



Office Alternatives: Working On-Site

The economic realities of the 90s have forced businesses to reassess and make fundamental changes in the way they structure their organizations. In this report, Herman Miller's Advanced Applications Group looks at how new ways of working affect corporate facility design and answers some frequently asked questions about supporting on-site work in a time of continual change.





Empty Workstations

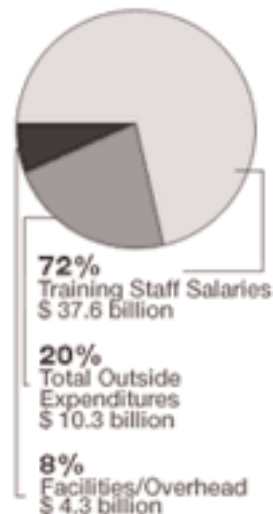
People whose work requires participation in a number of different projects simultaneously often spend more time out of their workstations than in. A spot check study conducted by Herman Miller facility designers found that project workers' offices were twice as likely to be empty during business hours as those of their more process-oriented colleagues.

Jon Ryberg, president of Facility Performance Group, Inc., gives an example of a major oil company whose headquarters were designed according to standards common in the 80s. A recent evaluation of space use revealed that the offices in this high-rise facility, which housed the administration executives and staff of the company's operating units, stood empty 60 to 70 percent of the time.

Employee Training

American organizations with 100 employees or more budgeted \$52.2 billion for formal training programs in 1995—a 3.2 percent increase over the previous year (source: 1995 Industry Report, "Training", October 1995).

1995 Training Budget



Throughout the 70s and the 80s, corporate offices didn't change much. Private executive suites lined the perimeter walls surrounding large, open spaces filled with individual workstations. Today, many of those window-lined private offices stand empty or are temporarily occupied by someone other than the person whose name is on the door. The larger executive suites have been converted into meeting or project rooms. Their former occupants are out: in meetings, consulting with customers, halfway around the world negotiating a merger, or at home conducting business on the internet.

Many of the open office workstations are empty as well. Their occupants may be telecommuters who come into the office just two days a week. They may be working in a project room with colleagues from other departments, across town conferring with a vendor on a new part, or attending a learning session.

Over the past few years, many businesses have made radical changes in their organizational structures and ways of working. To remain competitive in increasingly volatile global markets, they have experimented with different management and organizational models. They have invested billions of dollars in information technology and in employee training and education.



Team Types

Business organizations have traditionally used teams to solve a problem, implement a program, develop a new product, or simply to carry out routine functions. Today, however, there are more different types of teams doing more varied kinds of work than ever before.

Linear teams perform routine, repetitive tasks such as customer service, order entry, inventory control, and loan processing. People are arranged in a formal order as they function within an established process. Roles are well defined. One person completes a job and passes it on to the next person until the job leaves the team's system.

Parallel teams are assembled for a project that requires specialized skills from each member. Team members often come from different departments, and the project usually isn't their only job. They probably belong to other teams and contribute expertise to several projects in various stages of completion.

Circular teams are built for innovation. Team members dream, explore possibilities, and work together. The team comes together for a project, then usually disbands when the goal is reached. While it's assembled, the team may expand and contract. People come and go as a project evolves.

But after a few years of restructuring, downsizing and reducing space use, companies often find themselves left with facilities that have only the faintest relationship to organizational goals and the work people actually perform. Rows of workstations are underutilized as their occupants gather in overbooked and underequipped conference rooms originally designed for occasional high-level meetings. Generously sized offices that once conveyed status begin to look like a waste of corporate resources when the people for whom they were designed spend the majority of their time in team meetings.



Alternatives for Individuals

"Hoteling" refers to a system where unassigned individual work spaces may be reserved for use by a particular individual for a specified block of time. A corporate "concierge" is responsible for scheduling and equipping spaces for use.

The Chicago office of Ernst & Young pioneered hoteling in 1992. Auditors and managers who spent 50 to 90 percent of their time in the field would call in a few hours ahead of time to reserve a work area in the central office.

Free address work spaces are unassigned and can be used by anyone in the company—not just by people from a particular team, group, or department. Reservations are not required; the space is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

Just-in-time describes a method of leaving corporate space as open and flexible as possible by providing mobile or easily moved furniture and screens or partitions that can be assembled to support individual work processes "on the spot."

Shared assigned refers to a situation where two or more employees are assigned to use the same desk, office, or workstation at different times. The people who share the space are generally expected to work out a schedule for themselves.

Permanent assigned (traditional) applies to those individuals who continue to need an office space permanently assigned to them because most of their process oriented work is performed on-site.

