TOWARDS THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE
18 LESSONS FROM THE LEADERS
The future workplace is here, and every day at LogMeIn, we work with companies that are transforming themselves through the idea that creating harmony between spaces, people, processes and technology can lead successful organisations towards significant improvement, not only in productivity but also in creativity, collaboration and a stronger alignment with corporate values.

The *Workplace of The Future* report presents LogMeIn with an exciting opportunity to share insight into how leading and highly productive companies have transformed their offices into modern digital workplaces. The following report invites organisations to question, on a deeper level, the reasons why they should transform in the first place, and the key aspects of the organisation that need to be considered before doing so.

It’s exciting to be part of a movement that sets the future of the workplace. Here at LogMeIn, we wish you success in your endeavors for the years ahead.

**Lindsay Brown**
Vice President, Asia Pacific
LogMeIn
INTRODUCTION

The workforce is changing. New employees raised on digital-first communications, with high demands for digital services are resetting expectations for their place of work. Existing employees are demanding smarter, more collaborative environments, flexibility and digital-rich workspaces.

Over the last decade, pioneers of new office designs tried a variety of approaches to creating workspaces that they hoped would provide tangible improvements to staff productivity. However, in many cases, the high hopes for innovative office designs resulted in the opposite – workspaces that confused, frustrated and distracted staff. Some people have even gone so far as to state that such new, open and flexible work environments are harmful to productivity.¹

However, there are also many examples of digital-rich, modern workplaces that achieved measurable improvements for their workforces. Such workplaces not only improved productivity, but they also improved customer satisfaction, employee retention, creativity, and the ability to react quickly to competition and alignment to corporate values.

So, why do some organisations succeed in creating next-generation workplaces that genuinely make a positive difference, while others fail?

This is the question we set out to answer in this paper.

“What are the practical lessons that will allow your organisation to create a truly modern, highly collaborative, high-performing, flexible workplace?”

IBRS interviewed organisations that transformed future workplaces that made a positive difference to their workforce. We also interviewed designers, architects and academics. Based on this research, we extracted the key lessons on what makes that difference.

**SUMMARY OF CASE STUDIES**

**BVN** - BVN is one of Australia’s largest architectural firms, widely acknowledged for award-winning design across a broad and diverse portfolio, both in Australia and overseas. The company decided to refurbish their existing workspace at the Hilton instead of moving to a new location. They took this opportunity to rethink what the future of the practice would look like and how the environment could push into the future, supporting new ways of working that considered the era of disruption that the architecture and construction industry is now entering. BVN realised that unleashing the full power of teams drives the business. To empower the teams, BVN decided to move from a traditionally structured workplace to one that is fully flexible, giving teams and individuals agency to self-organise based on how they want to work.

**Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA)** - One of Australia’s four major banks. CBA has brought together their Sydney-based workforce, that is closer to the CBD, in a revitalised tech precinct to enable greater customer-led innovation and support the bank’s mission to be the best in digital. CBA has a long-standing history of creating state-of-the-art-workplaces for their people; with each workplace, CBA evolves and improves their approach to creating an engaging workplace experience for their people. Their newest workplace at South Eveleigh is a testament to this.

**Dropbox** - A global collaboration platform that offers customers an integrated workspace. The organisation transitioned from a purely Cloud-storage provider to a platform that offers users a single workspace designed to bring files, fragmented work tools and teams together. Dropbox moved to their Martin Place Sydney office to establish their “home” in the Asia-Pacific region. They adopted a totally flexible work environment and smart workspace designed to maximise collaboration and productivity. They also equipped staff with first-rate technology and support.
Towards the Workplace of the Future

Summary of case studies

Medibank Private Limited - A leading private health insurer that looks after the health cover needs of 3.7 million Australians and delivers a range of health services to the community. They are considered one of the earlier adopters of an activity-based work environment in Australia, as they moved to their new Melbourne headquarters in 2014. Medibank also wanted to create a health-based work environment by designing the workspace to encourage movement and healthy activities. Medibank’s people can choose their preferred working environment and have a choice of 26 types of work settings, ranging from quiet areas, collaborative spaces, Wi-Fi enabled outdoor areas and sit/stand desks.

hipages - Australia’s leading on-demand tradie platform with more than 300 staff, including their remote Manila office. The company relocated their Sydney office to a new base at 255 Pitt St. after experiencing rapid growth. They wanted a flexible work environment, while still providing their staff with desks. So, they designed their new workspace to maximise collaboration, flexibility and productivity by deploying clever configuration and tech. They also opted to de-corporatise their workspace and chose a homey look to reflect their customer-centric focus on the tradespeople.

Mirvac - A leading, diversified Australian property group, with an integrated development and asset management capability. Mirvac moved to their Sydney office in 2016 and decided to transform their semi-flexible work environment to a full activity-based work environment. To ensure they would maximise collaboration and productivity, they designed the workspace with the neighbourhood concept, where teams are co-located. They installed hatch areas for brainstorming, as well as quiet rooms for focus and community areas for events.

Lendlease - A listed property group specialising in project management and construction, real estate investment and development.

Pacific Hydro - Pacific Hydro is a global renewable energy owner, operator and developer. It operates high-quality, diversified portfolios across Chile, Australia and Brazil. Pacific Hydro moved to their Melbourne office in 2017 with the aim of fully adopting an activity-based work environment and creating a sustainable workspace that reflects the company’s culture and ethos.

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The most successful organisations that we spoke with all shared one thing in common: they spent time - a lot of time - researching their options. They visited multiple modern workplaces and considered which elements of these organisations could apply to themselves. More importantly, they researched more than just the physical office space. They looked at how decisions were made and the journeys undertaken.

“The secret to success is being able to have access to other people’s research and references you can draw upon. Workplaces must match your organisation’s values, culture, work patterns, branding, and more. This study provides a consolidation of many years’ worth of hard lessons, which will allow you to speed up your planning.”

– Dr Joseph Sweeney, IBRS

As more organisations are successful, there are more examples and the research becomes easier. But doing this research still takes time.

For example Medibank, a pioneer of activity-based working environments in Australia took more than four years to research, plan and execute their activity-based working environment. Since they were on the leading edge of workplace design, the organisation visited a number of international workplace exemplars and consulted broadly to come up with their version of an activity-based working environment or what they call Health Based Working.

Some years later, another progressive organisation Pacific Hydro looked to at several organisations, including Medibank Private, for lessons. Even with Medibank’s local example, Pacific Hydro spent over a year researching and planning.

More recently, hipages took six months to research their new workplace design, drawing upon lessons from Australian leaders in activity-based working, to determine their own options.

One of the goals of this study is to accelerate your research and planning by providing examples of organisations that are exemplars of future office space design.
“Copying another workplace won’t work. You need to research what’s possible by looking at successful journeys and apply their lessons. This takes time.”
– Nila Sweeney, Editor, Property Market Insider

The increasing number of local examples of next-generation workspaces is growing and this means that research and exploring options is becoming easier and faster. Organisations that have transformed their workplaces successfully are more than happy to share their learnings.

So while it may not take you four years, it is absolutely imperative that you don’t rush planning or simply use others’ as a template. You need to take time to explore what others have done, how they made their decision and only then begin planning in earnest.

