Change, Chaos, Contrasts and Compromise: Workplace of the Future

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Future Trends

As workplace managers, we are dealing with the impact of change – otherwise we wouldn't have a job. When we look into our crystal ball as to what the future brings we can see trends that will impact facility management. Our challenge is to help our organizations deal with the changes that result from these trends.

What are The Trends?

Changing Demographics

Today's workforce is made up of four generations of workers: the Traditionalists (1930's and early 1940's), the Baby Boomers (1945 to 1962), the Generation Xers (1965-1985) and the Millenials (1985-2005). The majority of workers today are 'boomers' or 'Xers.' Ask anyone and they'll tell you about the conflict between the boomers and Xers.

Boomers	Xers
Quiet	Rich sensory input
Large families	Latchkey kids
Calm	Frenetic
Closed office	Team space

Boomers like quiet space while the Xers can have multiple items running at once - a CD player, 2 or more software programs, email, instant messaging, cell phones etc. Boomers generally come from large families where they shared everything – bedrooms and clothes. Xers generally come from small families and were often latchkey kids. Boomers are typically looking for calm, quiet space (i.e. closed office) and Xers are comfortable with frenetic team environments. The easy solution is to accommodate each type in a space in which they are comfortable – however, the organization suffers in that knowledge transfer between generations is not occurring – and the boomers are retiring quickly! The facility manager needs to find a way, now, to accommodate the different generations to ensure knowledge transfer and find ways to reduce the conflict. By 2020 most baby-boomers will be in retirement years; in Canada alone, the labour shortage is expected to be approximately 950,000 workers.

Changing Skills and Occupations

The labour supply will increasingly contract, especially in technical areas. The proportion of technical workers is increasing as the work changes and those in non-technical occupations are subject to downsizing. As well, there are a number of emerging and promising occupations:
*   Computer related, multi-media, and telecommunications
*   Engineering, especially multi-disciplinary
*   Environmental specialists
*   Aerospace
*   Bio-technology
*   Accountants and investment professionals
*   Sales
*   Nurses
*   HR professionals
*   Building trades.

As facility managers, we will be directly affected by these emerging occupations. For example we will need to create an environment to retain and attract knowledge workers, and we will need to find technical staff to help deliver FM services.

The types of 'soft' skills required to succeed now and in the future are:
- Flexibility and adaptability to change – ability to summarize and analyze information, withstand stress, accept criticism, work as part of a team, work in a multicultural environment
- Independence – learning, problem solving, decision making, taking calculated risks
- Communications – orally, in writing, independently, as part of a team.

Increasing Importance of Knowledge Management

There are two types of knowledge – explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is that which can be or is written down (much is captured in computer files). Tacit knowledge is that which we gain through our senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Tacit knowledge is known as 'sticky' in that it is difficult to pass on to another person. We are not always aware that we are increasing our tacit knowledge. The ratio of tacit knowledge that we know we have received vs. that which we don't know we've received is 1:1,000,000.

We define the 'knowledge worker' as one who interprets or gains insight. It used to be defined as someone who works with a computer. The computer only has explicit knowledge. The knowledge worker uses all the explicit knowledge they can find and the tacit knowledge they have acquired to interpret or gain insight into issues.

The information hierarchy can be described as a pyramid: data is collated to become information, information is analyzed to become knowledge, and knowledge is interpreted to become wisdom.
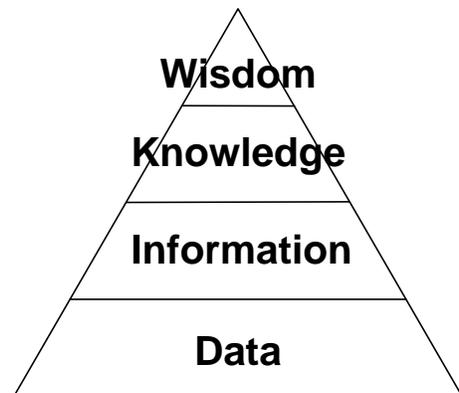
For example, to create a building condition report, the on-site data is captured, and the information is collated to create a building condition report. The information is reviewed and analyzed to develop in-depth knowledge of the building. Interpreting the knowledge in the report leads to the executive summary and risk management of proceeding or not with recommendations in the report.

