and a company store.*  
*Len Kruk, Futurist*

Though amenities can help attract quality workers, companies must first review cost-effectiveness and employee preferences. How many employees will use the amenities? Are the amenities a good match for employee needs? Will the amenities be viewed as a corporate attempt to reduce the employees' chance for a relaxing break or lunch hour away from the office?

An employee survey can help you decide by defining workers' needs and preferences. Some amenities are better outsourced. For example, a child care center requires costly construction, insurance, and labor costs. It's best to compare an in-house operation to outsourcing or stipends for parents.

"Although the government has been downsized and right-sized, it also has to retain and attract the best and brightest. And the government is not necessarily competitive in terms of salary and benefits," says Ed Feiner, chief architect for the General Services Administration (GSA). Feiner says the GSA is currently evaluating the impact of innovations completed at six prototype sites nationwide in which they implemented new standards for government facilities, such as systems furniture, child care centers, and expandable conference spaces.

# 5 I V E C

#### 4 Compatibility

There are two manifestations of compatibility. First, the workplace must be compatible with the organization's values, as well as the values of the individual worker. Second, the workplace must be compatible with the work being performed.

Even though today's workers are more likely to shift from job to job throughout their career, these employees are more concerned about compatibility of personal and workplace values than were their predecessors. The number of organizations that have clearly stated core values reinforces this observation. These values guide and shape how work is performed. In the seminal business book of the 1990s, *Built To Last*, the authors' research found that for companies such as Johnson & Johnson and Merck, who have enjoyed success for over a century, a strong core ideology with representative core values was a source of their ongoing growth and success. Companies must make sure their spaces reflect their current values. The employee can more easily screen, and finally choose an employer based on a viable corporate image.

The work space must be compatible with the work being performed. For instance, if teams do much of the work, sufficient group space must be available where teams can perform their work without interruption or interference. If much of the work is done individually, private, quiet work space must be available for individual workers.

The best furniture, image, and aesthetics in the world can't succeed if the people can't work in the space. And as each person works differently, the environment has to be adapted to each. To avoid a nightmare for facility managers, designers must select combinations of base components which work for many people, layered with user controlled adjustable tools which they can change themselves.

The provision of equipment and a human-centered work space must be supported by ongoing communications and training regarding the optimization of these resources. Too often the fast pace of organizational life and the lack of time precludes sufficient and appropriate training.



control

comfort

convenience

compatibility

communication

## 5 Communications

To have an environment that embraces communications, the design of the workplace must foster information sharing, the lifeblood of today's organizations. The availability of open space promotes informal information sharing and the growth of worker knowledge. Nurturing communications between individuals and teams can be achieved by implementing design concepts like main streets and communications magnets or by arranging groups to foster impromptu contact between various functions. Providing opportunities for displayed thinking greatly increases communications.

Steve Newport, director of human resources for Digital Resources in Toronto, says that space where employees can gather is invaluable to both the individual employee, as well as the organization. "In most organizations, 80 percent of organizational learning happens through informal conversation, and 20 percent through formal training. At Digital Resources you can chat with people easily because there are no office doors." (15)

The workplace should provide these environments and employers need not worry that such spaces will be abused for non-work related activities. Indeed, Steve Newport sees these spaces as bubbling cauldrons of new ideas and shared knowledge. (16) So does George M. Milne, Jr., Pfizer, Inc.'s research chief. Milne is such a strong believer in interaction that he redesigned labs at Pfizer to encourage interaction among scientists. "Innovation actually thrives in exchange. It is very social, and you want an environment that speaks to that." (17)

Inadequate information is the cause of more than half of the problems related to human performance, so it is crucial that the individual and common work spaces act as hubs of information. (18)

Organizations have found that training facilities are an important retention tool because employees today are constantly seeking opportunities for professional and personal growth. The new employee contract is based on career fluidity and not "employment for life," so workers are continually seeking new learning opportunities. (19) In addition, ongoing employee training and growth will have a positive impact on productivity and profitability.

