

Inspiring Spaces Reinvigorate the Office

Yes, more people have the option today to work away from the office. But, those who predicted the office would go away have been proven wrong. That's because leaders know the really valuable conversations and collaborations happen when people come together. Business leaders looking to innovate and create a culture resilient to a changing marketplace are looking to the workplace as a strategic lever for innovation and idea generation.

Steelcase global researchers surveyed more than 12,000 participants in 17 countries around the world. The outcome was the Steelcase Global Report, where we noted that one-third, an alarming number, of workers reported feeling disengaged at the office. Engagement is a bottom line issue. Disengaged employees become a drain on company resources and a scourge to the bottom line while an engaged workforce generates new ideas and fuels economic growth.

Business leaders are prioritizing this problem, but evidence suggests efforts may be misguided or only attacking part of the issue. Fun diversions such as game tables or a fully-stocked fridge may be addressing the social importance of relationship building in the office, but they disregard the need for a workplace that helps workers perform better. Inspiring workplaces offer spaces for people to collaborate, to focus, to lounge and to socialize. Fun and function need to work in harmony to build an engaging office.

"I don't need office hover boards or in-house seltzer machines or a shuffleboard court to keep me happy. What I need from my work environment is what most people need, regardless of generation: an atmosphere that is intellectually stimulating, collaborative, and respectful of time," wrote Meredith Bennett-Smith for Quartz.

Bennett-Smith goes on to say it's very difficult to do this without having watercooler conversations with her co-workers. Apps, instant messaging, texting and email can only get us so far. These forms of communication don't account for those "accidental" yet valuable hallway conversations. And, many companies aren't yet harnessing technology to help eliminate the disparity distance can create. Facial expressions and body language are vital components to understanding. Text-only communication is too easily misinterpreted and conversations can be quickly cut off when a new ping hits your nearest inbox.

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many offices have become.**

The office is a connection point for groups and teams, and that doesn't just mean finding ways to relax with co-workers. It means supporting the physical, cognitive and emotional wellbeing of workers by enabling them to build trust with face-to-face conversations and move projects along with important breakout conversations or the ability to concentrate and focus or rest and rejuvenate.

People are rejecting the sea of sameness many offices have become. They want breakout social and personal workspaces to choose from when at the office. That ability to choose where to work gives employees a feeling of control which research shows contributes to engagement. Getting to pick between a private or semi-private workspace that allows someone to focus, a small team room with collaborative tools such as whiteboards and information-sharing technology, and a work cafe for more social conversation creates an ecosystem of spaces engaging workers all day long.

“Interacting with my colleagues is one of the main reasons I get up in the morning,” wrote Bennett-Smith.

Led by this research, designers are creating purposeful breakout spaces that help everyone perform their best at the office. View the slideshow below to see examples of these new informal, authentic and inspiring spaces.

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Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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