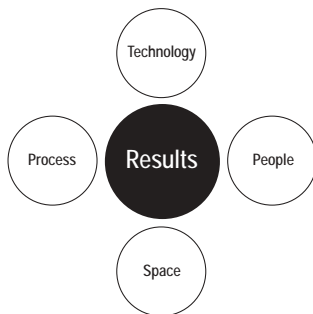




make work visible

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 Making Work Visible. 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 “Making Work Visible”

Making work visible is often referred to as “visual display.” It is achieved in the workplace by moving work from the horizontal plane (the work surface) to the vertical plane (panels or walls). This can be done either through electronic means (projection devices) or physical display (tackable surfaces and marker boards).

Visual display can be as simple as sticky notes that flag important details... banners and billboards that grab our attention... or notices on company bulletin boards for sharing information.

Visibility by itself, however, is not enough. Information needs to be relevant, timely, and audience-appropriate.

- Out-of-date and irrelevant information not only is ignored, it thwarts attempts to communicate more effectively.
- Visible work should be produced and displayed to properly fit the size of the room... and the audience for whom it is posted (so projected materials can be read from the back of the room), and written in a language people can understand.

Visual sharing is key to helping people grasp new ideas and remember things. It helps people share their learnings with others, communicate their thoughts and ideas more effectively and transfer knowledge.

Visual display triggers memory, which helps people make connections from the past to the present and to new connections for the future. It helps build on each others’ relationships and memories, and jumpstarts ideas.

How to Think About It

1. Making Work Visible in Formal Presentations

Formal presentations are a prime method for learning about and helping develop new ideas. In fact, nearly 62% of respondents to a recent Steelcase survey (HotHouse Seminar 2001) indicated that formal meetings result more often than not in “learning from one another and generating better solutions.”

Your work environment can help make the work of formal meetings more visible by enabling the participants to capture, display, store, and retrieve the information that’s discussed from one meeting to the next.

2. Enhancing Impromptu Exchanges with Visual Display

Many important social needs are met in the workplace. People talk, spend time together, and work on common projects. This “social capital,” when combined with clear direction and decision-making, can contribute to the development and sharing of new ideas.

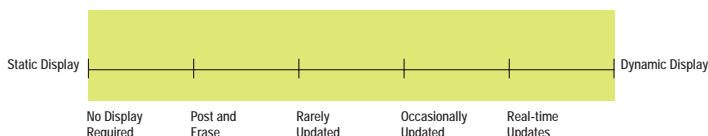
Many times idea sharing is impromptu and happens near someone’s workspace or in hallways and break areas. Wherever it unfolds, your discussions can be jumpstarted simply through the effective use of visual display — marker boards, tackable surfaces, or projection devices.

3. Maximizing the Effectiveness of Scheduled Collaboration Sessions

For effective collaboration, leveraging of group memory, and knowledge generation, visual display is a significant element. It supports your teams by capturing and displaying information for extended periods of time (sometimes referred to as “information persistence”). When your team members capture thoughts and ideas on a white board, for example, they can more quickly achieve a “shared mind” in virtually any group situation.

With shared access to the same words and pictures, team members are able to clarify differences, sort out conflicts, and achieve a shared understanding of information at hand.

What To Measure



Information is first transferred between individuals, then transformed as people work together. Transformation — the iterative exchange of ideas that is at the heart of the knowledge-creating process — is the key activity of collaboration.

When the shared notes are preserved and posted for the duration of a project, they help members of the group focus and direct their individual work and track the progress of the entire project.

Continuous access to the visual display of information helps your people get back up to speed quickly when the group reconvenes. Supporting visual memory with information persistence augments work process, communication, learning, decision-making and problem solving.

How To Experiment with Change

- Ask your local Steelcase dealer to work with you to evaluate broader use of marker boards, tackable surfaces, and storage tubs.
- Investigate and experiment with evolving technology — projection devices, internet connections, and real-time access to and retrieval of information — and seek feedback from people in your organization on their use and effectiveness.
- Experiment with mobile display units near groups of workspaces and in high-traffic areas, such as spaces between departments or en route to copy machines, cafeteria, elevator, or lobby. Designate these impromptu spaces and equip them appropriately to foster frequent communication and spontaneous information sharing.
- Equip one team space with “low-tech” portable marker boards to capture and store their information. Equip another team space with “high-tech” equipment that provides access and retrieval to electronically-stored information. Evaluate their feedback after 30 days.

Evaluate the Investment

Remember, one of the six planning principles of a high performance work environment is the ability to make work visible for people throughout your organization.

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 making work visible, see the Steelcase knowledge papers at www.steelcase.com; Tools and Insights.

- *Face to Face, Screen to Screen: Collaboration in the New Workplace (S11457)*