

White Paper

“You’re In My Spot”

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The Big Bang Theory

Space planning and management for optimum facilities performance underpins our profession. From the earliest days of CAD drawings, architects started figuring out how to extract management data about the building spaces they were designing and building. From those humble beginnings, the facilities management profession was born, as was an industry centered in managing facilities performance. Software applications sprang up (ARCHIBUS™ and many others) and the progress in capabilities across what has become a broad industry has been nothing short of dramatic. It all started in the mid-1970s, as early CAD systems began to provide more capability than just an ability to reproduce manual drafting.

Fast forward only a few years and early facilities management systems were evolving to track inventories of space, to locate (and assign) personnel and to use rudimentary tools like stacking and blocking to plan for the most efficient use of space. Fast forward a few more years. We have witnessed the evolution of architectural data modelling in the form of BIM to now include COBie standards and a host of supporting technologies; from Autodesk’s REVIT™ to suites of maintenance management tools. Facilities management has come a long way and continues its rapid evolution with technologies and best practices. Yet, space management is still a core competency of our work and the processes and tools we employ.

As a core competency, our contemporary standard of practice in space management is very technical, a logical outcome of adopting processes, performance metrics, data and tools into solution sets, all ultimately aimed at controlling facilities costs. Let’s face it, that’s why we are here. If facilities were flexible, portable and inexpensive, we would all likely be out of work.

But that’s not the case, is it? Our organizations change faster than any facility can keep pace with. Even the most sophisticated work methods and software cannot fully or cost effectively support the needs of organizations as they change over time.

Especially in organizations with high concentrations of administrative space, we have witnessed the evolution of many alternative approaches to managing space and total facility costs in buildings that are inherently inflexible and expensive to occupy and maintain. Consider that we now see practices in:

- **Flexible Space Designs and Systems.** We have evolved a long way from early concepts of modular office designs (sold as configurable but really weren’t) and towards building interiors and furnishings systems that actually can be adapted on the fly to support either temporary or semi-permanent staff group realignments. While costs per square foot to install these systems will raise total facilities costs in the near term, there are direct offsets in the costs of moves and changes within a space. If you consider that the average office worker still changes location twice annually, reductions in total costs are possible when considering productivity, lost effort and the cost avoidance of building modifications. It can work, all aimed at improving both floor space utilization and the affinity between groups of people and the work they perform.
- **Telecommuting.** Ostensibly, telecommuting lets organizations avoid many facility costs, altogether. And depending on the nature of an organization’s work, it has been shown to be effective so long as a secure IT and communications infrastructure is in place and so long as

there are performance metrics in place for those employees who are working remotely. Space management becomes more effective because the total facilities footprint can be reduced. Residual requirements are usually only for a few hoteling spaces and perhaps a larger percentage of meeting spaces when members of a team need to come together in collaboration.

- **Hoteling.** For the road warriors among us, hoteling has become a way of life and work. In larger organizations, it is a sophisticated capability where employees reserve a space in their destination location, arrive and at a kiosk and are told where they are assigned. Secured physical access is automatically in place, as is a dynamically rerouted and secure telecommunications infrastructure.

We can draw critical observations from these several scenarios. First of all, the total space being assigned to individuals is being reduced. Data, systems and robust software exists and is being applied to create the tightest calculations of space requirements and utilization that can be implemented. Second but often overlooked, the combination of all these methods and capabilities has, even if unwittingly, worked to diminish personal expression by employees. More on that, below.

Managing to standards of aesthetic good taste can be a slippery slope in workplace policy. We have all seen office environments that are managed to a standard of care that is virtually sterile, devoid of variations and the inclusion of personal affects. Isn't there some balance? What about my space?

The next time you walk into a familiar classroom, auditorium, restaurant, church... any place of assembly, look around. You will likely see the same people in the same locations, over and over again. Why? The simple answer is that all of us need to (and choose to) nest in familiar surroundings and it is through those familiar surroundings that we gain composure, relax some, spur our creativity and are comforted, becoming more keenly able to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

Moreover, take the road warrior mentioned above; travelling for days at a time and, during many weeks, in a different city or office each day. How many of them keep a photograph of special people with them or some other memento in their travel bags? It's usually the first thing to appear when they reach the next destination. They bring a little of their nest with them.

Some more than others, but all personnel in our workplace need to nest. We need to surround ourselves with some trappings of comfort, reminders of what is important to us or a remembrance of special events from our past. It is as true in the corporate-suite offices as it is in the cubical farm. Freedom of expression, even if muted by aesthetic-governing policy is essential to a vibrant workplace. Further, it directly contributes to worker productivity, as much as any effort to manage spatial affinity or to support organizations through effective space planning, utilization and operations.

What this ultimately suggests is that our work in space management needs to be part technological and process and part behavioral science. We can move, add, change, reduce and modify the work environment all we want, but employees will only be most productive for organizations if they are comfortable. People need to be where they are relaxed, can focus and produce, both singularly and in collaboration with others.

Repetition is a part of the answer; the ability in as much as possible to go to and work in the same location every day. And while organizations need aesthetic standards to reasonably curb

outliers in corporately acceptable personal values, we must allow for some freedom of personal expression. Planning for, assigning and managing space is ultimately all about employees being where they are creating the greatest total returns on an organization's investment. It must be a holistic view that combines direct and indirect personnel costs with measured total overhead that includes an optimum balance of facilities and infrastructure support.

As Sheldon would say, "You're in my spot." While both anecdotal and humorous in the context of a popular television series, the point should be well-taken and applied to our workplaces. Sheldon needs to feel comfortable in his surroundings; so do we in our pursuit of work-life balance and as we contribute to our employers' organizations. To the extent possible and practical, we need to minimize disruptive change for employees in their surroundings while allowing them to nest, if only just a little.

This is not to suggest that as facilities professionals, our evolutions in best practices, software capabilities, and data modelling are flawed. They aren't. But, implementing technical capabilities and personal aesthetic accommodations as part of a holistic environment where physical space embraces productive good behaviors will always create better and more successful organizations.

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