

Supporting Workstyles for Greater Organizational Success

by: The Haworth Knowledge and Research Team

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Employees represent more than 80% of a company's overall investments¹—an astounding commitment for organizations operating in a world of work that continues to evolve at an exceedingly fast pace. Businesses today must face the dilemma of how to strategically invest their limited resources to ensure every employee is doing his or her mind's best work for organizational success. That strategy includes evaluating how the built environment influences both individual and group work,² and ensuring that the cognitive processes people rely on to complete specific work tasks are accommodated. Now more than ever before, understanding how a facility supports workers' needs for concentration and interaction takes center stage in workplace design.

Employees represent more than 80% of a company's overall investments. It's essential they have the tools they need to become more effective.

Invest in the Workforce

When used as a tool for implementing an organization's overall goals and strategies, the workplace affects many aspects of the organization, such as attraction and retention, employee engagement, communication, and productivity. Accommodating workers' needs, and the work they accomplish, is important when investment in the workforce typically costs 10 to 12 times more than the building's infrastructure.³ The facility can also support—or hinder—people's ability to concentrate and interact. People will naturally assess the physical environment based on its ability to accommodate the task at hand, driving them to seek an optimal level of comfort and social interaction. Strategic space design is one way to support their individual and collective needs for working alone and sharing information, for concentrating and interacting.

Identify Worker Needs

First it's necessary to identify the unique ways in which people work and the range of tasks they perform, taking into account knowledge workers' varying requirements for knowledge and information.⁴ Workstyles reflect the diversity of how people work within organizations, affected both by what is expected of them and how they prefer to perform their job. Workstyles are defined by key conditions that have a direct impact on how people work, such as level of interaction, autonomy, and mobility. Understanding the needs of the workforce can lead to the development of a strategy that provides the right resources—space, furniture, and equipment—in order to optimize worker satisfaction and workplace performance.

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¹ Brill, Weidemann, and the BOSTI Associates, 2001

² Heerwagen, et al, 2006

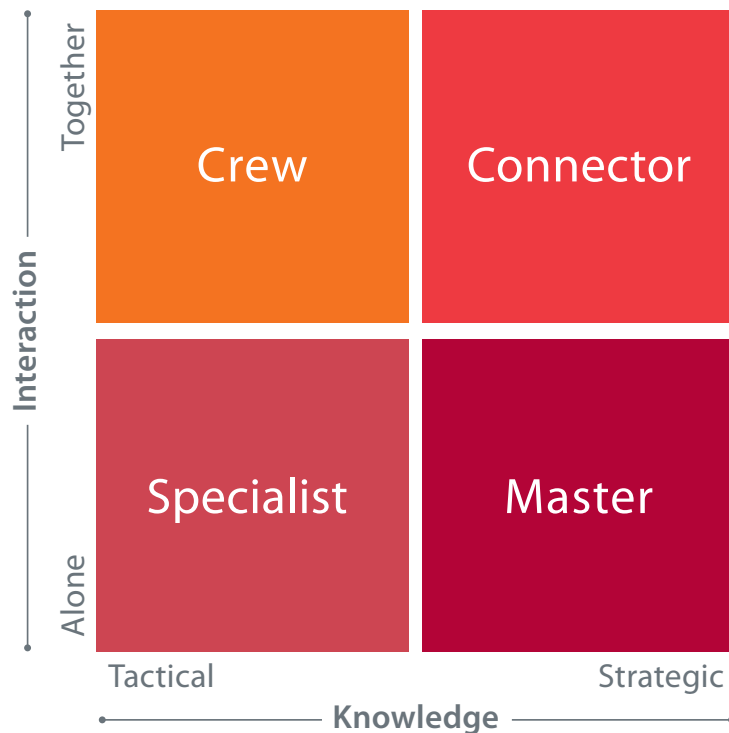
³ U.S. General Services Administration, 2006

⁴ Davenport, 2011

Four Workstyle Categories Based on Research

Planning an office environment is a complex task requiring a variety of places that support individual and group needs. As workers' responsibilities evolve along with technology, workspace design becomes even more complicated. Our in-depth, scientific study of workstyles has led to the identification of four workstyle categories, each containing key differentiating characteristics to help organizations make appropriate choices in workplace design that best support workers. Each workstyle has a relationship with two dimensions in the workplace—knowledge and interaction—to make it unique. Knowledge represents the type of thinking in which people engage—from strategic to tactical. Interaction may range from working alone to group collaboration. These are the four workstyle categories:

