

TELUS: Crafting a New Workplace

TELUS is a leading telecommunications provider in Canada. Like many organizations in its industry, TELUS has grown dramatically in recent years, both organically and through strategic acquisitions.

🕒 Read 12 mins



MERGING OPERATIONS: TELECOMM COMBINES FIFTEEN OFFICES INTO NEW, COLLABORATIVE WORKPLACE.

TELUS is a leading telecommunications provider in Canada. Like many organizations in its industry, TELUS has grown dramatically in recent years, both organically and through strategic acquisitions. Newly merged organizations need to leverage economies of scope and scale yet this often precludes immediately combining offices and staff who are usually widely dispersed. In fact, the need to rethink offices is often delayed for any company that's experienced major organizational change.

Before long, however, the need to bring team members together is overwhelming. Scattered offices are inefficient and any sense of company identity is diluted. What's needed is a renewed workplace strategy that reflects changes in the business, improves work processes, and creates a workplace that best serves the organizational culture and brand.

TELUS completed that journey for its Toronto team with the opening of their downtown Toronto workplace at 25 York Street, a 30-story office tower, TELUS House Toronto. This new office has delivered productivity gains twice the company's expectations.

CRAFTING A NEW WORKPLACE STRATEGY

The journey began three years earlier. The company's operations had grown to fifteen locations with offices ranging from 6,000 square feet to more than ten times that size. Different business units had dissimilar organizational cultures. Business processes varied. With a staff of 1,600 workers representing three generations, from boomers to Gen Y, the company needed more than just a new office; they needed to unify the organization's culture, brand, and team members.

Moreover, the company planned to use the Toronto project as an exemplar for its real estate portfolio. "Our goals transcended the new office tower in Toronto. We wanted a corporate workplace strategy that would help us create great work environments at our properties across Canada.

In keeping with our company tag line that 'The Future Is Friendly,' we're giving people better, more collaborative and inspiring work-spaces. At the same time, we're reducing our overall portfolio. Our mantra is 'better space but less of it,'" says Andrea Goertz, senior vice president, strategic initiatives.

To help craft its workplace strategy, TELUS engaged Steelcase Applied Research and Consulting (ARC) to conduct a preoccupancy survey of the company's work force. The research examined key work processes and work styles, including:

- how people interact, socialize, and innovate
- factors that contribute to lost work time, and how to reduce it
- the organization's mix of collaborative and individual work
- what types of workspaces were needed to support different work styles
- technology access requirements
- health, safety, and comfort needs

"The research really revealed a lot about how we work. It helped us understand needs for both collaboration spaces and meeting rooms, and places where workers can concentrate in private. We learned, for example, that workers needed easier access to spaces for impromptu collaboration, and team spaces that enabled teams to move furniture around based on the team's needs.

The survey also gave us baseline information we could use for a post-occupancy audit to measure the effectiveness of the new space," says Cathy Wardlaw, senior program manager.

AN OFFICE THAT MIRRORS THE ORGANIZATION

At most companies, workers are housed by function: finance staffers work together, customer service reps work together, etc. TELUS offices were the same. This meant that people in different departments, yet serving the same customer, often were located far apart, sometimes in different parts of the city. “But they all serve the same customers, so why not sit together?” says Wardlaw.

TELUS decided to organize their workplace the same way the company is organized, around three types of business units: customer-facing business units (e.g. consumer solutions, business solutions), enabling business units (e.g. technology operations), and supporting business units (HR, finance, etc.). People who serve the same clients would work in close proximity.

“So now we have the entire customer delivery process—people in marketing, sales, order fulfillment, finance, billing, and more—working on the same floors, organized around the customers they work for.”

WARDLAW

Their offices have a shared workplace model with just four types of worksettings:

- 120-degree workstations in an open plan
- benching workstations
- director workspaces
- private offices

“If workers serve the same customers, why not sit together?”