## Improving Efficiency, Effectiveness, and Productivity

Employees are not just employees. They are consumers of education, retail products, media, and more. What do businesses selling to your employees do to get their attention and loyalty? Their consumer marketing strategies sound similar to employee retention strategies.

*Retailers: Retailers seek to understand customers' needs and motivations. How should a store be laid out to maximize exposure to merchandise, while making it easy for customers to shop? How does redesigning a store impact customer behavior and attitudes? Does a particular*

*store design: Attract new customers? Make it easier to shop in the store? Persuade shoppers to spend more? Reinforce loyalty?*

*Students: Researchers at the University of Arizona established a Retention Assessment Model that advocates that institutional characteristics (such as support, challenge, and clear expectations) and faculty actions (such as prompt feedback, opportunities or collaborative learning, and respect for diversity) have a strong impact upon retention.*

*Newspapers: The Circulation Council of the Newspaper Association of America set out to identify best practices in reader retention. Its report suggested that newspapers maintain regular communications with subscribers to encourage customer feedback, develop customer loyalty, facilitate rapid complaint resolution, and reinforce a long-term and personal relationship between the reader and the newspaper.*



WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM HOW OTHER

## So... How Do You Get Started?

*How do you maximize employees' human performance with appropriate interior design and furniture applications? First, and foremost, listen to what they tell you they need. Furniture and interiors must evolve toward a manufacturing system that is more like the mass-customized delivery systems computer manufacturers are now utilizing. Second, it is very important not to frame the questions with constraints that limit their creativity. Questions typically revolve around "How would you do your job if people, technology, connectivity, environment, facility, furniture did NOT get in the way of doing the work?"*

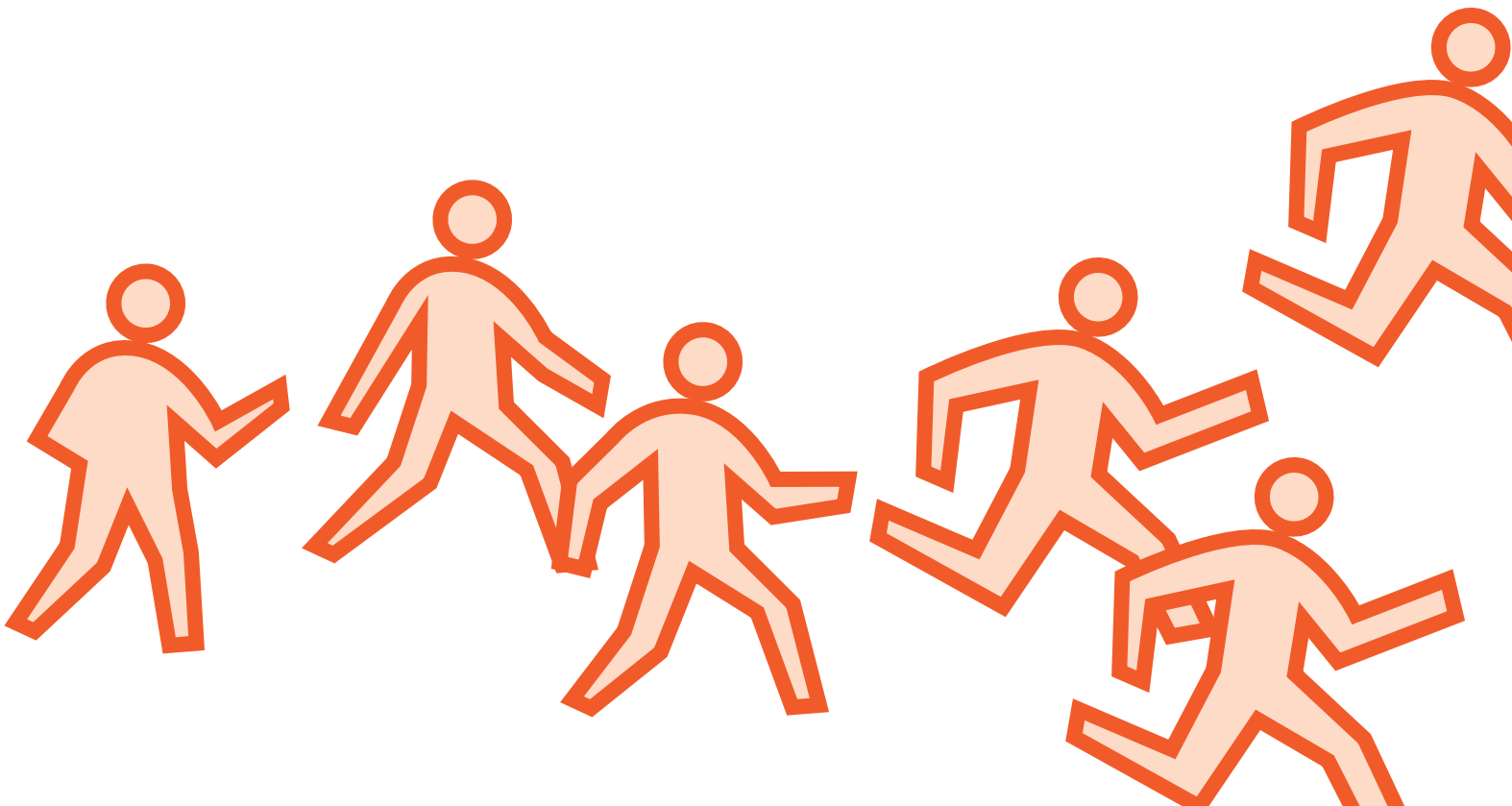
*Industry professionals must work with organizations and their employees to understand what tasks and activities are being done – or not being done because there is not a space or the right kind of furniture to do it. Solutions can not be generalized to the extent that generic*

