WHAT DOES PRIVACY MEAN TO THE FUTURE OF WORKSPACE DESIGN?

BHDP Architecture

September 2016









CONTENTS

3
3-4
4-5
5-6
7-8
8-9
10

Executive Summary

At the turn of the twenty-first century, many business leaders believed that collaboration would stimulate the innovation needed to survive the alarming rate of change and complexity in every facet of the marketplace. To that end, the goal of the popular barrier-free office was to facilitate collaboration. The result, however, was that too much collaboration proved to be a deterrent if measured by the avalanche of critics in the media space that stand united on a burning need for more privacy. In fact, workspace design client-facing focus groups hear this complaint more often today than in previous years: "I just don't have time to think!" Or, "It's too noisy to think."

At its core, the need for quiet and privacy in the workplace has architects, designers and employers scrambling to find the right balance. The answers will come from knowing why and how people work, which will ultimately lead to the creation of effective environments that maximize employee engagement, innovation and productivity.

PIVOTAL INVENTIONS AND PROGRESSIVE OFFICE BUILDING DESIGNS

The era of modern office architecture didn't begin until the late 19th and early 20th centuries as the Industrial Revolution summoned workers out of their farms and into factories and offices. Of the many inventions during that period, Elisha Otis's 1853 elevator made taller buildings acceptable work places.

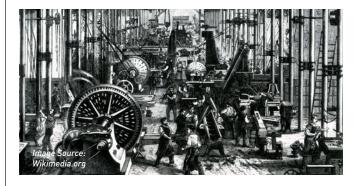
Before the elevator and instead of building extra stories, architects helped their clients maximize their space utilization in huge rooms like some Sears Roebuck and Company mail order centers. Elbow to elbow in heavy period clothing, female workers accepted heat and noise, poor lighting and long hours as givens. It wasn't until 1937 when the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) compelled overtime pay beyond the 40-hour workweek that work conditions started to change for the better. As the laws changed, workers' expectations (a key concept relating to privacy) changed along with them.

While there are many significant landmarks throughout architecture's history in the greater category of "building buildings," there are a few other notable markers in the greater invention and building timeline that contribute specifically to modern office design and its relevance to privacy.

RISE OF INDUSTRIAL AMERICA

1876

Many inventions had reduced the need for people in the fields (James Watt's steam engine (1775) and Eli Whitney's cotton gin (patented in 1794) to name a couple, which changed the "workplace" from the land to mines and factories and finally to offices. With the introduction of the telegraph (1844), the telephone (patented in 1876) and first airplane flight (Kitty Hawk, 1903) the "landscape" of work would be forever altered.



LARKIN ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

1906

This was an early modern office building designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. Significantly, this Buffalo, New York five-story dark red brick building used steel frame construction. Many

innovations made the building unique including air conditioning, stained glass windows, built-in desk furniture, and suspended toilet bowls. The building (demolished in 1950) is noteworthy for FLW's successful solution to problems of lighting and ventilation, thereby setting important precedents for the future

of office design.



Image Source: StudyBlue.com

OPEN OFFICE PLAN DESIGN

1936

In contrast to the Larkin Administration Building, the SC Johnson Wax Global Headquarters in Racine, Wisconsin was not demolished, and is a National Historic Landmark. Its 'Great Workroom', also designed by Frank Lloyd Wright may be the "mother" of open office design with more than half an acre of unimpeded workspace.



WORKERS' PRIVACY, COLLABORATION, AND OFFICE DESIGN

By looking at the beginnings of office building construction, the workspaces inside them and the key changes through the eras, it seems fairly clear that harmony among privacy, collaboration, optimal space utilization, and worker productivity (and engagement) has not yet been found.

A Harvard Business Review 2014 report on workspaces reinforces the need to find the right

balance. The authors

Christine Congdon, Donna Flynn and Melanie Redman write, "Companies have been trying for decades to find the balance between public and private workspace that best supports collaboration. In 1980 our research found that 85% of U.S. employees said they needed places to concentrate without distractions, and 52% said they lacked such spaces. In response,

thousands of high-walled cubicles took over the corporate landscape. By the late 1990s, the tide had turned and only 23% of employees wanted more privacy; 50% said they needed more access to other people, and 40% wanted more interaction. It's not surprising that the number of people that say they can't concentrate at their desk has increased by 16% since 2008..."