Business and Cultural Shifts

There have been many changes in our work life in the last 15 years and these changes appear to be accelerating not reducing. Some of these changes include:

- The quest for continuous improvement (is it ever good enough?)
- An increasingly diverse workforce
- A desire for balance work and personal life
- Being connected 24/7

What these changes are creating is chaos and often paralysis. Many people are simply no longer able to cope with the amount of change and have reached the point of not knowing what to do or which way to turn. This stress is palpable in many organizations.

New Technologies

The reliance on technology, specifically email, is causing a breakdown in communication to the point that there are courses available on 'email conflict.' Only seeing the written word does not give us the opportunity to 'see' the body language and adjust our method of communication, which leads to an escalation of conflict.

Flat panel monitors are rapidly replacing the old CRT type monitors. Flat panel monitors draw less power, produce less heat load, are better for the eyes, weigh less, and require less 'real estate.' Now all we have to do is divest ourselves of the 48" corner worksurfaces!!

While there are many new technologies, both to be accommodated and harnessed by facilities, the fastest new technology facing facility managers in 2004 is wireless. Occupant pressure will be the driver for this technology. The exploding use of wireless technology at home, for personal use and for telework, has created a knowledgeable end user who expects the same kind of flexibility and ease of connection in the workplace. The same user may not have the same awareness of all the data security issues that the use of wireless creates.

Communications networks are not necessarily, or even probably, totally wireless from end to end. The most important concern is to free the end user from the need to physically connect the device that he/she is using to a specific physical connector on the wall or in their workstation.

Until now, the relationship of the physical construction of the building and the communications systems has been the issues of where to run the vertical and horizontal backbone cabling, where to locate the communications closets and how to get the voice and data wiring to every workstation. With the increasing use of wireless, these concerns will be lessened, but other concerns take their place.

We know that thick concrete is a barrier to radio signals, and we know that metal components can impede or block wireless signals completely. For the facility manager, this means that attention will need to be paid to the actual construction materials for both the facility and its contents, to avoid creating avoidable blockage of wireless signals.

One surprising benefit is the ability to adapt older, historic buildings into state-of-the-art office facilities that, in the past would not accommodate the hard-wired infrastructure, but are easy to set-up with wireless.
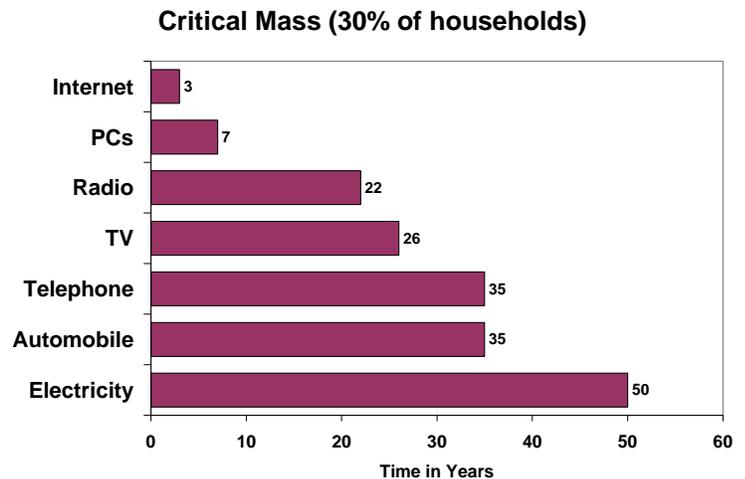
Change is Accelerating

In 1995
- 50% reconfigured their furniture, every six months or less
- 42% moved their people
- 12% of companies never made substantial changes to their offices.

In 2004 these percentages continue to increase. Most organizations react to change through functional or organizational changes. When this is not enough, they then make changes to the work environment. When this is not enough, they then make real estate changes. This is where facility managers can show their value – being able to distinguish when a facility solution is viable or when an organizational solution would be faster, cheaper and more appropriate.