Consider:
- Who will conduct the research?
- What are your objectives for the new office? What do you want to achieve?
- Which companies with future workplaces will you review as part of your research?
- How much time will you give yourself to inspect other organisations?
- Have you communicated how long the research will take to your executive team?
Different organisations have different reasons for wanting a new workplace. While the initial project may be driven by the need to relocate or expand into a new office, this is never the reason for wishing to adopt new working styles... it’s just an opportunity to do so.

During this study, we identified the following reasons why organisations invest time and energy rethinking and redesigning their workplaces.

- **Maximise office space utilisation**: it is estimated that up to 40% of office space is not utilised\(^1\) in traditional office environments. Activity-based working can dramatically improve office space utilisation.
- **Enhance collaboration**: some organisations seek to create work environments where “serendipitous collaboration” happens on a daily basis, or where teams can form organically.
- **Boost productivity**: staff that are comfortable and happy in the workplace are known to be up to 19% more productive.\(^2\) Making a workplace that enhances staff well-being and satisfaction can lead to significant productivity.
- **Transformation**: the workplace can help an organisation redefine its role and purpose. During significant corporate reorganisations such as mergers, acquisitions or privatisations, redesigning the workplace can be a powerful tool to harmonise and redirect the workforce culture.
- **Reinforce purpose and values**: intelligent decisions in how a workplace is set up can greatly influence how staff view their roles and objectives.
- **Improve customer perception**: there is a strong correlation to workplace design and how staff engage with customers and suppliers.\(^3\)
- **Brand positioning**: workplace designs are a primary “face” for an organisation’s brand and values.
- **Attract & retain talent**: modern workers are concerned about their work environment, and they seek out organisations that provide comfortable, effective and engaging workplaces. Workers that are engaged in their workplace are less likely to seek other employment and are generally far more committed to their jobs.
- **Agile reconfiguration**: companies that are undergoing fast growth or are engaged in rapidly changing business environments need workplaces that can be quickly reconfigured. This is particularly important for organisations that depend upon project-based teamwork.
While it may be tempting to try to obtain all of these benefits, the most successful organisations focus on no more than two.

Just as importantly, without visible support from the senior executives, the transformation to a modern, flexible work environment will not succeed. Your organisation’s leaders must fully back the benefits being sought after by shifting to a future office. Better still, they should be defining the benefits.

For example, Medibank Private’s Managing Director committed to being the project sponsor and champion for the insurer’s transformation to an activity-based working environment. The benefits sought were in support of Medibank’s transformation from a government-owned health insurance business to a privately owned, integrated healthcare provider that created more collaboration and transformed their culture.

“One of the big reasons for the move was to create more collaboration... it has gone a long way to breaking down silos, bringing things together and talk and work together. We’ve seen a massive improvement in collaboration and connections between teams.”

– Medibank Private

CBA is another pioneer of activity-based working environments in Australia. To successfully embed activity-based working, CBA helps their leaders to truly understand the vision and benefits of activity-based working, and how they can support their teams in a new environment.

“Leadership buy-in is vitally important to the success of activity-based working. People look to their leaders to champion and embed new work practices and reinforce the benefits with their teams.”

– CBA

In contrast, hipages sought to have an environment that reinforced their brand values. While collaboration was important and did influence the office layout, it was the reinforcement of customer-centric values that took precedence.

It’s important to give time and attention to embedding the plan. From a logical perspective, the management must have an unwavering commitment to the transformation, and they must be engaged early in the process in order to influence the key stakeholders.

Consider:

● What are the one or two key benefits you are seeking from your workplace design?
● Does your senior executive team “buy into” these benefits?
● How will you determine success in achieving your desired benefits?

A new office space is an opportunity to reinforce your brand, and how you configure it should match and even amplify your core values and culture.

For hipages, a home improvement company, their choice of workplace themes and configuration clearly reflected what the company stands for – creating an aspirational home environment. To do this, they chose a design that intentionally "de-corporatised" the workspace and was made to feel more like a home that celebrated their clients – the tradespeople.

"The customer must be represented in every part of our organisation so our entire office space is decked out to celebrate the different types of tradespeople we represent."
– hipages

For example, the entrance to the hipages office uses a domestic front door that is designed to evoke the feelings of comfort and arriving at home, albeit with an outsized kitchen and rumpus room that are all designed to encourage community and collaboration. Meeting rooms were themed to the company’s key customer categories: plumbing, gardening, electrical and carpentry.

"We wanted our personality to be seen everywhere when you come into the office. You walk in and it feels like a hipages home. It became our point of difference."
– hipages

Dropbox’s vision was to create a workplace that conveyed a sense of openness, transparency, simplicity, humility and trust – all a reflection of how they wish to be perceived by customers, while still fostering collaboration.

To achieve this, Dropbox embraced an open-plan office featuring an indoor patio, a dining room, and a large break-out space that looks like a typical Australian living room – all part of the plan to maximise productivity and collaboration while staying true to the company’s personality.
“Communal areas take up a third of the workspace and this is designed to amplify the way people work together. Every area serves a specific purpose and that together make the space functional and comfortable for the staff.” — Dropbox

Just because you are a single company does not mean you will have only a single type of workplace. For example, Pacific Hydro opted to match their workplace design with activities performed in those offices. In their Geelong workplace, which is geared towards the sales and call center activities, Pacific Hydro chose an “industrial chic” workplace design. However, their Melbourne hub has a “corporate personality.” While both office environments embrace the company’s core customer values of diversity, cooperation, action, leadership, adaptability, dedication and innovation, each does so in different ways, as each office supports different staff and customers.

“Companies that place people at the centre of their workplace design are more successful in their transformation. It’s not about reconfiguring space or constructing new ways of working in isolation but the workspace must be designed for people who will be using it.” — Dr Christhina Candido, University of Sydney

Consider:

- What “makes us” as a company?
- What’s our culture?
- What makes us unique?
- Who are our customers?
- How can we physically reflect our identity and our customers in the work environment?
A common trait of the successful workplaces is that they have several zones within an open-plan workspace that support different work activities. Therefore, you need to plan for the workplace to allow for concentration, private spaces, breakout spaces, teamwork areas, large-group collaboration spaces, and so on. Simply converting everything to an open office is a recipe for disaster.

“One of the shortcomings of open-plan offices is poor design. Trying to have several activities that don’t go well together in the same area will result in a clash. That’s when you start having issues around acoustics and lack of privacy. That’s when some people try to isolate themselves.”
– Dr Christhina Candido, University of Sydney

Research conducted by the University of Sydney, Sydney School of Architecture, Design and Planning, led by Dr. Christhina Candido, found that open-plan offices that adopted a human-centred approach to interior design and purposely allocated spaces to support a variety of work-related tasks – while implementing biophilic design principles – achieved high results for perceived productivity, health and the overall comfort of the work area.¹

Investing in designs that provide workers with a variety of zones within the modern workplace allows them to perform different work activities that require either concentration and privacy or interaction with others. This is a key move in mitigating the noise and distraction issues of open-plan and older activity-based working offices, and it should be carefully considered while planning.

When Mirvac developed its activity-based work headquarters, it decided to omit permanent private offices – even for executives. However, it recognised the need for all staff to have access to different types of workspaces for different stages of their projects. Mirvac’s workplace includes collaborative zones, hatch areas for brainstorming, individual quiet spaces, and team meeting rooms for focused work.

