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THE DEATH OF THE OFFICE

The cornerstone of an office or a workplace has been, for the most part, focused on one thing — utility. Organizations have traditionally invested in the bare-bones requirements needed for employees to work. Oftentimes this meant a cubicle, a chair, a desk, a computer and a phone. There was little to no focus on the employee experience, health and wellness, technology integration, or in any way creating an environment where employees actually wanted to show up. This was because organizations controlled all of the bargaining power in the employer-employee relationship.

Today we are seeing that balance of power shift towards the hands of employees who are starting to be more selective over the organizations that they choose as employers. In fact, the war for talent has never been more fierce than it is today.

Thankfully, when looking at how our organizations are designed, we have made some progress, but not enough. This is unfortunate, considering that we spend so much time working in a space that doesn't inspire us or allow us to work in the ways we want to work. It is this very concept of an office that we believe is, in fact, dead.

The new face of employees

According to Pew Research, millennials are currently the largest workforce demographic in the U.S. labor force. By 2020, millennials are expected to comprise 50% of the U.S. workforce and by 2025, this number is expected to be 75% of the U.S. workforce. This is a generation that wants to work in an office environment that reflects current times. This means having access to modern technologies, a visually appealing and engaging office environment, and flexible workplace practices. So why is it that in 2016 that most of our offices look and feel like they are decades behind their times?

It's also important for us to remember that the future employee isn't necessarily just someone who is young. The employee of the future is less about age and more about a change in mindset, behavior, attitudes and values. The future employee can be 22 or 52.

Over the past few years we have seen the rise of remote employees, co-working facilities and the "coffee-shop" worker. All of this is powered and enabled by new technologies that allow employees to work anytime, anywhere and on any device. This led many to believe that employees will never need to step foot in an office again. But if that's the case, then why are we seeing organizations like Mars Drinks, Whirlpool, Apple, Samsung and many others investing millions of dollars into creating new spaces? Why has commercial real estate firm CBRE found that U.S. office investment is at a 7 year high? How can this be the case if the office is truly dead?

The answer is that offices aren't really dead. They are re-emerging as employee experience centers. The purpose of an office is no longer to provide a space simply for employees to get their jobs done, but rather to create an environment where people actually want to show up to get their jobs done.



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Progressive organizations don't just offer one or two ways of working, rather they offer multiple modes for various work activities

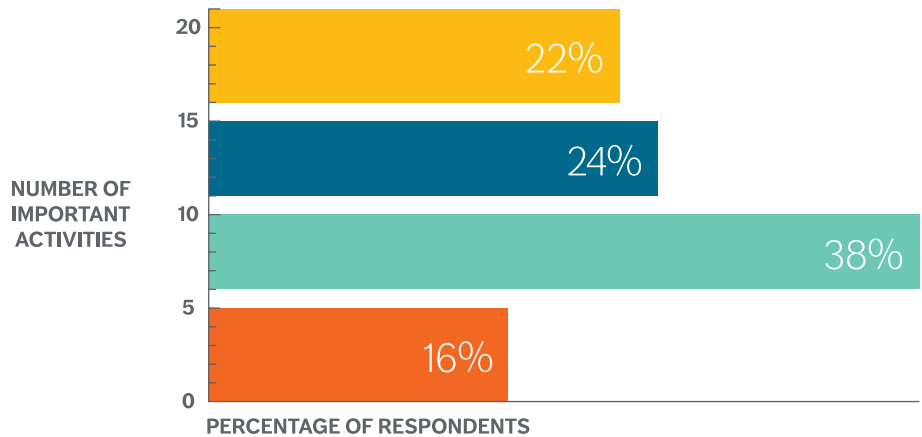
Your workplace can help you attract and retain the talent you need to compete in today's high tech, multi generational, distributed world. It can enhance your organization's reputation and give your employees a space where they want to show up and where they gain a sense of pride and ownership in the work that they do and the company that they represent.