Since the complexity of the work being performed has increased, it seems in turn that meeting time has doubled: workers report spending too much time in consultations, in conference rooms, or on virtual calls with distributed teams. The requirements of work interactions have restricted the time needed to concentrate and think about the complex problems presented by today's volatile marketplace. And open collaborative office designs are not helping.

Meanwhile, in a 2012 survey of 1700 CEOs, IBM reported the need to innovate and collaborate as uppermost in the minds of CEOs in both the public and private sectors. Three out of every four CEOs in

BÜROLANDSCHAFT MOVEMENT EMERGES

1960

In an attempt to provide a more humane work experience, and in contrast to the rows of identical desks from previous open space designs promoted by Frederick Winslow Taylor and Henry Ford, the Bürolandschaft design often incorporated curved screens, potted plants, and organic geometry to promote collaboration within the "pods" of people working on similar projects. By the 1970s, Bürolandschaft was washed away by a sea of cubicles returning to Taylor-esque rank and file formation.



Image Source: BÜROLANDSCHAFT.net

HOT DESKING

1980

This concept refers to assigning desks ad hoc, based on who's there at any given time. Workers have neither their own desk nor a personal space to hang a family photo, or enjoy a potted plant. Citigroup in downtown Manhattan has announced (December 2015) a return to hot-desking (also called office hoteling). American Express, GlaxoSimthKline and PricewaterhouseCoopers also espouse the arrangement in which personal belongings are stored in lockers. Hot desking has detractors, claiming that employees do better when they're given control over some amount of their physical environment.

BARRIER-FREE OFFICES

2000

Cubicles (sometimes called cubes) were designed to increase privacy, but represented tyranny to some workers as seen in the Scott Adams comic strip Dilbert and the movie Office Space. Yet, there is evidence that totally barrier-free offices take away the little amount of autonomy and privacy people crave.



the study identified collaboration as the most important trait that they were seeking in their employees. It is not surprising to find that management favors collaboration and the type of workspaces that enhance that activity. The problem seems to stem from the way in which the very well intentioned collaboration is constructed in the work place where many companies set up a 'department' to achieve innovation.



Innovation, however, is not a department. It is a way of thinking and acting that alters the fundamental DNA of a business and its management so that creativity—which Steve Jobs defined as a simple act of connecting things—becomes the core fabric of the enterprise. Creativity (connecting things) needs that proper balance between privacy and collaboration (not just collaboration by itself) in order to foster innovation. Accordingly it is important for design firms to wrestle with how best to optimize their clients' effectiveness, by making sure privacy and collaboration are in balance. To accomplish this goal requires an investigation of how workers generally define privacy and how much privacy is "enough," which will be explored below.

At first blush, one could say that the answer is easy: construct a working arrangement that has an adequate square footage of both private and public spaces with frictionless access to whichever is needed for the function and the role in question. But hardscape design is not the only answer to people's craving for privacy, any more than computer hardware by itself defines a computer. Software makes it work. In this case, corporate culture plays the role of software.

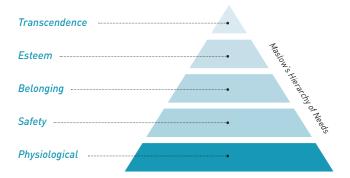
WHY WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTS MATTER

Whereas the offices of the 1950s and 1960s set the stage for the intersection of high-style architecture, culture and business, workplaces today range from re-constructed lofts to cubicles to home offices and everything in between. Yet the challenge remains. The phrase, "I just don't have time to think" expresses the need for privacy and rankles the best of business leaders and their architect partners as they work together to create the best place to get the best of their workers. By seeking the best amount of privacy, employers find that their employees perform their most satisfying, and therefore, their most productive work.

Business (or any public or private office) and architectural workspace designs are inextricably linked because businesses are comprised of people. People work, but what do they want? Why do people work? What do they need to be productive and to feel self-actualized? To get to the bottom of this challenge, it's important to understand what work really is. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines work as "activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result." Consider these key contextual issues as part of the quest to attract high-functioning workers.