Just eight months after adopting its new headquarters design, Mirvac recorded a significant increase in BOSSA scores.² Overall performance, health and productivity improved by 35 percent, while noise distraction and privacy scores improved by 50 percent, and spatial comfort scores similarly increased by 50 percent.³
Behind Dropbox’s “laid back” office is careful consideration of how different spaces will serve specific purposes. For example, the “courtyard” or indoor patio is designed to bring the outside into the office. Featuring lush greenery, staff use it as a quiet area for concentration and focus during the day, or a place to unwind and share ideas in the late afternoon. A living room area features amphitheatre seating and a sofa for casual and formal presentations. The boardroom, equipped with large screens for video conferencing, overlooks a walk-in garden that serves as a sound and visual barrier from the lift lobby.

“Workplace of the future in our opinion is about choice. We give the staff the flexibility to move around, to work in a quiet zone and an open zone, at their workstation, in the kitchen, in the boardroom… wherever it is to produce their best work. Every space has their purpose.”

– Dropbox

Architecture and design firm BVN opted for an unstructured open-space work environment, which enabled the team to self-organise.

Equally important in planning the space is adopting collaborative tools and technologies that are appropriate for specific workspaces. For example, small team rooms may require simple one-to-one video conferencing for bridging teams and clients, while larger collaborative workrooms could require large-format screens and cameras for group conferencing. Some rooms may demand “do not disturb” policies around technology use.

Ensure that any unified communications technologies are appropriate for the space and for the adjacent spaces.

For instance, if you have small, individual quiet rooms, staff may take in their own laptops and engage remote workers in their focused work activity. This
is particularly important when you have one of your staff working with one or more external specialists on a report or plan. Deep collaboration like this needs to be supported by simple mobile devices and low latency bandwidth (Wi-Fi) in the room.

“All of BVN’s quiet/meeting rooms are enclosed and have video conferencing capabilities and allow for focused work. BVN also provide open plan areas for more communal informal brainstorming sessions – these areas are also equipped with large screens for work sharing.”
– BVN

However, larger collaboration rooms may require a simple plug-and-play video communications. These rooms may be equipped with a simple screen – you don’t need a super high definition unit – just an all-in-one conference room hardware coupled with very easy-to-use video conferencing and collaboration software.

“Ease-of-use is essential. These small meeting rooms are often used in an ad hoc manner throughout the day by many different people. You want people to be able to come in and get to work straight away - no relearning software, no messing with cables, no hassles with connecting. To be successful, they must be frictionless.”
– Dr Joseph Sweeney, IBRS

Screen sharing is also very important within these rooms. Larger conference rooms may have the more traditional, high-end video communications capabilities and telepresence – although we are seeing these rooms being replaced with solutions that are very similar to the plug-and-play capabilities of a small conference room, which corresponds with the rising consumerisation of video and team collaboration environments.

**Consider:**
- What are the types of activities being performed by your staff?
- What type of workspaces are required to enable them to perform different activities at optimum efficiency?
- What is the optimum mix of workspaces?
- How could the mix of different types of workspaces change in the future?

The office of the future must cater to diverse styles of collaboration and communication. Enabling employees to meet physically or virtually in a matter of seconds is necessary to functionality, productivity and morale.

GoToRoom was created to solve these problems while providing organisations with a simple, all-in-one solution that easily outfits huddle rooms and medium-sized conference rooms with all the hardware needed to host or attend high-quality video meetings through GoToMeeting, all without the need for time-consuming setup or constant IT intervention. With multiple package options, businesses are able to select the system that meets their needs and budget.

**Your room system, unlocked.**

GoToRoom is an all-new out-of-the-box conference room solution that makes it simple to modernize the office with the latest video collaboration technology. GoToRoom offers a one-stop-shop by bundling state-of-the-art hardware with professional, user-friendly video conferencing software. Gone are the days of cobbling together makeshift meeting spaces. GoToRoom has everything you need in one simple kit.

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Towards the Workplace of the Future

LESSON 5
CONSIDER THE FUTURE OF WORK

Rather than planning for the current work environment, leading firms recognise that the future of work – and more broadly, society – will change, and they plan for that future.

A key consideration is that the future workforce will be far more inclusive. Therefore, organisations are planning new workspaces with ten-year visions to cater to greater diversity in the workforce and greater support for workers’ evolving lifestyles. Up to 60% of students are being trained for activities that will be significantly altered by automation, and the type of people hired will change as a result. The amenities you provide must cater to this new generation of workers, both for on-the-job learning and for potential growth.

When hipages moved to their new location at 255 Pitt St., they were experiencing rapid growth, doubling in headcount in two years. To accommodate the expected continued growth, they leased extra space and then sub-leased the unused space to compatible tenants in the short term.

"To ensure our home suited the growing needs of our hipages family, we made the investment in additional square metres beyond our current needs. We have subleased the current vacant space with short-term leases, ensuring that when the time is right, our home can continue to grow."

- hipages

In addition, you need to think about what management and human resource infrastructures will accompany the new physical infrastructure of the workplace.

BVN goes even further. The company recognises that emerging technologies are disrupting its practice. Not only is technology changing how work gets done, but it also changes skill sets, and thus, people and team structures.

“Diversity is fundamental for attracting top talent. To better retain and attract talent, companies must foster an environment of authenticity and openness, as teams perform better when individuals bring unique ideas to the table. Dynamic workplaces that encourage employees to move, adapt, and adjust the space to suit their needs can reinforce inclusive policies.”

- Gensler

"The amenities you provide must cater to this new generation of workers, both for on-the-job learning and for potential growth."
To ensure that it can quickly adapt, BVN has created a workplace that enables teams to evolve their practices well into the future. The workplace is set up to continually expose staff to new ideas and new technology, while constantly encouraging staff to innovate. For example, the firm has placed its “workshop” in the foyer, complete with a powerful 3D printer. Teams may use this 3D printer for modelling and design tasks. In addition, BVN is experimenting with virtual reality (VR) in this workshop. Thus, innovation is literally front and centre in the workplace.

“When we look at where the future is heading with the architectural design, a lot of what we do now could potentially be automated in the future. What this means is that we need to expose staff to what those changes may be and have the opportunity to learn new skills so they’re ready.”

– BVN

Consider:

● How could employment patterns change for your organisation?
● How will the new workplace engage and support people with diverse needs and backgrounds?
● What are the expectations of the incoming workforce?
● What technologies will drive changes in how work gets done?

1 “The new work order Ensuring young Australians have skills and experience for the jobs of the future, not the past,” 2017, Foundation for Young Australians.
2 “Why Improving Inclusivity and Promoting Diversity is Good for Business,” 2019, Gensler
The most forward-looking organisations recognise that the workplace increasingly extends well beyond the confines of the office. They are taking advantage of the surrounding neighbourhood and facilities to create “extended community workspaces.”

As a result, the location of a new workplace is as important as its interior design. Where you choose to base your new office should be carefully matched to the culture of the organisation and the type of staff you wish to attract.

“People often overlook the importance of the district to the office. Many meetings actually happen inside coffee shops and other locations that surround an office. Therefore, the district should be factored into the planning of the office.”
- Lendlease

According to CBA, their newest office at the South Eveleigh precinct represents the future of work, allowing their people to “get things done” in an increasingly connected, competitive and fast-paced world.