In the US, critical mass of a new product is reached when 30% of household purchase the new product. It took 50 years for electricity to reach critical mass and 3 years for the internet to reach critical mass. What this shows is that we are acquiring new products/technologies and changing at a much faster pace.

Critical Mass (30% of households)

Product	Time in Years
Internet	3
PCs	7
Radio	22
TV	26
Telephone	35
Automobile	35
Electricity	50

Stress Indicators

With the number of changes, many people are reacting with a wait and see attitude, a feeling that nothing is ever good enough, and a desperate need for consolidation. The change we are experiencing is stress enough. As facility managers we have a responsibility to create environments that are as stress free as possible. Much of the stress we experience is through our senses.

Sight
- Visual clutter
- Unclear or missing signage
- Inappropriate lighting
- No variety – a monotonous environment

Sound
- Noisy equipment
- Noisy people
- Street noise
- No refuge from sound

Touch
- Dirty and sticky
- No texture
- Too hot, too cold
- Quality of finishes

Taste
- Feeling that 'I'm not even worth a cup of coffee'
- Lack of scheduled social interaction
- 'Left a bad taste in my mouth'

Smell
- Bad or stale air
- No welcoming smells
- Diversity in food
- Allergies – perfume, cleaning products, off-gassing

There are two other senses that I talk about – intuition and balance.

Intuition
I believe that intuition is the culmination of the tacit knowledge that we have received and unconsciously processed. In North America many don't have confidence with decisions based on intuition, and risk aversion is not always respected. In addition there are cultural differences in how we react and interpret events.

Balance can be defined as a state of equilibrium. In the office today, enabling employees to balance work and family life is becoming a competitive advantage for many companies – it is the essential establishment of trust from employers that employees 'know what has to be done' and can manage their own schedules. Benefits now include flextime, elder-care assistance, flexible scheduling, job-sharing, adoption benefits, on-site summer camp, employee help lines, even pet-care and dry cleaning services.

The challenge to facility service providers is to be prepared for and reduce the cost and impact of change.
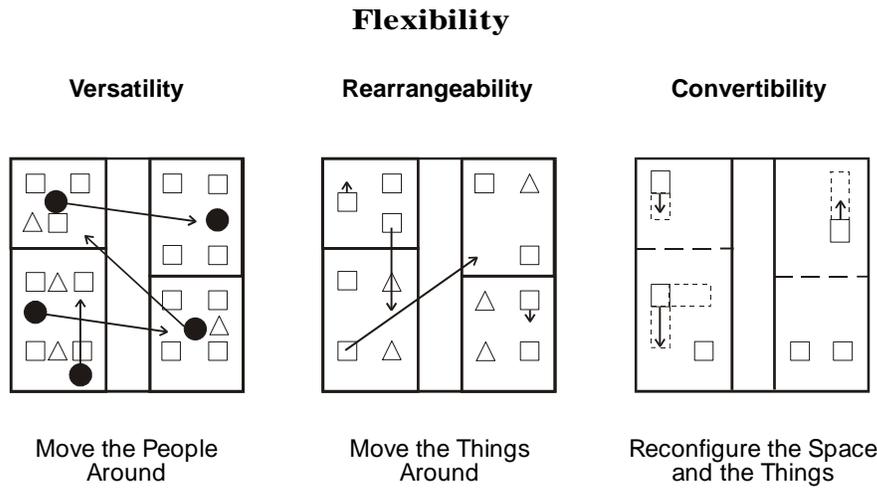
How do you…
- Plan when the organization is constantly changing?
- Maintain efficiencies in planning, budget and control?
- And keep the cost of churn under control?

## Options - Real Estate, Planning and Behavioral

Real Estate - Rather than redundancy, consider building in the capability for flexibility and adaptability.

Flexibility of the Interior Work Environment can be defined as a measure of a building accommodation setting that has the capability to respond or conform to organizational operational change with respect to three major planning criteria - versatility, rearrangeability, and convertability.