Abraham Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs"

Work is almost by definition a visibly satisfying climb up Abraham Maslow's famous, long-standing hierarchy of basic (1943, 1954) needs pyramid.



At the most rudimentary physiological level, people work to feed and clothe themselves. The next step safety motivates people to work to protect themselves. Belonging, esteem and self-actualization, are all needs that can be met at work. Even adding in Maslow's 1960s and 1970s inclusions of cognitive, aesthetic and transcendence needs (helping others to achieve self-actualization), work is a place (or activity) that should allow every single human need (as defined by Maslow) to be met.

In a perfect world, every person would seek to obtain transcendence. Every worker at every company would behave in such a way that those goals could be met. And although not everyone is the same and their needs aren't the same, their expectations of their work and what work means to them are very important. Upper management and the organization's middle line managers who seek to maximize productivity from their employees accept the range of individuals' expectations, both as singles and in the greater group sense. But management must balance both the expectations from their shareholders and from the employees. Management always seems to struggle to align the owners' profit wishes with workers' expectations, collaboration vs. privacy needs, peak space utilization to its opposite—vacant, underused offices and unused floor space for which they are usually paying dearly. Why is it important to find the sweet spot? Because human behavior in the workplace affects the bottom line.

Maslow lets us see that choice makes a huge impact on behavior. He states that, "the self-actualizing person enjoys solitude and privacy." Without the choice to access privacy, the worker in a workspace is denied the option to develop their potential, a key piece to Maslow's humanist theory of learning, which states that, "the development of human potential, dignity and worth are ultimate concerns.

Defining Privacy

Image Source: BHDP Architecture

Is privacy important? Expectations of privacy vary with the era, the work, and the individual. By accepting the complexities of people at their work, modern office space design is itself complex. By today's

standards, there are advantages of open-

space workplace design (cost, space utilization, collaboration, accessibility). The countervailing argument, however, is that by invoking open space design, productivity is reduced to such a low level that cost savings are negligent, if not negative. So the question is whether the disadvantages of openspace workplace design (decreased employee health and longevity, diminished individuality, reduction of self-actualized

behavior, creative imagination, and

too much accessibility) outweigh the advantages.

Synonyms and antonyms for "privacy" provide a point from which to discuss office privacy, if only to help us know it by its opposite. Each synonym evokes an antonym that may or may not be direct, but may shed some light on how some people define and view privacy and its importance. But the opposite may not always ensure the other.

SYNONYMS	ANTONYMS
Closed	Open
Control	Powerlessness
Isolation / Asocial	Social
Quiet	Noisy
Separation	Collaboration

The Privacy Landscape

If open space floor plans deny privacy, does a closed door ensure it? Furthermore, in today's workplace, does a closed door symbolize private and "arrived" if there's: (1) a window into the room for safety against sexual harassment suits or (2) unlimited access through the email portals of today?

In reality, the same person who complains of too much distraction at an open office layout workplace may find refuge at a noisy, high-bar bench seat at Starbucks with their monitor open to prying eyes, their data prey to hackers. Looking at the privacy landscape above, the Starbucks worker in this case has gained control over the interruptions. Part of this is brought on by anonymity or even inaccessibility. Anyone who has seen the 1999 movie Office Space cringes with memories of Gary Cole's character Bill Lumbergh draping himself over the top of a cubicle as he says, "Hello Peter. What's happening?"

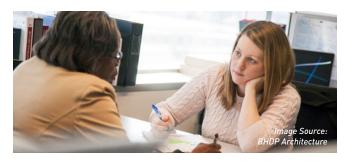
Control Vs. Powerlessness

Control is an important variable in the workplace privacy landscape (or the Starbucks store as above). Case in point: the Amtrak Quiet Car on the Northeast Corridor of Amtrak has won a devout following. The noise-free zone is self-policed, and the rules and expectations are clear. Cell phone use is discouraged if not prohibited. Whispered conversations are frowned on, but acceptable if soft enough and limited in length. The riders in this car have taken control of their environment, by choosing to sit here. "The Quiet Car is almost always the most crowded car in the train." The Quiet Car custom has spread across the country all the way to the Sacramento – San Jose corridor in California.