- **Crew:** identifies individuals who work in teams focused on tactical objectives and deliverables
- **Connector:** identifies people who often work in groups to generate new ideas and connect them to strategy
- **Specialist:** identifies people who mostly work alone focused on specific tasks and deliverables
- **Master:** identifies subject matter experts who primarily work alone to develop and hone strategic concepts



This matrix shows the interrelationship of each of the four workstyles with two dimensions in the workplace: knowledge and interaction. Knowledge represents the type of thinking in which people engage—from strategic to tactical. Interaction ranges from solo work to collaborative.

People generally have one primary workstyle that they rely on. However, based on organizational or project needs and goals they may work in more than one style. Below is a comprehensive profile for each workstyle category, including examples of the types of job functions represented by the workstyle.

Crew



Crews include people who work in teams focused on tactical deliverables and objectives. Their work is largely task-based, such as review of data reports and work plans, with focus on immediate response. Crews require a significant amount of face-to-face interaction, relying on the information shared within the team so each can accomplish his or her tasks. They spend their time moving back and forth between individual tasks and group work coordination. Crews' work is determined by external conditions, which are largely outside of their immediate control. Some examples of this workstyle are traders, web developers, various marketing teams, and online sales teams.

Connector



Connectors are people who often work in groups to generate new ideas that are connected to strategy. They rely on a high level of face-to-face interaction to meet individual and team goals. Connectors engage in strategic work relying on improvisation and judgment, requiring both solo concentration and group collaboration. Their work shifts fluidly between quiet heads-down space and dynamic group space. Connectors tend to have control of their work process and schedule. Some examples of job functions in this category include managers, strategists, consultants, and people who work on design or product development teams.

Specialist



Specialists primarily work alone focused on specific tasks and deliverables such as data entry and document review. Most of their time is spent at their own workspace where they can concentrate on the tasks at hand. Specialists' work assignments and schedules are largely determined by others. Examples include accounting functions, technicians, administrative roles, and code writers.

Master



Masters are people with deep expertise who typically work alone, engaging in strategic work that requires intense concentration for problem solving or ideation. Interaction with others is important to Masters, but most of their time is spent in their own workspace. Generally, Masters have a high degree of control over their work and schedule. Examples for this workstyle category include visionaries, researchers, writers, and engineers.

The Dimensions of Work

Workstyles are just part of the larger picture that shapes an organization, which includes the people who do the work, the work that needs to get done, and the interrelationship of work elements that affect the physical space: virtuality, interdependence, autonomy, and job complexity/problem solving.⁵ Virtuality, or location, is the physical dispersion of workers during the work day and the extent to which they use technology to communicate. Interdependence is the extent to which a person's work is dependent on others, initiating interaction. Autonomy is the freedom of scheduling or completing work tasks, as well as determining how they get done. And it can be directly related to job satisfaction.⁶ Both job complexity and problem solving are related to knowledge. While job complexity refers to the depth of difficulty in performing work tasks, problem solving is aligned with innovative, strategic thinking.

We identify variables across these four dimensions in order to differentiate workstyles:

- **Location:** identifies where people work, ranging from fixed to mobile
- **Interaction:** identifies how people work, ranging from face-to-face to solo
- **Autonomy:** identifies how much control people have over their work, from low to high
- **Knowledge:** identifies the type of thinking people engage in, from strategic to tactical

Two of these dimensions—knowledge and interaction—provide valuable insight in the design of workspace. Office layout is significant to the type of thinking people do since some workers require spaces that support concentration. It also affects circulation patterns and face-to-face encounters, influencing

interaction—a fundamental component in the development of social networks, especially those crucial to innovation.⁷

Designers must recognize and respond to these elements within the social and organizational context they're present in to facilitate worker performance. In some industries, research shows that office workers demonstrate higher levels of workplace satisfaction, job satisfaction, well-being, and organizational commitment when workplace design integrates with the tasks workers are required to accomplish.⁸

Knowledge: Not All Thinking Problems Are the Same

When Russian chess master Garry Kasparov played against the IBM super-computer "Deep Blue" in 1996, Kasparov relied on a cognitive process—and extreme focus—to aid in his strategic concentration. Meanwhile, "Deep Blue" performed a number of automated processes incorporating concrete knowledge, similar to human tasks such as mowing the lawn or washing the dishes. These concrete activities don't require the degree of concentration that strategic thinking demands.