“We want to be part of an integrated and vibrant precinct. This means forming connections with educators, community, creatives and entrepreneurs at South Eveleigh in order to create a tech ecosystem – and this is a shared vision amongst the precinct partners.”
- CBA

Office location was a serious consideration for hipages. The firm explored ultra-modern workplace hubs, such as Barangaroo in Sydney, but rejected these areas. In the end, hipages chose the Hilton, as they felt their staff and customers were far more interested in proximity to public transport and diverse amenities.
Security education is also incredibly important. You can have the best security approaches in the world, but people are always the weakest link. For this reason, your organisation needs training in strong password management, spam awareness, vigilance in identifying unusual activity, and even situational awareness.

“You don’t want to have security get in the way of your staff collaborating, but you do want them to understand the risks and adopt appropriate behaviours. Thinking about digital risk is a precursor to transforming into a flexible, digital workforce.”
– Dr Joseph Sweeney, IBRS

Consider:
● What district will best meet the needs of your staff and customers?
● What facilities in the local area could be utilised by your staff and customers?
● How can you create partnerships within the local district to enlarge and enrich your workplace?
● How will the staff access their work? Will they be using public networks and the internet? If so, how will you secure those lines of communication?

“More than just a workplace, these areas need to be full of great experiences and conveniences, including cafes, restaurants, shops, childcare, gyms and open spaces. This empowers employees to leave the office and disconnect from work while still being close to the office. Nearby childcare makes drop-offs and pickups a little more seamless”
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In contrast, Lendlease notes that the workplaces of the future, such as its Barangaroo facilities, are situated in mixed-use precincts with access to green space.

“We had to factor in our people’s and customers’ desires. We’re not a corporate business - we’re a tech company, but very down to earth. We wanted to create a space that reflected who we are.”
– hipages

When planning a new workplace, consider reaching out to organisations within the district to see if you can enrich their services. For example, implementing high-performance Wi-Fi for your staff in neighbouring public spaces and coffee shops effectively expands the district into a network of usable – and very attractive – workspaces for your staff, contractors and clients.

If you’re expanding into the district – the areas around the office – security becomes an immediate concern. It’s crucial to secure documents and information on any laptop or mobile device a staff member has when they are planning to work within the district or remotely.

“More than just a workplace, these areas need to be full of great experiences and conveniences, including cafes, restaurants, shops, childcare, gyms and open spaces. This empowers employees to leave the office and disconnect from work while still being close to the office. Nearby childcare makes drop-offs and pickups a little more seamless”
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Without exception, all the companies in this study took strong change management processes that were both transparent and inclusive. They did this by engaging not just key stakeholders, but every team and staff member, giving everyone an opportunity to provide suggestions and feedback.

Medibank embedded its workplace architects within its business teams so that they could observe how Medibank’s people actually work, what they work on and how they collaborate. These observations and discussions within the workforce informed Medibank’s workplace-design thinking. It is also vital that staff can genuinely influence decisions regarding the new workplace. Collaborate with as many people in the business as possible to ensure that true team needs and individual needs were listened to and incorporated where possible.

“Have an open conversation with employees. They may not stay for 10 years but they’re likely to be there for the next 12 months or two years. Engage them early and often and consider using an external change management company to kick-start the process.”
– Dr. Christina Candido, University of Sydney

Being a smaller company, hipages adopted a “blue sky approach” to engaging its workforce in the new workplace design. It asked its staff to describe their ideal work environment and give reasons why such an environment would be beneficial, without any restrictions. hipages also worked with staff to explore roadblocks that were preventing people from doing their best work.

“Make sure you understand the needs of each of the teams so that when you build the environment, you’re setting up the right neighbourhoods and have the right mix of the right people in the right places.”
– Medibank
We recognise that not all employees are the same. Our tech staff, product managers, engineers, finance and marketing, sales and service teams all have different needs. We looked at the pain points and we did that team by team. We identified that there are different needs and requirements and practicalities of different jobs and roles that we need to factor in.”

– hipages

Consider:

● How will you engage every staff member to ensure that the new workplace works for them?
● How will you deal with conflicting demands or demands that cannot be met?
When people think about companies that have adopted flexible environments, an organisation that stands out into most people’s minds is Google. The tech giant is widely known for embracing flexible work policies and offering their employees excellent benefits to help balance their work and life. But this is only possible because their culture and organisational behavior is built to support it. Simply adopting Google-style benefits and expecting a Google-style success is a trap many companies fall into. While all the organisations we interviewed for this report had adopted flexible work environments, each did so in a way that was uniquely tailored to their culture and work activities.

While all the organisations we interviewed for this report had adopted flexible work environments, each did so in a way that was uniquely tailored to their culture and work activities.

For example, Mirvac’s Sydney HQ adopted the activity-based model, but defined workplace “neighbourhoods.” So, while staff are free to sit wherever they like, or even move to a different floor, specific clusters of workers – teams – would gravitate to specific “neighbourhoods.” Such neighbourhoods were established to retain the consistency and deep collaboration encouraged by people being physically near each other on a daily basis.

Medibank has a zero-exclusions policy for activity-based work, meaning that nobody (including senior executives) has a fixed desk. However, they made adaptations to the work environment for areas with specific requirements, such as desk-bound call centres.

“We needed to be flexible about [why] we delivered activity-based working to all parts of our business. It’s not one set of rules for all, but principles on how we use the worksettings and neighbourhoods.”

– Medibank

"Once you get to know your population and working style better, it becomes apparent that there isn’t a one-size fits all approach to flexible working environments.”
– BVN
Pacific Hydro adopted hot-desking but recognised that it would take its staff time to adapt to this new way of working. To ensure success, they took a soft approach by allowing people to naturally gather in clusters and slowly get used to moving around in an activity-based environment.

“If we went too hard and too fast, we would have encountered more resistance. Many people at Pacific Hydro are passionate about what they do. By not enforcing agile work practices too hard or fast, it allowed time for people to get used to the new way of working and slowly, one by one, people are getting on board.”
– Pacific Hydro

Even Dropbox’s ultra-flexible working environment is customised to reflect how their staff want to work. While everyone can work wherever they want, each staff member can elect to stay at a nominated desk for an extended period, as a temporary home base. Every few months, there is an office rotation to keep true to the principle of flexible working.

“Everybody had their own home, their own place to put up the photos and leave some belongings. We found it important for engagement.”
– hipages

BVN wanted total workplace flexibility; however, during staff engagement prior to refurbishing the new workplace, BVN found that its staff wanted to have their own desks and a “home.” To complicate matters, BVN is a project-based business where teams need to form and work closely for varying periods of time. They realised that a purist, activity-based working model wasn’t a good fit for the organisation.

Instead, BVN gave its staff mobile desks – literally desks on wheels – which can move about the workplace to create project-based workgroups that would form and then reform around projects that could last months or longer. Staff can also wheel their desks into private areas or even cluster in smaller groups for focused work, and then relocate as needed.

“We catered flexibility for each stage of the project by allowing space for a more dynamic and high energy phase or more concentrated and focused stuff. We create agility within a spatial model. Most importantly, we want our teams to be close together.”
– BVN

For CBA, it’s important to cater to a diverse workforce in a range of roles.

“It’s important to create a flexible workplace that supports a range of ways of working and preferences. Our workplaces are designed in response to a more mobile workforce. We have incorporated more choice in the type and location of settings. At South Eveleigh, this extends outside of the workplace into the precinct.”
– CBA
From the above examples, it is clear that every organisation needs to define its own version of a flexible work environment. You have to work out your own organisation’s working styles, rhythms and figure out how your staff want to collaborate. From there, you need to create your own version of activity-based working or flexible working.

