

COFFEE SHOP CULTURE AT WORK: THE NEW FAVOURITE WORKPLACE

London 10th January 2015 — Coffee shops are very much in vogue today — and not just for a quick cup of coffee, but increasingly as workplaces.

Office workers regularly leave their offices in search of a more relaxed, creative environment.^[1] Generally they escape to Starbucks, Costa and the host of other coffee shops found on every high street. The great disadvantage of this is that coffee shops rarely offer the high technological and ergonomic standards that people need to be able to work efficiently and healthily. In addition, outside the office, staff members are cut off from their colleagues and from the company culture.

Steelcase, the world leader in the provision of high performance workplace solutions, resolves this dilemma and, with its new WorkCafé environment, draws employees back into the office. The secret of the WorkCafé is that it combines the stimulating atmosphere of a coffee house with the high degree of technology and comfort one would expect of a well-designed office. It is not only increasing productivity and interaction between employees, but also ensuring a more efficient use of space.

KNOW-HOW EXCHANGE WITH STARBUCKS FEELING

Working in a coffee shop has a long tradition: from a Viennese café to Starbucks. Coffee shops have always been places of creativity. In addition to snacks, beverages and comfortable lounge chairs, they offer the stimulating atmosphere which is an important magnet. However, the spontaneous exchange of information and know-how between colleagues are lost.

“In our increasingly mobile working world, it is a challenge for companies to bring employees together,” observes John Small, Director of Industrial Design, EMEA at Steelcase. “The WorkCafé provides a central location for creative exchange and innovation. Employees thus find the coffee shop vibe with the functionality of a well-planned office that has the qualities of becoming a new favourite workplace.”

GREATER FLEXIBILITY FOR INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Traditionally, managers believed that the best employees were those who spent most of their time at their desks. Those times are gone. Work is becoming increasingly flexible and mobile. According to current Steelcase research, employees worldwide desire greater flexibility in the choice of working environment, depending on the task and their personal sensibility. Those who can choose where they work will be much more motivated and productive. The new WorkCafé is supporting this trend. It offers different workplaces for all kinds of tasks, from concentrated individual work to collaboration within a group. As a result, employees can choose the appropriate place directly within the company's premises.

WORKCAFÉ ACTIVATES UNDERUTILISED REAL ESTATE

Steelcase has applied these insights in two of its own locations: The former café in Rosenheim has been transformed into the coffee-house atmosphere of the VIVAT Café. This has become a central meeting point, where people can interact and exchange. Similarly, the WorkCafé in the company's headquarters in Grand Rapids built in 2011 on the 20,000-square-foot area (1,860m²) of the former cafeteria. Previously the space was used mainly at lunchtime, leaving the remaining empty the rest of the day. The Steelcase team completely redesigned this area and created an environment in which employees can meet, work, exchange ideas and relax – as well as eating and drinking. With this reshaping of the facilities, the use of the space has been tripled.

“We decided to create this space within the context of our real-estate strategy. We felt that when nurturing well-being and the brand image by creating opportunities to establish relationships, this was the most important space to start with. Not only does the WorkCafé do all these things; it could also better support mobile working. The space became a symbol of the brand,” said John Small.

The WorkCafé is divided into five different zones: **Kitchen and Dine** with facilities for food and beverages as well as space for recreation.

The **Social Hub**, offering cafe and snacks in a lounge atmosphere where employees can gather in a relaxed atmosphere and exchange ideas.

Meeting Commons is conceived for undisturbed collaboration in meeting rooms of different sizes.

The **Nomadic Camp** where mobile workers can concentrate or meet with team members.

Finally, the **Resource Centre** providing employees with all those things that ease a normal working day; for example, lockers, printers and working material such as pens, pencils, etc. Even an EC cash point or a post facility could be part of this space.

THREE KEY ELEMENTS FOR EFFICIENT WORK

A WorkCafé is much more than just a coffee machine and a couch. The decisive aspect is the appropriate mix of atmosphere and good functioning. The Steelcase Advanced Applications team has identified three key factors for a well-designed WorkCafé:

Integration of technology. For efficient work, technology has to be integrated into the WorkCafé. Effective Wi-Fi is just as much part of the basic equipment as power access to everyone. The equipment has to facilitate information sharing between colleagues that are physically present or not. Digital reservation systems allow reserving working areas.

Design Attributes. The strongest argument in favour of a WorkCafé is its stimulating, relaxed atmosphere. The appropriate furniture elements, materials, colours, lighting and even music make workers feel at home there.

Hosting Characteristics. Various service facilities help employees to get organised and feel welcomed. Access to printing machines, personal lockers and space reservation is just as important as the availability of food and drink throughout the day.

^[1] Workplace consultants Flex + Strategy