How does the Quiet Car translate to office design? Certainly, hardscape makes some difference. The ambiance of the Amtrak car created by seating and lighting, color and design sends a clear message. Equally, office lighting, furniture, acoustics, technology, doors, huddle rooms and meeting rooms create an environment. But with the bent to collaboration, the appropriate design of private and collaborative workspaces continues to confound both management and their architectural partners, as the tacit messaging is not always clear. Autonomous control may be missing and if it is, powerlessness reigns. Perhaps the answer lies in people's expectations and the participants' adherence to unwritten, cultural rules.

Privacy Across Generations

The challenge in today's workplace is to be sensitive to individuals' needs, knowing that some people work better in collaboration than in privacy while others need the opposite. Designing for both with balanced homage to each across the demographic spectrums would be important. That said, there is a surprising set of statistics that indicate the median age of U.S. workers is increasing!



The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) at the U.S. Department of Labor expects the median working age to hit 42.4 years in the year 2024 from a 40.3-year median in 2004. So while the Millennials' numbers are exceeding Baby Boomers', the BLS reports "that the 55-years-and-older group's growth rate is projected to be 1.8%—more than three times the rate of growth of the overall labor force." What do employers need to know about that trend? In a Time Magazine piece "Millennials vs. Baby Boomers; Who Would You Rather Hire?" author Dan Schawbel states that. "Millennials see the work environment as flat. Further, that they like transparency. The 9 to 5 workday is fading." Meanwhile, the Baby Boomer is used to a hierarchy. They don't like working in a virtual fishbowl, and they like doors. Privacy needs vary by 180 degrees across the generations and mindfully managing the mix raises the stakes.

DEFINING WORKPLACE PRIVACY DESIGN CHALLENGES

It is essential for design firms to address both "hardware" interior architectural design and layout (walls, doors, windows, noise, colors, ceilings and lighting) with the accompanying "software" of cultural behaviors for its clients to optimize everyone's productivity across the privacy spectrum. To do this effectively requires an exploration of pairs of key concepts in the software realm: personal and professional; balance and blend.

The Hardware

The hardware includes walls, cubicles and doors, of course, but may require some objective layering, surveys, measurements and tests, experimentation and honing as follows:

It is clear there has been no perfect office (see Pivotal Inventions and Buildings Timeline presented earlier), or the original design would never have given way to the next. On the other hand, work has changed since 1906, and one way to measure workplace satisfaction is to simply ask if the working person is happy most of the time. Some companies today survey employees regularly and take this metric very seriously. Perhaps satisfaction comes from an interruption-free hour. Perhaps it's two hours a day in an indoor atrium surrounded by plants. Some folks like hotdesking. Ask them to hot desk, and leave those who like to hang pictures to work in cubicles and offices. Meanwhile, the measurements applied might be framed in light of Professor Emeritus Frank Becker (Cornell University) when he said, "One solution is to begin to think of the office not as a place within a building where the individual works most the time but as a set of loosely coupled settings both inside and outside the office connected by electronic movement of information and physical movement of people...". Do the surveys reflect employees' feelings that their work represents the "activity settings" set forth in the Becker solution? Regularly surveying the workforce is an initiative most often headed by Human Resources and deliberated by top executives to attain the most desirable office space. Efforts to obtain recurring (not once-and-done) feedback should pay large dividends.



The Software

Personal

Privacy from a self-actualizing and creative personal standpoint:

How much heads-down privacy does the coder who writes HTML all day need? How much does the Pixar storyboard creator need? Do these two human beings have different requirements not because of their jobs, but because of their personalities? Both individuals need their own just right "Goldilocks" not-too-hard, not-too-soft amount of creative private time. Management creates sensitivities to both with the goal of altering the fundamental DNA of a business and its employees. In that way, creativity becomes the core fabric of the enterprise.

Professional

What privacy means to workers and to the companies that hire them.