“Forget about recipes or any textbook, reference or whatever is used in any other organisations. Just find systems that work for you. You may find systems that are quite similar but everything needs to be customised to the way your business is operating.”

– Dr. Christhina Candido, University of Sydney

Consider:

- What methods will you utilise to ensure the people designing the new workplace truly understand how work is accomplished in your organisation?
- How will you engage staff so they can provide feedback at all stages of the workplace design, while also helping them understand what is possible?
- What is your timeline for change? Will your version of working be deployed on day one or will it evolve over time?
LESSON 9
THE NETWORK MUST BE EVERYWHERE AND INVISIBLE

A flexible working environment depends on mobility. At the very minimum, you need fast and reliable wireless connectivity throughout the entire workplace. And by entire workplace, we literally mean everywhere. In the most successful workplaces, wireless data was extended into areas not normally considered by technology architecture groups.

For example, hipages’ outdoor BBQ area and balcony are covered by wireless data, allowing staff to work outside in the sun while being just as effective as if they were at their desks. This solution is possibly even more effective, since natural sunlight is known to improve cognition and productivity. This endeavor required additional attention to getting network access going as smoothly and easily as possible when planning the new workspace.

“Technology was very hot and cold in the old office. In the new office, we have big, open balcony and terrace locations where staff can have lunch, Facebook live and work. So we made sure that the Wi-Fi worked just as well outside as well as inside.”
– hipages

It was also stated that whatever network technology used must be sufficiently robust and reliable to handle any workloads the staff may have now, and in the future. This means factoring in the significant growth in the demand for multimedia and Software-as-a-Service Cloud solutions.

In most organisations, standard Wi-Fi solutions are more than enough for access within the workplace, and possibly within the surrounding district. However, care should also be taken to consider unique, highly demanding work cases.

BVN architects and designers are examples of staff that needed high-speed data that surpassed the capability of wireless technologies. Multiple architects and designers need to collaborate on complex building designs and model files that are multiple gigabytes in size. Pushing these files over a wireless network would create noticeable lags in the workflow.

To support its architects and designers, BVN implemented an innovative approach to high-capacity networking.
Staff may wheel their desks into team-based clusters and then draw upon a ceiling-mounted, retractable cable (called a Data Boom). This single cable plugs into a specially designed “hub,” which then allows the team to connect their desks to ultra-high-capacity power. Other than the Data Boom cable, there are no visible cables or clutter.

BVN needed to design their workspaces in conjunction with planning high-capacity networking and considering that staff would naturally wish to cluster into teams.

“We work all over Australia. But it doesn’t mean I will miss a Monday meeting with my team when I’m interstate. Flexible working means that I connect and absolutely participate in the meeting from anywhere I am, share screens and do all the things I would do as if I was in the physical office. That’s all part of activity-based working: having technology to share, collaborate and feel like we’re all together doesn’t matter where we are and what we’re doing.”

- Medibank

Consider:

- How will people cluster into teams in the new workplace?
- Are there outdoor locations where wireless network access will provide staff with new workspaces?
- What work will teams conduct, and how will access to data services support that work?
- Are there special workloads that will require high-capacity networking? If so, where will these teams congregate?
- When and how will you bring networking architecture specialists into the workplace-design process?
- How do your staff use meeting tools, and which tools have the flexibility needed for your environment?
- How will networking support different collaboration spaces?

Equally as important as the internal office network is providing staff with access to the solutions, data and communications services they need to work effectively while away from the office. This is particularly important for team cohesion and collaboration. Being able to dial-in to video meetings and having access to shared screens from personal devices via internet connections is seen as particularly important.

“Each Data Boom arm carries power and fiber optic cables, and can support a cluster of eight workstations. We collaborated with the University of Sydney to design ways for the Data Booms to pivot on custom-built circular tracks mounted in the ceiling. The data booms can reach all areas of the floor plate, enabling complete flexibility for how people configure their workspaces. This solution is the first of its kind and has been patented as a new ceiling system.”

- BVN

1 “The Practice of Biophilic Design”, 2015, S. Kellert, E. Calabrese
LESSON 10
SMALL DETAILS, NOT BIG SPEND

Moving to a new work environment and shifting to a new way of working is expensive and time consuming. However, one of the most surprising lessons from this study is that small details matter a lot. Focusing effort on getting the “small things” right can not only improve satisfaction with the new workplace, but also reduce overall costs.

Small details that get in the way of day-to-day work are a major reason why workplace designs fail. The choice of desks, chairs and even how devices and screens are cabled make a significant difference to the staff satisfaction and productivity.

For example, Pacific Hydro’s attention to details, right down to hot-desk cabling, were paramount to their success. The technology staff spent extra efforts to neatly tie and cover all hot-desk cabling with mesh so that staff do not see the details. Each desk also has dual screens, USB ports, power to recharge phones and a stand to hold laptops. Effectively, staff can simply plug two cables to their device to make everything work.

Consistency is also important. Every desk at Pacific Hydro is configured exactly the same, and every meeting room has the same approach to video conferencing and collaboration.

“One notices the execution of small details – such as how easily their PCs or monitor will connect. It’s important to prioritise work experience that matters on a day-to-day basis over fancy tech and get their work experience to be smooth and consistent.”
- Pacific Hydro

The major shift in collaboration and unified communication seen in the last ten years means that many companies have moved from large, expensive and complex “telepresence” rooms to plug-and-play video communications, personal desktop video communications and collaboration.

So, rather than attempting to cable up rooms with state-of-the-art screens and cameras, they offer standardised, plug-and-play solutions that enable staff to
walk into a room, switch a little black box, and instigate a video meeting and collaboration session with third parties in a manner which is almost identical to what they would do at their desks.

“We bought hotel grade screens rather than just consumer grade screens and just plug them into our conferencing systems. They’re less expensive but they do a great job and they make the room look awesome. Placing two screens on a desk was a good expense because it enables people to work the way they want to. However, cabling to these screens and powering them needed to be practical and spiffy.”

- Pacific Hydro

An area where Pacific Hydro did spend a little extra was in soundproofing conference rooms. While addressing ambient noise may appear to be a small detail, staff do notice and appreciate the difference.

Consider:
- What are other organisations doing to address the small details of day-to-day work?
- Who will take care of the small details? For example, who is responsible for designing and cabling hot-desks? Who will define the solutions used in collaboration and conference rooms?
- Where can you cut costs in order to focus more effort on getting the small details perfectly executed?

Telephony is also incredibly important. Gone are the days where staff would tolerate complex push-button commands on desk phones. They want their workplace telephony to be as simple as using their mobile phone – or better still, made available on their mobile phones! This is particularly important in activity-based work environments.

Staying within budget isn’t always easy when embarking on a workplace transformation. However, Pacific Hydro’s diligent research enabled them to do just that by cutting out the big ideas and focusing on experiences that matter to staff.

For example, rather than buying expensive, high-end conference room systems and oversized screens, Pacific Hydro installed hotel-quality screens. This meant that they could place more screens throughout the office, thereby creating additional, easy-to-use meeting spaces.

“The key here is ease of use. Staff are now comparing in-room experiences with the ease of their desktop experiences. Ideally, they should be the same, or very similar. They should also be what I call consumer-familiar so that any guest or a new staff member can operate the environment intuitively. There should be no friction to starting a meeting whether it be with a single remote worker in your team, or meeting with multiple clients and board members across the globe.”

