Free Address Workplace Strategies

Knoll workplace research identified four major themes impacting and driving the workplace today: a desire for flexibility, the need to find a balance between spaces for individual and team work modes, increased need for hospitality in the workplace, and of course, the growing emphasis on personal well-being. To address these challenges and goals, many organizations are utilizing free address workplace strategies.

The terms "Agile" working, "Free Address," and "Hoteling" are often used interchangeably, creating confusion in workplace planning. This topic overview demystifies these terms and clarifies the role of each program as workplace strategies. In addition to defining each practice, this brief will review appropriate workplace planning elements and provide tactics to reduce future risk and product suggestions for solutions. For further information, refer to the Agile Working topic overview and the Knoll educational presentation.

"Free Address" or "Free Addressing" —
No fixed seat assignments; "unassigned"

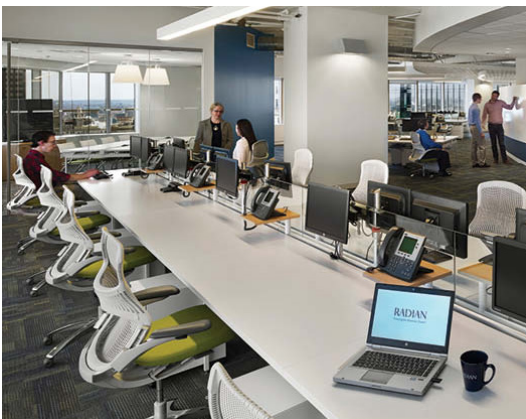**Hoteling —** reservable spaces

Hot-desking — unreservable desk-sharing

Mobile Working — home, or campus-wide working

Flex-Work — a company-implemented program

"Agile" Work(ing) — software development methodology

"Smart Workplace" — branded term for free address

Organizations make the choice to move to "free address" environments for several reasons which can be considered in two categories: Operational and Strategic. Additionally, organizations are not only seeking more flattened hierarchies and connecting operating structures, but the percentage of contract and temporary workers is also increasing. Finally, offices have high levels of mobility – workers rarely spend all day at one place, and on larger campuses where personnel may move between buildings or office and jobsite, they don't need a desk to occupy all day, every day.

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OPERATIONAL

- Optimize utilization of real estate assets
- Adapt to changing teams' needs and capacity
- Manage real estate expenses
- Reduce square footage per person

STRATEGIC

- Accommodate mobile workforce
- Drive innovation
- Dissolve departmental silos
- Spur creativity
- Improve employee engagement

There are a few common benefits and challenges associated with the move to a free address workplace strategy. The most common motivation for free address programs is a desire to increase headcount within a facility. For a mobile workforce that works outside of the office most of the time - such as consultants or outside sales personnel - free address may provide a good solution by increasing the seat ratios to allow for seat sharing.

However, that same outcome could become a challenge or even a critical problem for workplace planners if the entire workforce is in the office on a given day and seating capacity is insufficient. For example, if a sales team is typically out visiting clients throughout the week, but all are present in the office on Fridays submitting contracts, then free address strategies will not provide any capacity gain as a seat is needed for each worker on Fridays.

➕ Benefits

+ Optimizes seating capacity for intensely mobile works (e.g. consultants)

+ Offers individual choice of work setting*

+ Can provide capacity increase

+ Consolidates amenities to promote connection and generate cost savings

+ Allows for greater diversity of spaces

+ Makes unused vacant space available to other employees

⛔ Challenges

+ Lack of "home base" can negatively impact employee well-being

+ Work patterns may eliminate benefits

+ Inconsistent technology and ergonomic performance options reduce utilization

+ Free address space can also feel very impersonal/sterile

+ Employees reluctant to embrace free address may "camp out" in one seat

*if provided within planning model

Common Questions and Issues

Free address strategies raise many questions and issues, and a key discussion point is "What is the right seat ratio of seats to people?" There are many responses to that question, and the answers depend upon the types of "seats" being counted. Are café spaces equipped with screens, Internet, and technology so someone could work in that setting? Are private offices open for use when the usual occupant is away? Each organization and work group considering free address as a strategy needs to identify their own answers to these questions prior to implementation.

Early-stage implementation of a free address workplace strategy should offer a much greater seat-to-person ratio than the program target. This will reinforce occupants' belief that there will be a preferred seat in the location of their choosing on any given day. Many people experience some anxiety about using a new workspace - free address environments can be a big change from what a team is used to experiencing. Ensuring that there is plenty of seating, particularly at the beginning of implementation of a free address program, can help ease those concerns. Over time, organic growth will absorb those extra seats and the desired utilization will become common.

Maintaining cleanliness and hygiene is a significant issue for free address environments. Sanitation tools (hand sanitizer pumps or disinfectant wipe dispensers) should be easily accessible to every workspace. Etiquette practices and workspace training for free address spaces should include daily and weekly cleaning routines, such as wiping down each workspace at the start and end of each day. Additionally, providing individual headsets for Voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) phone use is important to avoid the spread of germs between individuals.

One challenge in free address environments is making spaces feel inviting and comfortable – too often shared spaces end up as generic, personality-free, sterile spaces. Find ways to support individual well-being by: creating neighborhoods with distinct design styles, emphasizing comfort and adjustable ergonomics, and recognizing the people on the

Key Insights – Protocols

+ Offers workplace behavioral training and coaching

+ Develop proper workplace practices

+ Leadership must model behavior they want to see

+ Provide sufficient spaces for privacy

Key Insights – Place

+ A diversity of work settings and spaces is essential to support personal choice

+ Don't forget personal storage

+ Technology must be a primary consideration for successful spaces

+ Neighborhoods and other way-finding elements are important

Key Insights – People

+ Not every role is suited for free address programming

  • Some roles require space for private conversations

  • Storage of objects still matters for some groups

+ People naturally sit with their friends and their teams – assigned seating may be the only way to ensure interaction

teams in the space through totem walls, picture hubs, or other design personalization away from the workstation. Finally, don't forget to plan for personal and team storage – people have stuff! Think about security and accessibility of the storage from the users' perspective to ensure that it is utilized appropriately and inhabitants' needs are met.

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