Multiple modes of working

Organizations around the world are getting caught up in the open vs. closed floor plan debate. In fact, there have been numerous articles written about how open floor plans are bad for business. Unfortunately, this misses the entire point. Forward thinking and progressive organizations don't just offer one or even two ways of working, rather they offer multiple modes for various work activities.

Think about your house for a moment. You have a kitchen and dining room where you eat, a bedroom where you sleep, a living room where you relax, and perhaps an office where you work. You don't just have one space where you do all of these activities. Similarly, organizations need to think about how employees work and provide multiple options.

Leesman, a research organization that focuses on measuring organizational effectiveness, has identified 21 different types of activities in which employees participate. These activities include everything from informal unplanned meetings and relaxing, to creative thinking and video conferencing. From the list, the respondent's (numbering over 112,000) breakdown looked like this:



Clearly our workspaces are becoming more complex and, as such, require more than just a single way of thinking about physical space. Based on this research, there are a couple of things that organizations can do in order to create a more inspiring and productive workplace:

PREP WORK

1. Before doing anything else, spend time understanding how your employees work and where they work. You can observe your employees, conduct surveys and engage in one-on-one conversations.
2. Think about your physical space like software. That is, use employee feedback to iterate, make changes and updates, and continuously design.

Consumer-grade technology integration

For a long time, enterprise-grade technology was the gold standard of what organizations looked for when deploying everything from internal social networks and video conferencing, to ERP and talent management platforms. Today we are shifting away from enterprise-grade technology to focus on consumer-grade technology. If you think about why so many people are attracted to tools like Facebook, Twitter, Google, Netflix and the like, it's not just because these platforms are valuable tools, but because they look and feel like they were designed for today, and even for them.

According to the PwC report, Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace, 75% of millennials believe that technology makes them more effective at work and almost 50% believe that their managers don't understand the way they use technology at work. What makes this particularly interesting is that 59% said that an employer's provision of state-of-the-art technology was important to them when considering a job. Clearly this has very strong implications for an organization that is seeking to attract and retain top talent.

Technology acts as the central nervous system of the organization. Many of the concepts that are explored around the future of work, such as real-time recognition and feedback, getting rid of annual employee reviews, and improving communication and collaboration, are not possible without the use of technology. Here are some action items for your organization:

1. Ask yourself, is the technology at your organization so attractive, so useful and so modern that employees would consider using it in their personal lives? If not, what can you do to fix that?
2. Focus on implementing technology policies that cater to this new world of work. For example, give employees a choice of smartphones and devices to use at work and deploy internal social networks that emulate personal social networks.
3. Try to understand the tools employees use and why they use them. You may also explore a reverse mentoring program between those who understand emerging technologies and those who don't.

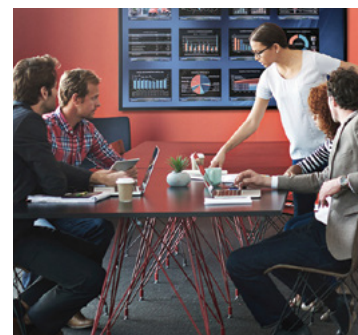
ACTION ITEMS

Values reflected in the physical space

One of the things that organizations suffer from is the "online dating syndrome." With online dating, you get the opportunity to look at someone's profile to see if you want to take the relationship to the next level by meeting in person. Sometimes the person you meet matches what you read in his or her profile and sometimes it doesn't. The same thing happens with organizations. Oftentimes they say that their values include fun, transparency, honesty, communication, collaboration, respect and the like. Yet these organizations are plagued with bureaucracy, outdated workplace practices and office spaces that look like they are designed to actually keep those values from ever becoming realized.

