Design for Integrated Work

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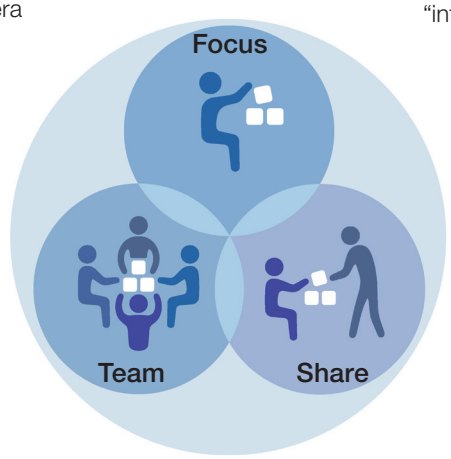
There are many drivers of change in today's business world. **We are seeing a shift away from the classic "command and control" business model,** in which the organization is designed as a pyramid, with top down leadership. This design worked well in an era of limited communication technology with mass marketed products intended for a homogenous consumer base. The individual employee was the unit of work, and work occurred in a static location—often within a private office. Most professional employees were men and there were only two generations at work.

Today, the collective wisdom of the group has become the driving source of innovation and decision-making. Companies are striving to become organizationally "flat"—breaking down internal organizational silos, and encouraging teams to cross-pollinate ideas and to take a multi-disciplinary approach to problem solving. The team or group is now the basic unit of work and their work products are knowledge-based and, thus, often intangible. Using the Internet and telecommunications technology, **employees are becoming highly mobile,** and work now occurs in a variety of individual and group modes and spaces within and external to the facility. Thus, **the workplace is becoming a resource, rather than a specific place that people go. The demographic composition of professional workers themselves has radically changed** and now reflects for the first time a majority of women, four generations at work, and a significant diversity of race and ethnic backgrounds.

The evolving business world presents a challenge to the design of effective workspaces—all of course, while controlling costs.



Integrated Workspace

A New Model of Work

In order to simplify the problem and bring coherent solutions to this complex intersection of work and workspace, some organizations, including Knoll, have developed conceptual models of work. The Knoll model of "integrated work" includes the notion of both individual and group work modes, and emphasizes a dynamic component—the ease of movement of people and flow of work between those modes—as key to organizational effectiveness (O'Neill and Wymer, 2009).

Work Modes

Today's work consists of three primary work modes: "focus," "share," and "team." **Focus is an individual work mode that occurs within a primary workspace that supports concentration and reduces interruptions.** Work in this mode is primarily "heads down." **Share is a collaborative work mode that can occur in individual or group spaces and centers on the casual exchange of ideas with a small number of colleagues.** Sharing occurs through joint viewing of a single computer screen, reviewing a document together, or simply exploring divergent thoughts with others. Sharing is a means of transferring knowledge between employees, and can include learning and mentoring. **Team is a group work mode related to specific work goals that occurs in formal and informal meeting spaces.** The team work mode is typically project work. However, the nature of team work can flow from formal to casual and the workspaces that support this work should match this ebb and flow.

Activity Behaviors

Daily work **includes the notion of "activity," the set of informal behaviors that provide social connection – the**


Focus


Share


Team

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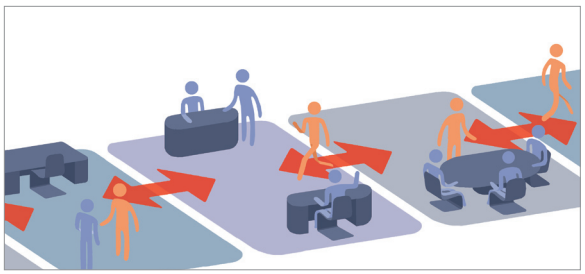