Some workers may seek a closed door. Some identify privacy with quiet; others with freedom from distractions. Management may define privacy by other means such as email privacy or protection from divulging proprietary information. People, products, industries and economies change these definitions. A Millennial may embrace the freedom that comes from not being tied to a desk. But employees working in a Starbucks may not sit well with the Research and Development department. If the "secret-sauce" is accidentally spilled to competitors or to the marketplace, it could mean disaster.

Balance

Determining the right balance of privacy and collaboration.

How is balance measured? Does working four hours in solitude balance with four hours of collaboration? Is there a magic 80-20 split of square footage that translates to proper balance? Is the balance measured in a perfect number of huddle rooms per employee? Every industry is different. Every company—its mission, vision and culture—will dictate the right split. If balance can be measured in numbers, then imbalance is easy to fix. Change the numbers and see how the desired outcomes (profitability, innovation, employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction, etc.) are affected. Would these be the ideal metrics, or would something else work in determining the proper balance?

Blend

Blending science and art to produce engaging workplace environments.

Frank Lloyd Wright blended science (air conditioning and plumbing) with art (built-in desks, steel-beams and glass) with his Larkin Administration and the SC Johnson Wax buildings. Blending social sciences of psychology, physiology, and anthropology has become more important as the workplace has moved out of fields and factories to offices in workspaces. Work is a place and a state of mind. While people would like to think they are not defined by their work, they spend more than half their waking life doing it. Making half of people's lives more tolerable and even exciting requires a blend of variables: Image Source: science and art, architecture, BHDP Architecture management, physical attributes (plumbing, heating, ventilation, etc.), and the softer aspects surrounding collaboration and privacy.

SOLVING THE WORKPLACE DESIGN PRIVACY PROBLEM

All of the world's over-collaborative problems, cannot be solved by throwing up cubicle walls, any more than tearing down doors can provide the collaboration popularized in the Pixar and Google office-scapes.

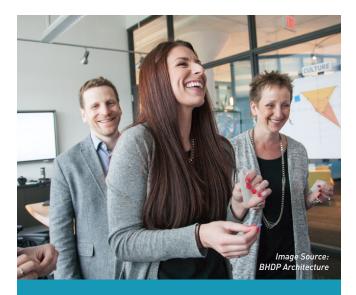
Here's the challenge: Introverts and extroverts need to co-exist. In her 14-million-view TED Talk, author Susan Cain tells reports that one-third to one-half of the people in this country are introverts. They work better, create better and think better in solitude. Darwin, Dr. Seuss, and Steve Wozniak were introverts. Cain continues by saying American business celebrates and rewards extroverts. With this dichotomy in mind, it is important for the architect and the organization's management to embrace the idea that it is their joint role to encourage both introverts who crave privacy and extroverts who thrive on collaboration as they seek to optimize workplace design.

The Guardian Unum UK Infographic encourages a collaborative workforce, but also recognizes the need to see that the ageless workforce is a trend that cannot be ignored. They cite being mindful of worker stress and of being open to mining Big Data for sensitivities to workers' needs and then acting to improve the working conditions as indicated. Improved working conditions, they suggest, will increase productivity. Ignoring these dynamics, they found, will increase costs.

In this context, it is prudent to study the alternatives to working in a traditional office. What is it that people find attractive in the new co-working phenomena such as WeWork.com and PeopleSpace.us? Can something be learned from reviewing these users' demographics, workspaces and dynamics?

When it comes to the future of attracting and hiring workers these words apply:

DESIGN MATTERS. CULTURE MATTERS.



TOP WORKPLACE CONCERNS

- 1. Work-Life Balance: Employees expect to enjoy time off to rejuvenate.
- 2. Fair and ethical treatment of both employees and customers.
- 3. Trust between employer and employee, plus a sense of camaraderie.
- 4. Balance of privacy and collaboration to allow introverts and extroverts to thrive.

From Fortune Magazine's "What Amazon's Workplace Controversy Says About the Future of Work," it would seem that there must be a concerted effort and many fairly new aspects relating to attracting high-performing talent to today's organizations.