- Dr. Joseph Sweeney, IBRS

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Getting people to embrace the new workplace design and new ways of working can be extremely challenging. Many people have never experienced activity-based working and are sceptical. Most people simply don’t respond well to the sudden change that is thrust upon them.

Therefore, getting staff involved with the transformation early not only makes staff happier, but is also essential for success.

Leading organisations in workspace design all report that it takes time to educate staff on how to work in new ways in the new workplace. This education should start well before staff are moved into the new workspace.

One approach to this educational journey is to build prototypes of the future workspace options within the current office. These prototypes include hot desks, seating, technology and service supporting the workspace. Having a prototype of the new office, not necessarily the entire office, but a portion of the planned office, with the key features, allows people to experience and feel how they will be working in the future.

Such prototype workspaces service two purposes:

**Pre-Move Education**
Prototype workspaces educate staff in how the new way of working can benefit them well before moving into the new workplace, highlighting the flexibility, comfort and ease of use.

For example, Medibank provided all staff with the new laptop and mobile devices they would be using in the new activity-based workplace well before moving into the new building. Staff were able to adjust to the new wireless way of working and new communication and collaboration solutions prior to moving. In terms of getting the staff used to the new technology prior to the move, a significant education process in activity-based working was already in place.

Like Medibank, CBA has a strong focus on ensuring that their people understand new technology prior to a relocation. To help with this transition, CBA provides their people with mobile devices and training on using the technology ahead of a relocation.
Like Pacific Hydro, Mirvac also built a pilot space to engage the whole company before the move. Mirvac rolled the entire company through the prototype workspace over a period of six months. Every three weeks, Mirvac had a different business unit use the prototype space and provide feedback.

“We were preparing people for this new way of working before they even moved into the space. This was critical for many reasons: Change management was a lot easier when you move into a new space and you know how to work in that space over the last month to five months. We’ll find out where we needed to provide additional tools or learning for people to help with that change.”

- Mirvac

As Mirvac points out, it is important to capture not only staff comments and choices on the physical design of the new workspace, but also any additional activities that may help the transition. Such additional activities may include training in specific software, security considerations and programs to help staff consider innovation.

“Our pilot highlighted the benefits of having staff deeply engaged. For example, if you plan to move to a paperless workspace, then you need to work with staff to ensure that they have the tools - like OneNote - and training they need to replace their personal paper notebooks. It is everyone coming together to jointly develop and share innovative ways of working.”

- Mirvac

Staff Engagement in the Design Process

Prototype workspaces allow for staff to provide feedback on what works, as well as the small things that may get in the way of their productivity (see Lesson 10). Giving people a chance to try out and comment upon the future workspace means employees are not detached from the design; they’re actually a part of it. It also allows the designers to see things that don’t work before they are implemented, allowing them to adjust the planned future workplace to accommodate staff needs.

At least six months before the move, Pacific Hydro built two different examples of what the new workspace could look like and let staff provide genuine feedback. The company provided choices for stand-up hot-desks and chairs, among other things, and allowed staff to provide detailed feedback and vote on the favoured environment.

“Make sure that staff are able to select from a range of pre-selected choices, but don’t give them too many. Stay focused on teasing out the small details that matter to the staff.”

- Pacific Hydro

“One of our key learnings is to build awareness and understanding of any new technology early-on. With the move to South Eveleigh, we arranged laptops and mobile technology three to six months prior to the move. This meant that our people knew how to get the best out of the technology available to them before they moved into their new location. Through testing the technology in their new environment, we found that employees settled into their new work-home within 30-60 minutes at South Eveleigh.”

- CBA
Consider:

- What parts of your future workplace will you prototype, and where will this be located?
- How will you collect the learnings and comments from staff once they have experienced the prototype?
- How much time will be needed to allow your workforce to provide feedback on the prototype?
- How frequently and in what ways will you provide feedback to the staff on what you are learning, and when will you adjust the prototype to reflect the staff feedback?
In the last few years, there has been a lot of focus on modern designs being “fun” and having “super experiences” like slides, gaming tables and the like. This has been a trend particularly in technology startups. However, in hindsight, such “gimmicks” may not be adding much to the workplace and may, instead, actually be causing disruption.

For example, in one office, we noted that an indoor play area – complete with a billiard table – was causing staff to isolate themselves far away from the area, due to sporadic noise. A space that was aimed at offering collaboration opportunities was actually doing the exact opposite.

Therefore, when it comes to workplace design, it is more important to focus on human behaviour and needs over being “innovative” and “cool.”

Dr. Christhina Candido states that companies that successfully implemented activity-based working environments adopted designs that use organic shapes that bring spaces together without visual barriers. Pods of all sizes are prominent in these workplaces, such as walls with textured elements and plants that promote visual integration, but also privacy. In addition, the design of these offices has placed strong care on furniture ergonomics and presence of sit-stand workstations.

“*It’s important to consider the comfort of furnishings and degree of freedom to adapt and choose how and where to work.*”
- Dr. Christhina Candido, University of Sydney

hipages took the notion of human-centric design to heart when laying out its activity-based workplace. It avoided creating a “battery-hen-like” environment by arranging a variety of different workstations at different angles, in odd combinations. The desks and joinery in the general work area had various finishes, emphasizing individuality even within the open-plan environment.

However, human-centred workplace design is not just about avoiding distracting gimmicks, mixing up the furniture and offering different workspaces. Dr. Donna Wheatley, of WMK Architecture, states that careful thought needs to be given to how different work areas should be positioned in relation to each other.
According to Dr. Donna Wheatley, the connections between work areas must enable them to be utilised in a way that works for the staff. There is no point in having things that staff use frequently far away from the other things that they use just as frequently. For example, it might be best to locate different types of meeting or collaboration rooms in different parts of the office, based on the staff's activities in those areas.

“How different areas fit together must be based on people's working habits. So the design of the office requires having empathy for the end users, and how they will actually use the space.”

- Dr. Donna Wheatley

For example, Medibank created buffers between two zones: the communal and high-traffic area, and the area dedicated to concentrated work. The concentrated work areas had greater privacy and natural sunlight from windows, while the collaborative workspaces were adjacent to the meeting pods.

Another important human aspect of a modern workplace must be how it impacts staff's health and mental well-being. The connection between the built environment and workplace humans is now well recognised. For example, access to natural light and fresh air can improve staff productivity by 19%.

To this end, Mirvac placed 75 percent of workstations within 7.5 metres of a window to harness the well-documented physiological and productivity benefits associated with access to natural light. In addition, Mirvac’s internal lights are also programmed for varying brightness at appropriate points throughout the day to maintain optimal circadian rhythms of staff, which are also known to have benefits for healthy sleep and, by extension, productivity.

One principle that underpins workplace design at CBA is wellness. At CBA’s newest workplace, South Eveleigh, a wellness center and retreat spaces have been established.

“While activity-based working has created a lot of efficiencies by accelerating ways of working, we want to give our people ways to unplug. Retreat spaces at South Eveleigh have been a popular way for our people to relax and unwind.”

- CBA

Consider:

- Do you have access to the latest research into built environments, well-being and productivity? If not, who can you turn to for help?
- Are your designers considering light, air and access to green spaces as part of the workplace design?
- When selecting and arranging furniture and work areas, are human-centred design principles being utilised?