CATHY WARDLAW | Senior Program Manager

“We wanted workplace standards that balanced efficiency and effectiveness, and made future changes easier,” says Eva Cetra, real estate manager. A small number of standard workspaces will simplify work environment changes during the company’s 15-year lease on the building. “The floors are virtually identical so we’re able to move various groups up and down and around the floors as business reshapes.

The floor plan has a variety of different work settings, including amenity and group spaces, so when we reconfigure, basically everything people need is already there,” says Cetra.

The workplace reinforces the company's open, collaborative work style. Panel heights are low. Meeting rooms and offices have glass fronts. Team meeting spaces are defined by an architectural framework that preserves site lines to other spaces. Natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows reaches across every floor, and blinds and lighting automatically adjust to maximize daylight and control energy costs.

MAKING THE LEAP

"TELUS has gone from a range of traditional work environments in a variety of different locations, to a single, mobile environment, and that's a huge leap," says Mandy Sutherland, a consultant with the Steelcase Applied Research & Consulting group that assisted TELUS with the 25 York Street project. To make the jump, the company crafted an extensive change management program.

It started with a detailed survey of employees to gather data about the effectiveness of their then-current environment, and what they needed to be more effective in their work. The survey started a multi-year communications effort.

"We're a technology company, and we used technology to reach people via an internal web site, answering questions, etc. But as great as technology is, face-to-face is critical," says Cathy Wardlaw, senior program manager. Beginning two years before the building opened, update meetings were held with employees to provide project updates and answer questions. "We held 67 face-to-face meetings with employees, explaining what's happening, getting people engaged with the project, and building excitement," says Wardlaw.

A change advocacy team, a mix of middle and upper management, worked to encourage acceptance of the new, open workplace strategy. Monthly presentations were held with employee groups. Advocates within each departmental group, called primes, brought questions to the project team and answers back to the rank and file.

A mock-up of the new Steelcase worksettings was available for a month for employee visits, with a real estate person on hand to answer questions. Later, a video of the mock-up was posted to an internal web site.

When the first floor was installed, employees toured the space to see what was coming for them. A welcome kit was posted online with more information about the new work environment, and a Wiki page was created to provide information on everything from daycare availability and train schedules to parking and restaurant locations.

On move days, representatives from POI Business Interiors, the Steelcase dealer who managed the move and the consolidation of the 15 offices, showed employees how to adjust their new chairs, I.T. experts answered tech questions, and real estate staff were on hand to provide support. Welcome cards on desks included an email address and 800 number for quick help with any move-in issue, and ergonomics education posters were posted throughout the space.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT TOOLS FOR “TURNING TREPIDATION INTO EXCITEMENT”

- Pre-occupancy survey
- Face-to-face meetings with all employees
- Monthly project update meetings
- Change advocacy team
- Internal web site
- Departmental advocates to convey questions and answers
- “Kick the tires” mock-up
- Online video of mock-up
- Wiki page for local area information
- Move-in assistance
- Chair adjustment demos
- Quick response 800# and email address
- Post-occupancy survey

“We had some concerns in consolidating our offices into one location. Some people were close to their homes in those old offices. Now we were asking them to come downtown and that could mean changes in transportation, child care, parking, and other activities” says Andrea Goertz, senior vice president, strategic initiatives.

“The change management process helps employees make those changes, even embrace them,” she says. “It became practically a non-issue by move in. Concerns were heard, and we gave people a lot of lead time. We turned trepidation into excitement.”



BUILDING THE BRAND

Walk the floors of TELUS House Toronto and you see graphics and colors consistent with the company brand. The organization's values are printed on meeting room walls. Company attributes and team photos are showcased as well. This is an organization, after all, that for years had been spread across more than a dozen dissimilar work environments.

"By 2015, we will have only 30% of our workers located in a TELUS building, and the rest will be mobile or working from home. We needed the facility to be visibly branded TELUS, so that when you come in, you instantly felt the company, you got the vibe of the company, you touch and feel the brand," says Goertz.

