

# Your Environment has EVERYTHING to do with your results!



Are you someone who sits at your desk, or work space and wants to shout—I can't get any work done here! You're not alone. Only one in every two average U.S. employees believes that their current workspace design encourages innovation and creativity. In addition, these employees felt they would be 21% more productive if given a better working environment.\*

Today, productivity is king! A recent survey of 1400 CFOs taken by Robert Half and Company indicated that productivity was the #1 challenge they would need to address in the first 100 days of 2009. Let's start by looking at how the work environment affects productivity. During this tough economic cycle, maybe an easy and inexpensive way to engage and enhance the contributions of your critical knowledge workers is to think about adjustments that could be made to the physical space of each employee.

Those of you reading this probably already know your own MO (Modus Operandi or mode of operation) or form of productivity through the Kolbe A™ index. Did you know your Kolbe is instrumental in helping you identify the physical workspace layout that will stimulate your MO? Your Kolbe results can indicate whose mind is activated by their work setting and who is literally de-energized, burned out, and even stressed out by it. Does your workspace have a negative effect on your productivity, the productivity of those around you, and the productivity of those you lead? In addition to a healthy level of communication and motivation, the actual physical layout of the work environment is extremely important to maximizing productivity. One of the insights Kolbe provides is the particular environment you need to be effective when it comes to the physical layout of your work area.

**Fact Finders** need room for their books, data, and resources so they can study, evaluate and review the necessary details. They need a setting that is traditional in nature with a desk, plenty of bookcases or shelves and access to technology to get necessary proof and validation. They need a place for their credentials to be displayed so others can know and understand their individual expertise. A private office setting engages their creativity and productivity.

While recently meeting with a client to discuss a possible job change, he indicated that the role was enticing, but he just wasn't sure he could be productive *there* – he no longer would have his private office setting. What MO did he likely have?

**Follow Thrus** need space that allows them to be coordinated. There must be organized systems for them to sort, file and arrange all of their work projects. Clutter de-energizes them, so providing a work area where things have a place, are put away in their place, and filed alphabetically will allow them to access necessary work documents quickly. An uninterrupted setting where they can get in a rhythm and go from start to finish on a project engages their creativity and productivity. One of our clients came to us and wanted to know why the work performance of a highly productive, high potential employee began to deteriorate. After a few questions, we realized that their recent office move put this employee into a “bull pen” setting right in the middle of high traffic patterns. Her performance was affected because she really needed to be in a space out of constant movement where she would have uninterrupted time to get in a rhythm and sequence to bring her work projects to closure.

**Quick Starts** need a space that supports open communication and dialog. Being a catalyst for transformation engages their creativity and productivity. They need a space conducive to verbalizing their thoughts and ideas. A small conference table or booth (like in a coffee shop) allows them to gather a few people together to brainstorm and discuss the possibilities. They also are drawn to color. Colored folders or highlighted documents will help them quickly find essential information. Just last night I learned that President Obama has a purple folder with ten letters that were sent to him that he is committed to reviewing and responding to daily. Brightly colored walls with colorful art activate their energy. But they also need access to a small private room where they can lay out their essential materials and concentrate when heads down work is required. Without this they will constantly be sucked into the verbal interruptions that keep them from finishing their work on time and adhering to agreed upon deadlines.

**Implementors** need a space that has furniture with lasting endurance rather than style. Give them the space with the original brick wall. Put them next to the window rather than in a space with all walls. They need to examine things physically, take things apart, manipulate and move things around to stimulate their creativity and productivity. Remember Tom Cruise in the movie, *A Few Good Men*? Cruise's character says at one point in the movie, "where's that bat? I just think better with that bat in my hands." They should bring a small object they can play with to lengthy meetings to insure they stay engaged in the dialog. Don't get frustrated if you can't find them at their desk. Walking around the production area or driving in their car can oftentimes stimulate ideas. A stand up desk or counter top where they can walk around and spread out their materials is ideal.

Working with an Implementor dentist's office recently I encouraged using whiteboards to indicate scheduled patients and changes to those schedules. The office manager (a Fact Finder) was putting the changes into the computer, and then getting very frustrated when the hygienists and dentist didn't get her communication. Implementors need things shown in a physical way. It was a perfect solution for their communication breakdown.

In addition to personal work spaces, you must have space available that creates the right context for focus, collaboration, learning, and socializing. If you don't have these types of spaces available, your employees will be compelled to find them elsewhere. Coffee shops have become the new standard for individual focused work (for those people who can focus with much buzz going on around them), as well as providing an ideal setting for open dialog, discussion and collaboration.

A recent survey conducted by Gensler\*, an architecture and design firm, estimates that poor workplace design costs US business \$330 billion in lost productivity PER YEAR. These are the types of work spaces this study\* suggest you should provide to maximize productivity:

1. **Focus**—Interruptions and distractions are among the biggest threats to worker concentration. Workers need distraction-free protected time to get their individual work done in peace and quiet. Focus spaces should also include small, quiet rooms for times when high concentration is required.
2. **Collaboration**—Work spaces that promote spontaneous interaction, collaboration, cooperation and teamwork. These spaces are characterized by visibility, openness and mobility to share knowledge, listen and co-create.
3. **Learning**—Knowledge economy companies are aware that their success is determined by how fast they can learn and share that learning. Learning work spaces integrate learning with every aspect of daily activity.
4. **Socializing**—Knowledge economy success will be increasingly social and relational. Building relationships opens lines of communication among employees and builds the framework around which collaboration can occur. Social networks accelerate the capacity to produce new knowledge, and help teams and groups solve problems, learn, innovate and adapt.

The full Gensler 2008 Workplace survey\* is fascinating and I would encourage you to read and review it at: [www.gensler.com/#home/3](http://www.gensler.com/#home/3)

Gensler\* focuses on what *they* call the four work modes. Focusing on providing these types of spaces are great, but to get the full productivity gains we could, we also need to overlay the needs and requirements of the different striving MOs that Kathy Kolbe identifies as the Action Modes™. One thing leaders and managers must do is observe how people are working, what seems to be working and what doesn't, and then foster an open dialog to learn more about specific aspects of each person's work area that adds or detracts from innovation and creativity.

I know what works and doesn't work for me. Right now I am at my best working environment for high levels of concentration – a small classroom where I attend church. I don't have this type of environment in my own office space, but as an autonomous leader, I have the freedom to get to the right environment that stimulates my writing talents. Make sure you know the environments that are necessary to engage the contributions and talents of those on your team.

If you believe Peter Drucker when he says, "knowledge worker productivity is the only real competitive advantage in a global economy," then there is no time better than now to understand their contributions and the environments that will fuel them. The productivity gains produced by putting your employees in the right work environment can have a great long term effect on the bottom line. We must go beyond merely redecorating, and consider how we would fundamentally rethink the design for each employee.

In this challenging economic cycle, knowing, understanding and then creating work spaces that engage creativity and productivity can cost very little, but do much to maximize performance and increase profits.