Humans’ tribal nature can be a trap for companies transforming to open-plan work environments. Failing to consider people’s natural inclination to group together results in dissatisfied, disengaged and unproductive teams. Companies with satisfied, engaged and productive staff were found to have implemented the activity-based work environment with a “neighbourhood” concept in mind.

The neighbourhood concept means that while your work area is fluctuating, you’re always surrounded by the same core group of people.

The way your organisation implements workplace neighbourhoods depends on the current structure of your organisation and your ideal future structure (see lesson 1).

For example, if your organisation is large, with clear boundaries between business departments, then the new workplace would need to support departmental clusters, even while still allowing staff to move about the workplace as they work with other departments. Departments that collaborate frequently – for example, sales and marketing – could be located close to each other.

However, if the goal of the new work environment is to breakdown silos or create cross-functional teams, then the workplace design will need to support the ability for teams to form and disband quickly.

“Workspaces need to be planned for the tribal nature of people, which is essential for innovation and for collaboration. Don’t forget flexible workers! People who arrive later in the day should not be excluded from the ‘best locations’ and isolated from their regular work team”
- hipages

BVN spent ensured their workplace design would harness self-defining neighbourhoods to transform their workspace into a hive of creative dynamism. Since they are a project-based business, the company has a need to form teams that effectively become workplace neighbourhoods for many months, but are then disbanded or reformed upon project completion.
Towards the Workplace of the Future | Lesson 13

“We realised the people in each team and the size of teams change over different project phases. So we gave the teams the agency and complete freedom to decide how they set up their physical spaces [neighbourhoods]. If they want to sit in U-configuration or in a row or circle, they can. They can decide who sits where and for how long. They can self-organise quickly. Because the work environment is self-organising, it is also self-regulating. When teams are working really well together, then our projects go very well too.”

- BVN

Consider:
- What neighbourhoods already exist within your organisation?
- Is there a need to change the structure of neighbourhoods within your organisation, and if so, how can the new workplace design accommodate the transition?
- Are there neighbourhoods that naturally form and disband? How can the new workplace be designed to accommodate this?
- How will the new workplace be arranged to maximise the interactions within and between neighbourhoods?
- What collaboration services and spaces will be needed, and where must they be located to maximise productivity within and between work neighbourhoods?
In CBA’s experience, fast-moving teams and projects require areas that are “hackable” – spaces that are easily configured and disassembled. In CBA’s new South Eveleigh workplace, there are spaces that are hackable depending on types of work and employee preferences.

“At South Eveleigh we provide our people with an environment that they can hack – they are able to break down barriers to collaboration or innovation. This involves movable whiteboards, furniture that can easily be taken apart and put back together in a different setting very easily and doesn’t require property and operations to get involved.”

- CBA

While these spaces offer another level of flexibility within an activity-based work environment, they can also present a particular challenge from a technological perspective.

In traditional, non-hackable office spaces, technology is built into the workspace and fixed in place: speaker systems and cameras are placed in set locations, and power outlets and network cables are available only at specific spots based on assumptions on how the room will be used in the future.

However, in a hackable workspace, nothing can be permanent. That means that the area needs flexible approaches to the network – high-performance Wi-Fi – but it also means that screens and cameras, speakers and microphones, also need to be relocated in an instant.

“There is a trend towards mobile screens – including touchscreens, with plug and play meeting control systems. Basically an organisation can build a hackable space in video conferencing room by using a little black box containing all of the meeting software solution, cameras and microphones required, coupled with a movable screen on a stand. The important thing here is to ensure that there is minimal cabling required for the technology.”

- Dr. Joseph Sweeney, IBRS
Power is a particularly important point. When building a hackable space, think very carefully about how to provide multiple power outlets as hidden panels throughout the room. The more you put in place up front, the more flexibility you have in how the room will be deployed. A little extra spent here can go a long way.

**Consider:**
- Will you need to create a workspace that can be reconfigured into different room sizes using movable walls? If so, what would be the largest space and how could that be divided into smaller rooms as needed?
- How will screens and collaboration solutions be easily movable?
- How will all power and other cabling be accessible from anywhere in the hackable workspace, and hidden when it is not needed?
Leaders in workplace design have addressed the above challenges by building informal meeting spaces where collaboration and innovative ideas can be fostered. These workplaces are often located in thoroughfares and in between neighbourhoods (lesson 15) as part of their focus on human-centred design (lesson 14).

For example, Pacific Hydro turned a hallway into a high-tech water cooler area by placing large-touch video screens with its popular ‘Windy app.’ Staff would stop at these screens, review the real-time information being presented and, more importantly, have discussions with their peers. The thoroughfares became informal meeting places where ideas could be shared and updates given.

“We rely on the weather for our business so now people play with this touch screen-filled hallway - this has become an informal meeting spot.”
- Pacific Hydro

Ironically, hot-desking can easily hinder spontaneous collaboration. This is especially true if organisations do not consider the tribal nature of humans and accommodate neighbourhoods in their workplace designs (see lesson 15, above).

When collaboration spaces are placed too far away from focused work areas, collaboration breaks down. People do not make future bookings for rooms that are a distance away from workspaces for what may be an ad hoc discussion.

However, when collaboration spaces are placed directly with focused work areas, staff satisfaction declines sharply due to constant interruptions. In these cases, staff either remove themselves from the focus work area and find an isolated location (sometimes booking meeting rooms to block out the noise and interruptions) or suffer through the day with far lower productivity rates.

There are significant benefits to providing casual collaboration spaces. According to Dr. Gisela Backlander, the ability for teams to adopt self-leadership and autonomy over goal-setting, both of which happen during casual collaboration, are two of the most significant factors that impact employee performance in activity-based working environments.

hipages has placed large TV screens with easy-to-use video collaboration solutions in many different open spaces to encourage teams to collaborate naturally, as if at

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a watercooler, even while having remote staff or clients attending.

“Our teams can just come together, stand up around these open areas, and other people can join the video conference and be part of the conversation.”
- hipages

CBA has found that informal spaces are widely used by their workforce and that areas like the kitchen hub is fertile ground for rich conversations to occur, as their people bond over preparing meals or teams coming together for regular huddles.

“Over the years, we’ve found that activity-based working deforms the way a business works. This is visible through the way people dress, meet and connect as well as the way people like to work. But more and more, we’re seeing people connect outside of the formal meeting rooms and into informal meeting spaces. As a result, we’re also noticing a positive cultural shift in our workplaces.”
- CBA

Other organisations also realised that community spaces can serve as casual collaboration areas. Mirvac noted that small businesses and start-ups often have lunch spaces that support community and social integration within the business.

Mirvac have been increasing the number of long tables within their workspace. Initial results have been successful with people sitting together, having lunch or even just coffee and collaborating, while sharing ideas and getting updates on each other’s work.

Casual meeting spaces are an incredible opportunity to link your staff to remote offices, homeworkers, time shifters, and even customers and suppliers. Rather than just seeing these spaces as locations within your workplace, consider that they can also be a magical doorway between your office and a million other locations and people.

This can be achieved by setting up a consumer-grade flatscreen in the casual meeting area and equipping it with a simple video communications solution. At any time, staff can use the solution to open the doorway to remote a fellow colleague, client, prospect or even an expert consultant. These need not be formally planned meetings, but they can be ad hoc engagements.