*components rule. There should probably be some universal underpinning that will allow people, technology, and space to be integrated across systems. There should be a common vocabulary and connectivity options – both physical and electronic – that allow people to buy what they need, when they need it.*

*Organizational decisions concerning the built environment are not always in tune with knowledge workers' perceived needs. Furniture and interiors are not viewed as tools by many of those making the decisions. They are perceived as overhead. The big problem with getting change to work at all is related to the leadership not "getting it" and when they do, many failures still happen because they do not change themselves. We need to educate executives and keep getting the message out that the world of business and employee satisfaction is not black or white. Furniture and interiors*

*are a key part of any change effort, especially as they relate to sustainability. If the furniture and interiors allow for interactions to occur easily and seamlessly, then employees will be able to optimize the use of their knowledge and skills in providing efficient and effective customer services. Using their knowledge and skills successfully addresses their number one criteria for joining the organization – opportunity for personal growth and development.. Paul Barnette, Architect*

By linking the purpose, values, and objectives of the business with its people, employers can create a workplace that facilitates what the organization and its people want to accomplish. By doing that, employers can give employees what they need to combat stress and work effectively – a sense of control. This strategy will enable a company to motivate talent that will ensure its ongoing growth and success.



**BUSINESSES  
RETAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES' LOYALTY?**



*TEN QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS SHOULD ASK ABOUT THE  
IMPACT OF THEIR COMPANIES' WORK ENVIRONMENT ON  
THE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF EMPLOYEES*

- 1 Does your company treat the workplace as an investment or an expense? What is your workplace strategy?
- 2 Do you feel your company relates the use of its office space to its overall business objectives?
- 3 Does your office design and furniture match your mental picture of what your vision of the company is or should be?
- 4 What message do you think your office sends to your employees? That you value them? That you want to facilitate them? That your office is the type of place where you would want to stay?
- 5 Do you know how your employees feel about their individual, group, and public work spaces?
- 6 Do you think your employees are stressed? Do you ever ask them? Does the design of your work space cause stress or reduce stress?
- 7 Can your employees modify or personalize their workstations? Do they have the correct tools to be ergonomically comfortable, feel productive, and get the job done?
- 8 Do your employees have a place at work where they can recover from stress?
- 9 What first impression do you think job applicants have of your office? Have you ever asked them?
- 10 Have you considered adding amenities or office design choices as a recruiting incentive?



