

OFFICE WORK HAS CHANGED. . .

Four Transformations to Office Work That will Impact Office Location and Building Selections

1 From repetitive tasks to problem solving

In previous eras offices tended to be filled by assembly lines of workers compiling and copying documents or business correspondence (whether by hand or typewriter). Today word processors have removed the need to re-type documents whenever a minor change occurs. Computers help to streamline the gathering and storage of financial and operational information. Yet, offices and office workers remain busier than ever.

Typical office workers today do more than gather, count and copy. Most analyze information, solve problems and are expected to think innovatively and creatively. Some office tenants today produce animated feature films, create video games, and program all types of computer software -- involving strategic-thinking and problem-solving tasks inconceivable a few decades ago.

“Space design and space arrangement have always been crucial to productivity. But while factories have long been laid out scientifically, such thinking was not applied so rigorously to office space.”

- Richard Florida, [Rise of the Creative Class](#), 124.

3 From clock-based to people and project based

Unlike many workers of the past who arrived at 9 AM, did their jobs, and left precisely at 5 PM, the majority of office workers today are engaged in creative challenges, often ones that they enjoy. Their problem solving and creativity does not necessarily follow the clock.

Employees will come in early, leave late, or even work longer hours and on weekends. They also take breaks when required when they feel unproductive.

2 From a space for work to a place for collaboration

Offices have always existed to provide space for people to work on the same projects, such as running a forest company. But the human collaboration involved in the past often resembled an industrial-style division of labour. Information gathering, thinking and typing were frequently separate functions. Today, these roles tend to be combined. Moreover, “flat management styles” have become more typical, further encouraging collaboration.

Today the value of an office environment is bringing people together to collaborate, share ideas and innovate, whether they are solving a client’s legal problems or designing and programming video games. They might be collaborating constantly or occasionally, and in both planned and unplanned sessions. What is crucial for innovation and productivity is being able to meet face to face on demand to move projects forward.

4 From Employers Market to an Employees Market

By 2010 economists and demographers predict a shortage of as many as 10 million skilled workers in North America, especially including knowledge economy workers (whom Richard Florida calls “The Creative Class”).

This shift will generate two primary consequences: (1) a greater concern with worker productivity -- creating a high performance environment where each employee can work as effectively and efficiently as possible; and (2) attracting and retaining workers will also be crucial to organizational productivity -- it will be an employees market.

Office buildings and office space have not changed as much as office work because until now there has generally been a labour surplus, allowing employers (office tenants) to have lower worker productivity and to be less concerned about attracting and retaining employees.

. . . ARE OFFICE BUILDINGS KEEPING UP?

Four Emerging Trends in Office Selection & Leasing That every landlord, tenant, and urban planner should note

1 Tenants will be concerned more about the overall “place” than the cost of “space”

In selecting office space, tenants will wish to create a high performance place, which allows employees to do their best work. This also aids in attracting and retaining quality people.



Relieving stress at
Canada Way Business Park.

In addition to providing a positive work environment inside their leased space, office tenants will want their offices in places that inspire innovation and creativity. They want options for employees to take breaks and that will help them relieve stress or inspire ideas (both of which increase worker productivity). Typical desired amenities include fitness centres, restaurants, cafes and green spaces on site or nearby.

3 Average square feet per person will stop declining

Packing people together who need to think and solve problems can create stress and reduce productivity. Yet, the nature of office work today is often collaborative, such that individual offices are not necessarily the solution either.

Therefore, many companies and organizations will seek increasing amounts of space to accommodate both individual and collaborative work. For example, a major Vancouver programming company leases 250 square feet per person. The facility manager believes that productivity would be higher if each team had their own small lounge for creative and strategic discussions as well as desks that were further apart. This would raise square feet per person to approximately 275.

Increased space per person is also resulting from companies choosing to offer some amenities themselves, such as large, catered company cafeterias, reading or TV lounges.

2 Demand for buildings Downtown and in Town Centres to increase

Most companies cannot afford to offer everything their employees want on site. These office tenants will look to the surrounding community as well as landlords to provide some amenities such as workout rooms, pilates classes, coffee bars, pubs or a park.

These amenity requirements are increasingly pulling many tenants away from isolated business parks and toward downtown, town centres and other highly urban areas (such as West Broadway). Transit access is also a concern or even a requirement for many companies.

“Demographic forces are about to put a squeeze on the labor supply.”

-- Business 2.0, September 2003

4 HVAC systems and air quality will become crucial factors in site selection

Air quality and temperature are among the biggest complaints of office tenants and employees. Computers and peripheral devices now fill workspaces, generating heat and consuming more power. And the more computers and peripheral devices, the larger the problem (in some software programming companies there is an average of over two computers per work space). Because heat and air quality are known to impact productivity, tenants will increasingly demand better than what is often provided today.

A second factor involving HVAC will be accommodating flexible and extended hours. With work happening when people are productive instead of being dictated by a clock, tenants will increasingly demand that HVAC be available any time in their units. Being able to focus air conditioning or heat onto a specific floor or unit will be required.

This Special Feature presents the preliminary findings of forthcoming research reports. To receive copies when they are published, please contact Wendy Waters, Research Director at wwaters@avisonyoung-van.com or 604-647-5084