- 1. Work-life balance is high on people's list today. A recent survey of nearly 66,000 U.S. undergraduates by consulting firm Universum found that young people rank work-life balance as their top career goal.
- 2. Consumer loyalty pours from the transparent fish bowls in which companies work today. Customers that care are "turned off" by companies that do not treat their employees fairly. The marketing firm Young & Rubicam found that between 2005 and 2009, U.S. consumers expressed a nearly four-fold increase in their preference for companies, brands, and products that show kindness in both their operations and their encounters with customers.
- 3. Companies that trust their employees out perform their low-trust peers. Research shows that companies with workplace cultures characterized by high levels of trust by the organization's management, together with camaraderie and respect among colleagues, as well as pride on the job are better at beating the competition. From 1997 to 2014, publicly traded companies on Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For" list outperformed the S&P 500 by a factor of nearly two to one.
- 4. Privacy and collaboration need to coexist in a balanced environment that lets both introverts and extroverts thrive. Floor plans, lighting, even greenery can help both sets of individuals. Celebrating and encouraging the differences, like in a good marriage, will enhance success and longevity. The analogy applies to employers and employees.

For "hardscape" considerations, it is important for architects and designers to work with their clients' management to support and encourage the behaviors that will meet their clients' goals. Huddle rooms might help. Perhaps color, material and texture integrations would be key to one company, but not to others. The most significant part of the "build" is in the preparation stages, where possible design elements are explored for suitability, but also with sensitivities to budgets and problem solving.

When management doesn't listen, there are costs. There are costs to collaboration and costs to privacy. The importance of knowing which is needed when and giving employees the ability to choose one or the other by designing the spaces to do each suggests a best approach. Trusting employees to make the right choice goes a long way to self-actualization and even beyond to transcendence. Another consideration to think about is that the future will see Artificial Intelligence (AI) eliminating more jobs, and those people who survive the cuts will be the ones that are best at finding more things for the AI robots to do. For employees to keep ahead of the robots, they must do what the robots still cannot do... yet. That is, they must be given back "time to think."

CONCLUSION — WHAT DOES PRIVACY MEAN TO THE FUTURE OF DESIGN?

From the media coverage of this single topic, it would seem that there is indeed a privacy crisis. Privacy is psychologically important (Maslow). But what does, "I don't have time to think" really mean? Distraction? Noise? Is it simply too much to do, too many distractions, and the associated stress with little control to change the environment? Architects who design interior spaces realize that while open space layouts promote collaboration, the wider-angle focus may be that too much collaboration may lose the best human resources. People are happiest when they are effectively engaged in work that they are good at and feel makes a difference. Happy workers may indeed be those exact individuals (the introverts from Susan Cain's popular TED Talk) who need privacy to self-actualize but still appreciate the ensuing collaboration that produces true innovation.

There is no quick fix, no easy answer in the shortterm. One possible solution might come from a retooling of expectations by denouncing the American "bias" for action as a symbol of accomplishment. Management and society tend to reward busy-ness because it's easier to see. Solitude and inactivity look like nothing is "happening" as in, "Hello Peter. What's happening?"

The crisis is not to be averted by reconfiguring the hardscape office design by itself. The solution involves the "soft-scape" behavioral sciences as well. Sorting out the behaviors that promote productivity and designing for those might bring back a semblance of equilibrium. Finding a way to give back to those that "don't have time to think" might be handled by creating a place to think. Some of the thinking time could in turn be used to ponder a solution to the privacy crisis.

Designing environments that affect the key behaviors necessary to achieve strategic results can be done with effective communication and analysis of organizations' needs, their employees' roles, and an honest appraisal of the current and future work in what is currently called "the workplace." There is no question that human behavior in the workplace impacts the bottom line. That is why designing spaces that will ultimately attract those individuals who crave time to think and who enjoy collaborating as well is a win-win scenario.

ABOUT BHDP

BHDP Architecture, an award-winning international for intelligent, innovative and inspiring solutions management, and strategic consulting. The firm also tools and analytic support via AVUITY, its independent tech services consulting practice. Recently named one of the Fastest Growing Architecture and Design Firms of 2015 by Interior Design Magazine, BHDP serves five core markets: Workplace, Retail, Higher Education, Science and Integrated Industrial Design; and was recently named one of the Fastest Growing Architecture and Design Firms of 2015 by Interior Design Magazine. For information, visit www.bhdp.com

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