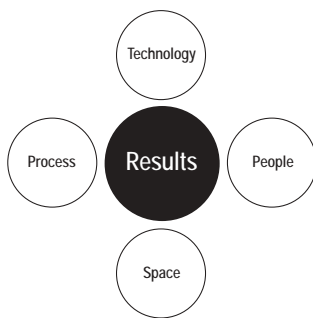


offer inspiring spaces

There are sound business reasons for treating your work environment as a strategic asset... regarding it on the same plane with people, business processes, and technology.



As a strategic asset, the workplace must function as a high performance environment that seamlessly integrates architecture, furniture and technology through insightful planning.

The following discussion centers on Offering Inspiring Spaces. It is one of six planning principles that enables you to plan and create a workplace that becomes a critical management tool, supporting the corporate strategies that have a direct impact on your business results.

Exploring the Issue of “Using Space to Stimulate Inspiration”

In the past, any talk of revitalizing or inspiring workers might have been considered frivolous. But new research points to the need among high-performing workers to release stress, rejuvenate, and re-energize at work.

It's a fact — people are naturally drawn to spaces where they feel comfortable and connected to their environment. That's why certain vacation spots always draw large crowds... cozy restaurant booths are the first chosen... and park benches facing the pond seem always occupied.

Similarly, when it comes to learning, innovating, and sharing, office workers are drawn to places that attract and inspire them.

So, how is inspiration achieved in the work environment? Experts report that “humanness” or scale-of-space is critical...as well as the comfort, informality, and personalization of the workplace.

How to Think About It

People get inspired in different ways: some through quiet and solitude; others by interactive stimulation through exercise and play. It's important to understand what inspires the people in your organization.

Whatever the type, spaces designed with inspiration in mind can help heighten people's senses, their awareness, and their mental processes. Here are a couple of examples:

High-performance workers

- Your high performance workers should be supported in ways that replenish their energy and enthusiasm, whether in the form of food or beverage... or mental/emotional treats or exercise. For long-term success, it's important to nourish and refresh them.

High-performance teams

- The work of your high performance teams depends on the ability and opportunity of team members to play together. Recreation and socializing creates bonds and shared understandings, and uncovers mental models in a way that significantly affects team performance.

What To Measure

Spend some time evaluating various work areas within your workplace:

- Are all — or nearly all — spaces geared to the same worker temperament? Or are there remarkable differences from area to area?
- Among all of your organization's spaces, which is the most unusual or out-of-the-ordinary? What makes it so? How did it get that way? Who uses it?
- Visit a high-energy department (sales or marketing)... then one with a more rigid focus (finance or production management). Compare the ways the people in these two groups get "inspired." Where do they go? What do they do?

How To Experiment with Change

Providing a range of spaces invites people to consider how they work and how the space surrounding them contributes to their work effectiveness.

- Create one or two peaceful, respite zones in out-of-the-way, secure areas. Encourage people to use them for reflection, contemplating new ideas, or just getting away from work for a few minutes.
- Provide a comfortable lounge chair and ottoman tucked away in a hidden sunlit corner... or a shaded bench overlooking a pond on a corporate campus.
- Incorporate live plants, artwork, music, light dimmers, landscape vistas... or add the sound of water to selected areas to help establish tranquility.
- In a centralized area, easily accessible by large numbers of people, create a stimulating new space for informal interaction, play, conversation, and socializing. Picture your people talking, laughing, scribbling ideas on white boards, sharing conversation over cups of coffee... or even exercising.
- Invite a small number of your employees to experiment with impromptu breaks whenever they feel stress from high-intensity and routine work. Ask them for feedback after a few weeks.
- Furnish a common area with playful toys and other artifacts that invite your people to have fun and release stress. Use signs to explain the need for balance in the work/life equation. Seek their feedback.

Evaluate the Investment

Remember, one of the six planning principles of a high performance work environment is the use of space to inspire people so that they can do their most effective work.

If you're interested in using this or any of the other building blocks to help define or redesign your work environment – by strategically integrating the architecture, furniture, and technology used by your people – let us help.

For more in-depth information on using space to stimulate inspiration, see the Steelcase knowledge papers at www.steelcase.com; Tools and Insights.

- *Beyond Style: Social Comfort As the Next Motivator*
- *The Workplace As Motivator: Space That Inspires*
- *Alive and in Color*
- *Face to Face, Screen to Screen, Collaboration in the New Workplace (S11457)*