"Consulting firms learned the lesson the hard way: consultants working closely with clients started to relate more to the client company than their own. If we're going to send people to work from home or be mobile workers, we had to have that strong connection to TELUS when they come back in," she says.

Establishing a strong presence in the downtown area also builds the brand, and attracts customers, employees, and other stakeholders. "Many companies move outside the core city. We think it's valuable to be here and to have customers see us here. This is a destination.

We're building a legacy in downtown Toronto. It's hard to put a number on the value of that, but we all recognize the benefits. Everyone at TELUS, from the youngest team members to our senior executives, is proud of this place," Goertz notes.

“Our mantra is ‘better space, but less of it.’”

ANDREA GOERTZ | Senior Vice President, Strategic Initiatives, TELUS Human Resources

By 2015, only 30% of workers will have an assigned workspace. Workplace branding reinforces the organizational culture for a mobile workforce.

A WORKPLACE THAT DELIVERS RESULTS

The company has, however, put hard numbers on the value of the new work environment’s impact on work processes and productivity. Using their pre-occupancy survey as a benchmark, the company conducted a six-month, post-occupancy survey that measured significant improvements in key workplace attributes:

- access to private space for concentrated work: up 45%
- access to impromptu meeting space: up 45%
- availability of bookable meeting space: up 42%
- team access to space with furniture that can support group work: up 38%
- perception that the workplace supports new idea generation: up 25%
- belief that the workplace helps attract and retain employees: up 20%

“The satisfaction rate has increased remarkably in the vast majority of areas surveyed. Almost every category showed significant improvement, with several increasing 40 points or more. Some categories where improvement was not as notable already had high measures of satisfaction,” notes Goertz.

The company initially expected a boost in productivity of 2 to 3 percent. After calculating for reductions in lost work time, and improved adjacencies for employees, the company now estimates the jump in productivity at 5%, representing a savings of over \$7 million each year.

RAISING THE BAR

What the company has learned in developing their new workplace strategy and work environment will be applied to future projects, including the company’s headquarters in Vancouver. But at a company that values change and initiating opportunity, they’re looking for even better results as they fine tune the workplace at TELUS House Toronto.

“This is a successful model, a gorgeous work environment, and people love it here. But we’re always raising the bar,” says Goertz.

Productivity was expected to improve 2% to 3%. It's up 5%.

DESIGNED FOR WELLBEING, INSIDE AND OUT

TELUS has a company philosophy to “give where we live,” exemplified by philanthropy and team volunteer work. Their new work environment gives, too, in wellbeing benefits to workers, customers, and visitors.

The 25 York Street building is people-friendly. Instead of intimidating pedestrians, it's set back from the street so there's enough room for a sidewalk so wide that the Toronto Star said “it feels more like a plaza...the kind of place where crowds will gather regularly.” It's located on a subway line, amid a mix of residential, retail, and corporate buildings.

The building glass is untinted, and unusually transparent, providing not only natural light throughout the inside, but a wonderful view of the city outside.

This is a LEED Gold certified building that recycles heat and rainwater, captures sunlight, and incorporates high-efficiency lighting and green roofs. It's also hooked up to Toronto's deep-lake water cooling system. The result will be 30 to 50 per cent less energy use than a similar building. All furniture is formaldehyde free, reducing volatile organic compounds.

TELUS team members can take advantage of a fitness and wellness center, gym, prayer room, massage and physiotherapy rooms, and a gourmet kitchen where staffers can prepare meals, services that help make the workplace both a more invigorating, and relaxing, environment.

Andrea Goertz, senior vice president of strategic initiatives, says it all comes back to understanding the needs of TELUS workers. “It's important that our people have access to amenities, whether it's convenient workout facilities or collaboration spaces, but also restaurants, dry cleaners, coffee houses, everything the city can offer. We believe our team members have to have a balance in their life. One way we can help them with that, which in turn will make them more productive, is to show that we respect their need for work/life balance.”

PRODUCTS

STEELCASE

TURNSTONE

Featured Product



Leap