We’ve also seen these screens be left running permanently connected to remote office locations so that staff literally feel like there is a portal where ad hoc meetings and collaboration can take place with their peers, regardless of the distance. For example, one organisation’s technology group left such a portal running in its main Australian office, linking to its development house in the Philippines. Staff would frequently walk up to the casual area and discuss the status of the project, ask technical questions of each other and generally develop a closeness between staff that is absolutely essential for success in highly complex knowledge-based work.

Consider:

- Where should ad hoc collaboration spaces be placed to maximise ad hoc collaboration, without disrupting focused work?
- What are the facilities that will encourage people to come together at these spaces?
- Which casual collaboration spaces will benefit from video communications, enabling people to join in the discussions remotely?

Your Helpdesk Must Rival A Genius Bar

Rolling out an activity-based work environment must include the right technologies to enable work to be flexible and mobile. New mobile devices, great communication and collaboration services, reliable and fast networking, practical security, as well as ready access to documents are all essential to a mobile work environment. Additionally, you need responsive and effective IT support to ensure there is no friction for employees when using these technologies and services.

Medibank recognised the need to place employee technical support front and centre of its workplace design. It implemented a “FIT Desk” concept – a face-to-face technical support help desk located in a shared collaboration area. Any employee can simply walk up to the FIT Desk, which is always staffed and gets hands-on help with their tech issues and training.

It is important to note that the FIT Desk is not just an extension of traditional IT help desk services that focus on “fixing tech.” Instead, it is a consumer-oriented approach to ensuring employees return to productivity as quickly as possible.

“Everybody’s busy and working from their laptops. So if there’s an issue with their device, it needs to get it resolved quickly. Rather than ringing the help desk and waiting in the queue, staff just pop up to the FIT Desk and get immediate support. IT support staff take care of the ticket handling – there is no paperwork, phone calls, or forms to fill out. Of course, all ticketing and tracking of issues are still done, but it’s done by the FIT Desk team, leaving staff to focus on getting on with their jobs.”

- Medibank

The consumer-oriented mindset also entails a rethink of service levels. In Medibank’s case, if an employee’s laptop problem cannot be solved, the employee is given a new computer and is back to work almost immediately.

Furthermore, with the FIT Desk team on site, they can also be called on to provide technical support for meetings.
In addition to installing an integrated IT help desk within some CBA buildings, employees can also access IT support through collateral, such as quick reference guides.

“We provide our people with tools that will help them understand how to use the technology and they can tap into these materials anytime. Intuitive technology and support is incredibly helpful to our employees who are settling into their new work locations.”
- CBA

Dropbox also ensures that the staff are well-supported, IT wise. The workspace has a central “Dropstop” – an IT help desk where employees can flag issues and connect with the AV technology to the support team.

Consider:
- How will your IT group provide consumer-like technical support on site?
- Where will your face-to-face support team be located?
- What technical support service levels will be guaranteed to the employees?
While having staff experience, a prototype goes a long way to addressing the turmoil of change; several organisations also adopted a structured “launch day” for the new workplace. It is not just enough to have an office move, because the new workplaces often entail the adoption of new work practices.

Therefore, the day of physically moving staff into the new workplace focuses not only logistics, but also in ensuring familiarity and comfort.

To ensure productivity from day one, Pacific Hydro created an event immediately prior to the move to its new workplace. This event was called “Innovation Day,” and it gave staff a full day of hands-on experiences with the new office space to obtain detailed training on how to use the technology, work areas, video and collaboration rooms, hot-desks, lockers and the space as a whole.

By conducting this event on a Friday, prior to any materials from the old office being moved in, Pacific Hydro could focus on getting staff fully trained and excited to use the new facilities without legacy thinking and clutter.

The following Monday, the previous materials from the old office were brought in, and staff were able to get to work and be fully productive in the new way of working immediately.

However, launch days are not just another opportunity to train staff in the new way of working. They are also an opportunity to enhance employees’ ownership of the new workplace and build morale – both of which are essential to ensuring satisfaction levels remain high.

hipages turned their launch day into a powerful corporate communications activity and celebration. The firm had all staff wear branded t-shirts and carry banners announcing “hipages was on the move,” and marched between their old office up to the new office, drawing in interest not just from the public but also building up excitement among the staff. Once at the new workplace, the staff celebrated with a welcome breakfast, followed by an exploration of the new facilities.
“There was just so much happiness and excitement... a really, really special moment. Everybody appreciated that they were appreciated and that the company was investing in them by providing an amazing work environment that reflected all our values.”
- hipages

Consider
- What activities will best help staff embrace the new workplace?
- How can the launch day boost employee morale and a feeling of ownership of the new workplace?
- How will training in the new workplace’s facilities be provided to ensure productivity?
Successful companies continued the engagement well after the move. They continued to discuss what’s working and what’s not. There must be a consistent and ongoing commitment to making activity-based or flexible working successful.

You need people on the ground training and engaging with the staff permanently and continually reinforcing the motivation behind the move to a flexible working environment.

Don’t forget the new hires. Just because the rest of the office knows how to use the new workplace facilities and technology does not mean new staff who are not familiar with working in activity-based workspaces will know how to be successful.

For Medibank, the above was key learning. They found that new hires sometimes found it difficult to move from the way their previous employers had set up office spaces and work environments to Medibank’s modern activity-based workplace.

“\What we forgot was the people that were coming into the business that hadn’t experienced activity-based working, and initially we didn’t do a good job inducting them into our unique workplace. What started happening is that different cultures were starting to emerge, with some people isolating themselves because they believed that activity-based working was not working for them. In reality, it was because they didn’t understand this new way of working. So the importance of induction was a key learning of our journey.\”
- Medibank

Mirvac also learned that when it comes to change management, you can never do enough after the move. As new digitally enabled facilities and solutions become available and part of the workplace, staff need to be continually retrained with new digital collaboration services.
"It is not just about the physical workplace - in the world that we live in, transformation to a digital era is a constant. People need continual training to keep up with how work is done."
- Mirvac

Consider:
- Who will create and implement an employee onboarding program for the new workplace? Ensure that this training includes not only the facilities but the ethos of the workplace.
- How will on-boarding be delivered? Who is responsible for ensuring that the onboarding program is successful?
- As new digital facilities and collaboration services are added to the workplace, how will employees, contractors and other stakeholders be trained in their use?
CONCLUSION

When it comes to transforming your workplace into a modern, flexible working environment, there is no substitute for careful planning, researching and diligent implementation.

While the strategies adopted by these leading organisations vary depending on the nature of their businesses, values and goals, the underlying principles for achieving success remain. They all approached the transformation with an open mind and lofty ideals. They were all driven by the desire to future-proof their organisations.

The workplace of the future is one that truly empowers the staff. It’s flexible, inclusive and diverse; it’s digital-rich and one that places health and well-being at the forefront. This is no longer just the domain of tech companies. Businesses that don’t transform their workplaces are likely to find themselves struggling to attract and retain talents, and to maintain a productive workforce.

As shown by these leading organisations, successful transformation to flexible working environments is about providing human-centric workplace designs, consistent and intuitive technology and support, as well as a cultural shift to managing by outcome, not by line of sight or command and control type leadership.

This requires a huge degree of trust and empowerment.

Now, it is up to you to work with employees and build a future workplace that the entire company will be proud to call home.
**AdditionaL Readings**

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- Editorial (2017) "The new work order Ensuring young Australians have skills and experience for the jobs of the future, not the past," Foundation for Young Australians.