While the ability to access and download information quickly has made many tasks easier, synthesizing it in a timely manner often proves to be more difficult.⁹ In the workplace, most people need to physically block the distractions that reduce their attention to this process of synthesizing. It's difficult, with so many things competing for our attention. People are working in increasingly more collaborative environments, where the average rate of interruption for an office-related task is once every 11 minutes.¹⁰ When a knowledge worker—relying on deep, strategic thinking—is interrupted it can take as much as 23 minutes before the original "flow state" is regained.¹¹ While people who constantly multitask feel like they're quick and efficient, they are actually experiencing higher levels of stress. In fact, research suggests that, for knowledge workers, multitasking actually saps productivity.¹²



5 Morgeson and Humphrey, 2008

6 Humphrey, Nahrgang, and Morgeson, 2007

7 Wineman, Kabo, and Davis, 2009

8 McGuire and McLaren, 2009

9 Heerwagen, Kelly, and Kampschroer, 2012

10 Mark, Gonzalez, and Harris, 2005

11 Mark, 2010

12 Davenport, 2011

What most workers need is the ability to find uninterrupted spans of time to immerse themselves in a state of concentration. People today often seek out this quiet refuge anywhere they can in the building. They may find themselves at “third spaces”—coffee shops, libraries, or home offices—anywhere that provides the anonymity and solitude they need to get their work done. In a 2010 research study by The New Ways of Working, almost half of the surveyed organizations had started an alternative workplace program within the last two to five years—a program that combines nontraditional work practices and existing practices aimed at improving human effectiveness.¹³ In place since the early 1980s, they have grown in reputation from a “quiet agreement” between knowledge workers and their managers to an opportunity that lets people concentrate so they can focus on the work at hand.



Workers often seek out the quiet refuge that's available in the building, or they end up at “third spaces”—coffee shops, libraries, or home offices—anywhere that provides the anonymity and solitude they need to get their work done.

Interaction: Humans Are Social by Nature

The volumes of knowledge that people carry from lifetimes of learning and experience are what contribute to meeting organizational goals and objectives, as well as nurturing innovation within organizations. If people are choosing third space locations to work, how can businesses rely on their workforce to gather insights, knowledge, and share these assets, along with their experiences? Fortunately, humans are social by nature, craving interaction, relationships, feedback, and the meanings that come from storytelling. Through these nurturing actions, people develop trust, transfer knowledge, challenge assumptions, and foster new ideas.

Workers are required to communicate more than ever before as problem solving has become notably complex and people depend on the specialized expertise of fellow employees. As an example, the finance department of a company may now rely on demographic information collected by the human resources team. Development teams depend on information technology expertise that comes from web analytics. The facility management team may need to know the effect of mobility on work and communication patterns to inform building designs. All of this interaction is critically important to workplace planning and equally as valuable in forming and maintaining the social relationships that are ultimately linked to innovation.¹⁴

“An effective workspace supports both collaboration and individual work with the right balance of different types of space for the occupying organization. Space allocation should reflect the impact of mobility and the need for interactions of every type, from informal socializing to formal, scheduled meetings.”

– The New Federal Workplace, GSA Public Buildings Service

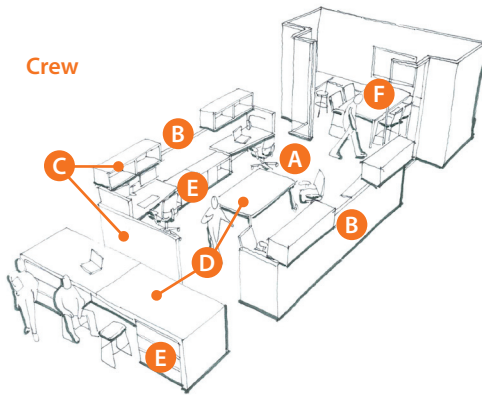
¹³ Ouye, Nagy, and Langhoff, 2010

¹⁴ Wineman, Kabo, and Davis, 2009

Design Implications

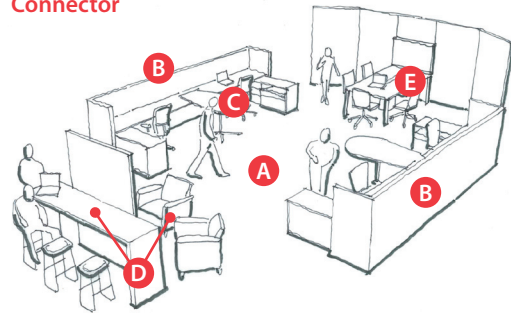
Our four workstyle categories provide insight into the nature of work in every organization, suggesting that traditional monolithic space standards do not optimally support employees' work needs. Each workstyle type benefits from design elements that uniquely address specific work needs in the office. And each is influenced by an organization's distinctive culture. The four workstyles are listed below with suggested design elements to suit their needs.