In addition to working more collaboratively, people are working in a greater variety of locations. The advances in technology that have enabled this new mobility are not usually well supported by office layouts designed for more traditional work processes. Managers today can easily carry their laptops from one corporate work site to another, but whether they'll find convenient access to the appropriate network is a different story.

Corporate facilities groups are responding to emerging needs and work patterns with design strategies that range from tentative first steps to complete transformations. The most conservative and commonly applied approach maintains the traditional one-person-one-office ratio but reduces the size of individual offices to free up space for team meeting areas and project rooms. The most radical solutions eliminate individual offices altogether, dividing corporate space into work centers that support different functions like meeting, training, and research, as well as individual work.

In between these two extremes, a number of office alternatives for groups and individuals is emerging. Some businesses have tried a number of these alternatives, either simultaneously or successively, as they have discovered that one result of "continuous improvement" is continuous change.

We have observed a number of methods for providing alternative workplaces for individual work while maintaining maximum flexibility.



Alternatives for Teams

Permanent assigned spaces may be dedicated to an ongoing project or long-term account to house resources and materials. The space provides a place to support collaborative work and some individual work performed by team members.

Group address spaces are not assigned to a particular team but are available for group use as needed. This type of space works well for parallel teams whose members generally work apart or off-site but who need to meet on an irregular basis.

Tenant space is group space that can be "rented" by a circular or other team (like a new-product development team) whose members will collaborate for an intense but limited period of time.

Alternatives for Meeting

Videoconferencing rooms are designed to support the special lighting, acoustical, and technological requirements of video broadcasts and group communications.

Huddle spaces for informal meetings, chance encounters, and work breaks foster idea exchange and communication.

Learning spaces range from traditional classrooms to multipurpose rooms designed to support participative learning experiences like team-building.

With the growing emphasis on collaboration and the greater variety of team types, we are beginning to see a number of *alternative work spaces* for team use incorporated into on-site facility layouts.

New ways of working requires *meeting areas* that go beyond conventional conference rooms.

The best facility strategy for any given company will combine several of these workplace alternatives to support corporate culture and business goals. Our own observations suggest that experimentation and constant assessment of how well a particular method supports work processes is essential. Successful companies will become adept at seamlessly integrating office alternatives that support continuously changing work patterns and business strategies.

Next we present some of the frequently asked questions in our work with customers who are redefining and redesigning their offices in an era of constant change.

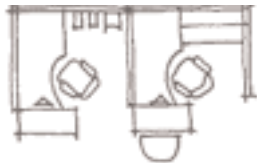


Facility designers and planners must be thoroughly briefed on changes in organizational structures and strategies.

1. How do we determine the appropriate environmental solution to accommodate all of our changing work patterns?

Before an effective new environment can be created, the people responsible for the design and planning of the space must understand the current organizational structure and changing management practices. Designing an effective team space, for example, requires knowing why the team is a team, what type of work process the team is practicing, whether the team is a permanent or temporary organizational arrangement, and whether some of the team members work off-site regularly or sporadically.

Since every corporation is changing in many different ways and adapting new management disciplines from a multitude of options, there is no single prescription for change in the corporate facility. Our own observations suggest that it is best to view corporate space as a place for activity centers that support both group and individual work.

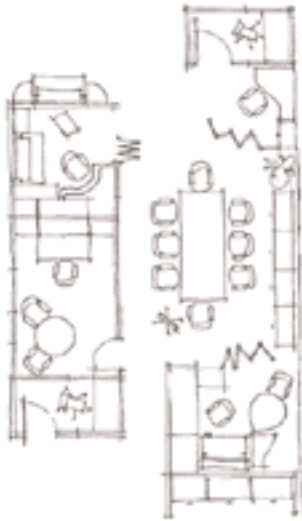


2. How can the size of individual workstations be reduced to free up space for team activities?

Workstation standards that were appropriate in the 1980s were often generously sized. Work process changes in the late 80's and into the 90's left these individual spaces unoccupied much of the time as people spent more and more time meeting with others outside individual work areas.

We are seeing a trend toward reducing standard workstations with footprints of 8' x 10' or larger to 8' x 8', while 8' x 8' and 8' x 6' standards are being reduced to 8' x 6' and 6' x 6', respectively. Storage consolidation is one way to reduce standard workstation sizes. Many companies are implementing electronic information archival systems to reduce the need for physical storage components within individual workstations.

We recommend that individual work activities be assessed before deciding on any standard. Individual work needs should also be compared to the collaborative work requirements of the organization when creating new facility policies.



Phone booths, an enclosed meeting area, and small individual workstations with mobile screens meet a variety of privacy needs within a collaborative team area.

3. How can we plan for individual privacy requirements within a team or collaborative group space?

Often individual work activities need support within the same general area in which a team resides. Assessing the frequency of privacy needs—how often privacy is essential to an individual's productivity within the team space—is a step toward determining how a balance between collaborative and private spaces can be accomplished.