Today, your organization's values must extend beyond banners that are hanging on your walls to being a physical manifestation of what those values represent. In other words, if you had to think about the values of your organization and then translate those values into your physical workspace, how and where would those values show up and what would they look like? For example, if professional development is one of your core values, you might have a space in

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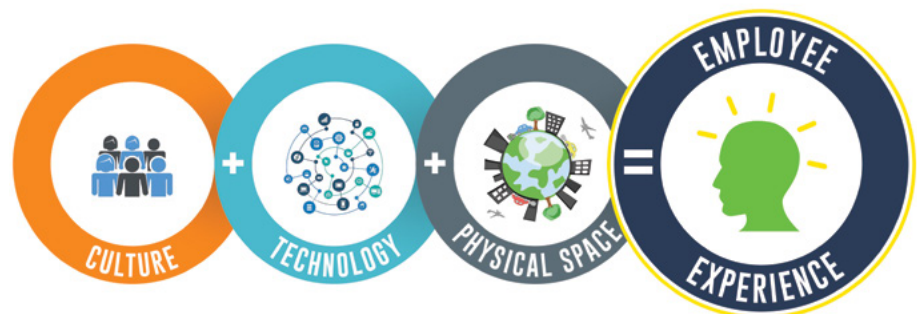
your office dedicated to formal and informal learning. If collaboration is one of your values, a cafe-style environment could provide a space for people to gather for casual conversation. If communication is one of your values, consider more open and airy environments complemented with technology solutions that allow employees to connect with one another. Here are some things your organization can do to make this happen:

REVIEW YOUR SPACE

1. Examine if and how your physical space truly demonstrates the values of your organization and identify which values are clearly exhibited and which ones are not.
2. Involve employees in the process and ask them how they would like to see the organization's values demonstrated in the physical space.

While considering this reemergence of the physical office space, it's also important to recognize that the physical space is only one part of designing the employee experience. The combination of three distinct work environments make up the employee experience: the physical, cultural and technological. The physical space refers to the actual office environment we are surrounded by, the cultural environment portrays how we feel at work, and the technological environment refers to the actual tools we use to get our jobs done.

THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE EQUATION



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Typically, most organizations focus on one and in the best cases, two of the above elements. But when we look at the future of work, it's becoming quite clear that all three environments must be considered.

As millennials become the dominant demographic in workplaces around the world, we must learn to adapt to some of the changing behaviors, attitudes and expectations that they, and other generations, exhibit. This will lead to other changes in our organizations around management, the review process, company structure and much more.

Giving people more money is no longer the #1 thing that most employees care about. In an environment where the war for talent has never been more fierce, the organizations that will win are the ones that can create an in-demand employee experience that integrates an inspiring culture, modern technology and an interactive physical space. It's time for us to redesign, and more importantly, redefine the components of the new workplace. The office isn't dead; it's re-emerging as an employee experience center. Is your organization keeping pace with these changing times?



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Jacob is an Author, speaker and futurist. His latest book, *The Future of Work: Attract New Talent, Build Better Leaders, and Create a Competitive Organization*, explores how the workplace is changing and was endorsed by business leaders such as the Chairman of KPMG, CEO of Whirlpool, CEO of Intuit, CEO of SAP, CEO of Schneider Electric, Gary Hamel, and many others. Jacob also co-founded the Future Of Work Community which is a brand council of the world's most forward thinking organizations who come together to explore the future of work. He frequently speaks at conferences and events all over the world and contributes to media publications such as Forbes, the WSJ, USA Today, INC Magazine, CNN, and many others. His clients include companies such as Microsoft, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, NYU, Wells Fargo, The Harvard Business Review, SAP, Cisco, and many others. Jacob also hosts the popular Future of Work Podcast where he interviews business leaders, executives, and authors. In addition he has a bi-weekly Youtube video series called the Future in 5 and a longer form program called The Future of Work Show where he goes inside of the world's most forward thinking companies to interview employees, executives, and tour their offices. You can learn more about Jacob and get access to his blog, podcast, and video series by visiting TheFutureOrganization.com. You can also connect with Jacob on Twitter (@JacobM) or email him, Jacob@TheFutureOrganization.com.

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