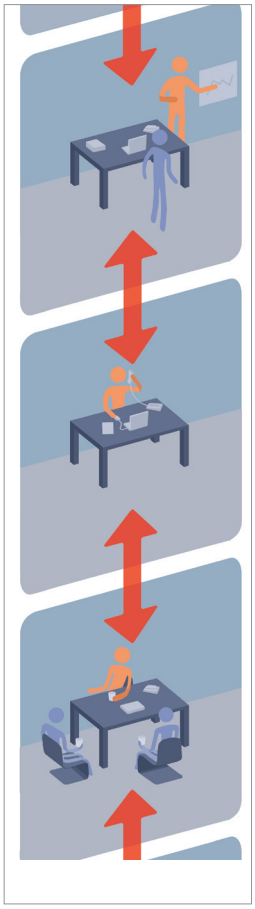

Above: Horizontal Integration
Left: Vertical Integration

link that binds people and the organization. As part of activity, cultural norms, the "life ways of the organization" are conveyed between employees. Thus, activity is a fundamental characteristic of the fabric of work, and is completely integral to the three work modes.

Workspace Integration and Performance

In addition to the work modes and activity behaviors, the workspace needs to facilitate **the seamless flow of people and information between the work modes.** We believe that the efficiency of information flow and physical movement between work modes is critical to organizational effectiveness—at least as important as supporting the individual work modes themselves.

There are two types of workspace integration. **Horizontal workspace integration** is the ease with which information and people flow between work modes that occur *at different physical locations* within a facility. **Vertical workspace integration** is the ease with which individuals are able to shift from one work mode to another (such as from focus to share modes) *within their primary workspace.*

Research Program

We explored the integrated work model and examined its impact on work effectiveness through a research program that involved several projects. In one research initiative, we interviewed 40 professionals across eight industries who manage and design facilities to understand their perceptions of our model. In a parallel effort, we examined the effects of workspace integration on employee performance by directly surveying more than 52,000 end users of workspace.

Our research provides convincing evidence that the ease of flow of people and ideas between work modes (quality of workspace integration) leads to enhanced employee performance and business outcomes.

Key Insights from Knoll Research

- Horizontal and vertical workspace integration occurs with equal frequency regardless of industry—suggesting that **both types of workspace integration play an important role in organizational performance.**
- **Companies tend to over-invest in focus mode workspaces despite the relatively low contribution of focus work to business success.** This is an opportunity to re-prioritize investment in furnishings and space allocation to support collaborative work modes.
- **Employee performance improves with increased workspace integration.** This suggests that workspace design elements related to horizontal and vertical integration can be optimized to enhance business and performance outcomes such as collaboration, learning and mentoring, employee engagement, and reduced facility cost.

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Implications for Facility Planning

Well designed workspaces ensure the smooth transition between individual and group work. In this section we discuss how to design spaces to support horizontal and vertical integration.

Horizontal Integration

- Optimize layout and location of workstations and offices to enhance visual access. The line of sight from person to person helps connect the individual to the group. This visual connectivity reminds individuals there are others around them and people monitor their behavior.
- Reduce overall horizon height of the walls and furnishings to increase visual access and accessibility. This is not to say

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that a single horizon is the right solution. Instead, provide the balance of horizons to support the work at hand: low horizons support collaboration and mid-height panels assist focused work.

- Create a variety of work activity zones to enhance chance encounters. Providing a variety of settings to support a variety of work is a cornerstone of dynamic planning. Understand your work processes and provide appropriate settings to mirror the work flow.
- Create collaboration spaces of varying sizes. This tiered approach to meeting spaces should meet the varying needs of the engagements—formal to casual.

Vertical Integration

- Design the primary workspace to permit quick, informal meetings (nimble visitor seating, collaborative work surfaces, marker boards, etc). Having a second or third person accommodated in the primary workspace allows for the exchange of ideas and information in a fluid manner.
- Ensure technology devices and furnishings are arranged to support collaboration. An adjustable monitor arm allows for more than one person to view the flat screen display, or wireless input devices make it easy for others to take command of the mouse and drive.
- Specify furnishings and technology that can be adjusted or moved by the worker. Support personalization of the primary workspace by micro adjustments—worksurface, chair, storage elements, etc.

References

O'Neill, M. and Wymer, T. (2009). *Design for Integrated Work.* Knoll White Paper, Knoll, Inc.

Knoll research investigates links between workspace design and human behavior, health and performance, and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments.

To learn more about this topic or other research resources Knoll can provide, visit www.knoll.com/research/index.jsp

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