Today it's not enough for companies to pay well and offer competitive benefits in order to succeed in attracting and retaining employees. While these factors are important, if companies want to attract, retain, and motivate the employees, they must create a work environment that gives them a competitive edge. In this tight job market, companies need to think of competing for employees the same as they do about competing for market share. "The single best predictor of overall excellence was a company's ability to attract, motivate, and retain talented people," concludes *Fortune Magazine's* 1997 survey of the most admired companies.

Haworth is exploring this and many other workplace issues with WCE, a consultant group that analyzes the workplace from a multidisciplinary point of view, including an architect, facilities strategist and designer, a futurist, an organizational expert, a psychologist, and a communications professional. Haworth wants to help educate employers to be aware that by making their workplaces work easier they can attract and retain employees, gain more productivity and, therefore, more profits.

"Interiors can be a WOW factor that sets the organization apart from competitors – for both the customer and the potential applicant. A well-designed interior reflecting the values and principles of the organization will go a long way in establishing a connection between employee and organization culture," says architect Paul Barnette of WCE.

"The average person says, 'I don't live in a shabby home. If my income allows me to live in a nice home, why shouldn't my office be comparable? Just as my home style is appropriate to me, so is my workplace.' Just as we wouldn't let someone come into our home and decorate it without our input, why would we do that in the work environment?" says futurist Dr. Len Kruk of WCE.

Keeping employees requires reducing stress. A recent study of employees said job-related burnout rose from 39% to 53% in the last 3 years. With stress being one of the primary causes of employee turnover, employers are turning to designing work environments to reduce stress.

Unfortunately, workplace configuration and design are often perceived as "invisible and intangible" and, therefore, are not a priority in many corporate cultures. Presenting strong evidence that the employee's workplace means a great deal in terms of initial attraction and retention can change this attitude. An excellent step in this direction is a new study from the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) that shows the physical workplace can play an important role in decisions about accepting or leaving jobs. Haworth, USG Interiors, and the Carpet and Rug Institute supported the independent research study. When asked specifically if the physical workplace would have an influence on their decision to accept a position, two out of five employees said it would. Half said the physical workplace would impact their decision to leave a position.

"We believe it's important for employers to link the purpose, values, and objectives of their business with their people and provide a workplace that embodies what the organization and its people want to accomplish. This strategy will enable a company to attract, motivate, and retain talent that will ensure its ongoing growth and success," says organizational expert Skip Lange of WCE.

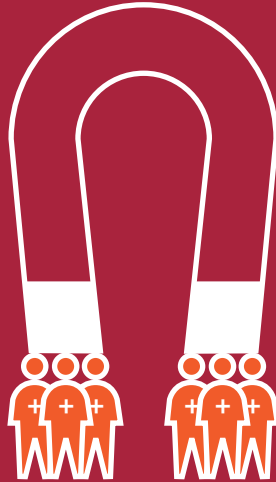


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**Edward L. "Skip" Lange** / Editor, Paul Lavenhar

"Skip" Lange is a senior consulting associate for Workplace Change Enablers (WCE). Skip is a highly experienced organizational consultant who has a track record of facilitating organizational change. Clients he has served have ranged from Fortune 500 organizations to emerging businesses, including AT&T, Advanta Corporation, Teleflex, Copelco Capital, among others. WCE is a multidisciplinary organization of experienced change management specialists. The members of the WCE team have made added commentary.



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