Crew



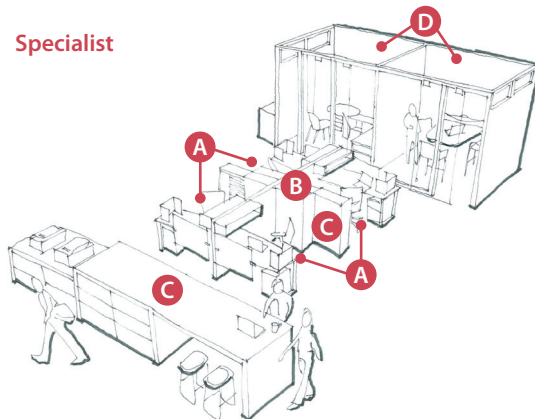
- A: Interactive group layout
- B: Sense of group boundary
- C: Some individual privacy
- D: Impromptu group workspace embedded
- E: Personal storage + shared resource library
- F: Coordination area nearby

Connector



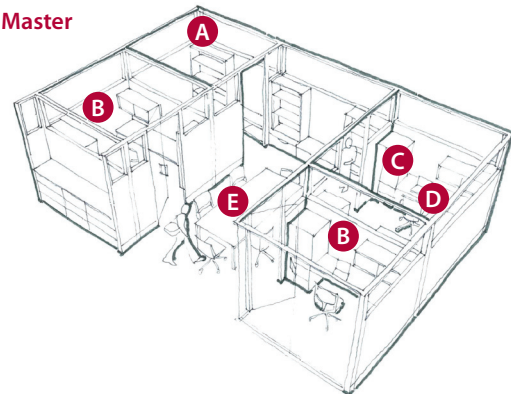
- A: Interactive group layout
- B: Sense of group boundary
- C: Some individual visual privacy
- D: Informal group space embedded
- E: Team room nearby

Specialist



- A: Quiet individual workspace
- B: Some panels for visual privacy
- C: Personal storage and shared files embedded
- D: Audio privacy rooms nearby

Master



- A: Quiet individual work environment
- B: Enclosed spaces or private alcoves
- C: Sense of personal control/ownership
- D: High amount of personal storage and layout surface
- E: Informal group space nearby

Understanding workstyles provides organizations with valuable insight toward workplace design that enhances desired work activities and experiences—allowing people to perform their best.

The Nature of Work Continues to Evolve

Since the introduction of Peter Drucker's knowledge worker concept in 1959, organizations have attempted to better define the complexities of office work beyond simplified task-related classifications. Those once simplified descriptors have become insufficient, as work processes have become more complex and dynamic, rather than routine and repetitive.¹⁵ Workers increasingly need more information and knowledge to work effectively in teams. The result of this need is driving new patterns of work that will force businesses to leverage new technologies and challenge organizational models.¹⁶ This impact can clearly be seen in the dramatic increase in collaboration, the reliance on technology tools such as tablets and smartphones, and the access to information. Where and when people work is no longer a technological constraint.

The workforce—now comprised of four generations, each with unique interests and needs—is distributed over broader geographic and cultural boundaries than ever before. At any given time, roughly one third of employees in private and public sectors are working remotely.¹⁷ Only 30 to 40 percent of workers with assigned spaces are actually using them.¹⁸ The traditional notion of work happening in the building is something of the past.

By recognizing the unique ways in which people work, organizations can create environments that support those workstyles, helping people achieve their mind's best work to enhance both individual and group performance. Responding with workplace designs that foster growth, inspire people, and make the most of their facility investment results in a direct impact on organizational performance.



15 U.S. General Services Administration, 2006

16 Heerwagen, Kelly, and Kampschroer, 2010

17 GSA Building Services, June 2009

18 GSA Building Services, June 2009

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