Private work spaces can be separated from collaborative areas by moveable partitions or mobile screens. Small individual workstations created from systems furniture can be designed to surround a collaboration area in the center. If privacy is primarily required for telephone-related activities, partitioned "phone booths" provide a good solution.

The purpose of the team and team priorities should be taken into consideration. Is the team focusing on creativity or on productivity and effectiveness? If needs for quiet, undisturbed time alone are sporadic, it may be best for individuals to leave the team space occasionally to work in a converted conference or multipurpose room located elsewhere.



Mobile furniture that can be easily rearranged is becoming an essential work tool for today's worker.

4. How will facility management change when more flexible and mobile furniture solutions are necessary to support workplace alternatives?

Many facility managers are implementing new policies that allow for moving the most flexible furniture products within a given workplace geography. Like a laptop computer or any other piece of equipment required to perform certain job functions, mobile furniture items may be assigned to a particular position and become the responsibility of the person filling that position. Responsibility for furniture located in team areas can be assigned to the team. The point of providing flexible furniture is to increase the effectiveness of workers; it may indeed be necessary to change attitudes about how furniture assets are managed.



5. Are the corporations experimenting with office alternatives finding ways to determine on-site people-to-workplace ratios?

Although this calculation is a simple math problem, it becomes complex when all relevant factors are considered. The experience base for evaluating this type of data is in its infancy, and there is no single formula that will fit every organization.

We have worked with a large telecommunications corporation that studied mobility and interaction among workers to determine on-site requirements. They developed people-to-workplace ratios appropriate to their needs.

Calculating the number of workers telecommuting, job sharing, and working on teams or team assignments will help in determining on-site requirements.

Grouping workers by office alternative types is a first step in calculating on-site space requirements. One of our customers developed these people-to-workplace ratios for their work force.



6. How can we ensure that the resources we invest in office alternatives today will meet our facility needs five or ten years from now?

Clearly work and the workplace will continue to change. New generations of computing devices and software appear with increasing rapidity, and work processes are continually reformulated to keep up with changing business strategies and opportunities. Multifunctional furniture products that are not overly specialized to support current technology and job functions are the best hedge against facility obsolescence.

The rapid rate of technological and organizational change calls for furniture that will be able to adjust and adapt to unforeseen technology and worker requirements.

Sources and Resources

Everybody's Business: A Fund of Retrievable Ideas for Humanizing Life in the Office
Clark Malcolm, Herman Miller, 1985

Discusses both good and bad points of offices and how organizations create environments that become everybody's business.

The Negotiable Environment: People, White Collar Work, and the Office
Cecil Williams, David Armstrong, Clark Malcolm, Herman Miller, 1985

Describes a research project exploring the relationships between people, work and the office.

What Are the Questions?

Herman Miller, 1992

Facilities for Project Teams

Herman Miller, 1994

Research Summary: Explains project team concept, details facility designs for three project models.

Office Environment: The North American Perspective

Herman Miller, 1994

Research Summary: Explains changes in office environments in North America; discusses the relationship of people, production, and place.

The Changing Work Force

Herman Miller, 1993

Research Summary: Discusses how changing work force demographics are affecting the definition, design and furnishings of the workplace. Suggests these trends in demographics and workplaces will continue to accelerate over the next 10 years.

Designing Effective Work Groups

Paul S. Goodman and Associates, Jossey-Bass, 1992

Book that reviews current knowledge about groups and explores new directions for understanding them and improving group effectiveness.

Teaming Up

Carl Harshman and Steven Phillips, Pfeiffer and Co., 1994

Book providing clues to why their environments are changing and how to address those changes.

The Unshackled Organization: Facing the Challenge of Unpredictability Through Spontaneous Reorganization

Jeffrey Goldstein, Productivity Press, 1994

Book exploring new ways to look at change and how rethinking change happens within an organization and how to encourage the change process.

Workplace 2000: The Revolution Reshaping American Business

Joseph H. Boyett and Henry P. Conn, Plume Penguin Books, 1992

Book that is a guide for an America facing global competition in the marketplace, charting the education, skills, and attitudes that the new workplace will demand.

Future Tense: The Business Realities of the Next Ten Years

Ian Morrison and Greg Schmid, Morrow, 1994

Book providing a blueprint of the epochal forces that business must contend with through the beginning of the next century.

The Twenty-First Century Organization: Analyzing Current Trends—Imaging the Future
Guy Benveniste, Jossey-Bass, 1994

Book showing planners, managers, and others how to recognize the consequences of radical innovations in communications and other technologies and how to use today's knowledge workers more effectively.