Flexibility

Versatility	Rearrangeability	Convertibility

Move the People Around	Move the Things Around	Reconfigure the Space and the Things

Based on Pena, William, 1987, Problem Seeking, Washington, DC, American Institute of Architects Press

Adaptability of the Building Fabric
is a measure of a building's capability to respond to major changes in functional use which involves implementation of new accommodation settings within an existing physical asset.
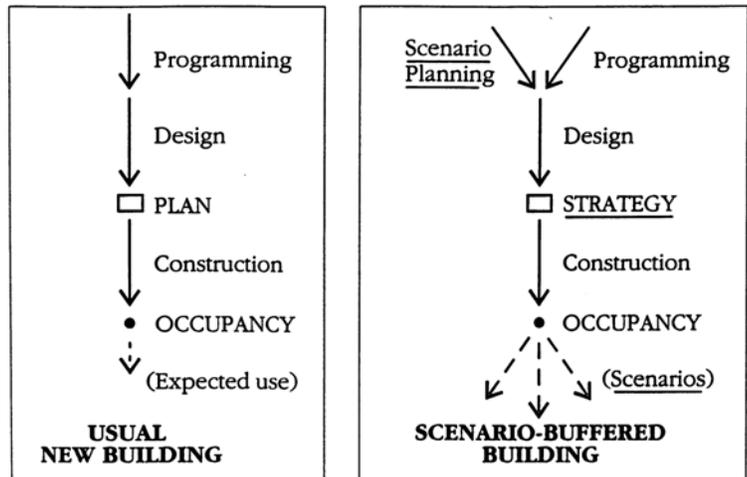
Brand, Stewart, 1994, How Buildings Learn, New York, New York, Penquin Books

Planning Options

What are people asking for in their work environment?

At a recent symposium we heard from occupants about how they want support from facilities and the types of spaces they need:
- Connect with my community
- More, smaller, faster, shorter projects
- Keep managers out of trouble
- The latest and greatest technology
- Space that I can personalize and have some choice

Options for the Senses – Ways to Reduce Stress in the Work Environment

Sight
- Lighting – high overall brightness, quality and variety in daylighing, automatic occupancy switching
- Wayfinding – do it and keep it current – nothing is more stressful than trying to find your way somewhere and the signage either doesn't exist, or is not current. As more new staff arrive, we can longer assume everyone knows where they are going.
- Colour – give your occupants some choice in colour in their personal workspace that still ensures a thread of continuity within a framework

Sound
- As the percentage of open workstations increases, the percentage of closed meeting space needs to increase
- Provide a variety of types of spaces to support a variety of types of tasks
- Use acoustic materials wherever possible
- Educate occupants on the differences in behavior protocols associated with closed office privacy, standing privacy and seated privacy

Touch
- Too hot, too cold – give your occupants some control
- Some theatres calculate heat load based on ticket sales and adjust before people start to complain
- Activate HVAC as the door is opened, or lights are turned on, in meeting and conference rooms
- Add texture – half the population is kinesthetic

Taste
- Schedule lunch and learns – increases knowledge, provides a social setting and shows you care about the employee
- Provide beverages – or the infrastructure for someone else to
- Be careful not to cater solely to the generation Xers

Smell
- Sears makes automatic adjustment of fresh air by measuring carbon-dioxide
- Have coffee brewing before occupants arrive (many people told me that having the lights on and the smell of coffee makes them happy when they arrive at work)
- Real plants – they provide variety in the environment and some plants will absorb toxins in the air

Sense of Control
Facility managers have worked so hard to look after everything for the occupants, that occupants have lost a sense of control in their work environment. Think of the personal control in passenger vehicles vs. today's typical office.

Cars	Office Buildings
Task light	Sometimes
Air flow and temperature	Seldom
Music	Not often
Seat comfort	Usually, but people don't know how to adjust

How can you help your own FM employees?

- Build partnerships – with HR and IT specifically and with your occupants
- Give them the tools and the training they need and deserve
- Understand their specific interests and encourage them to become the specialist in that area
- Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Provide them with conflict resolution skills
- Deal with bad behaviour quickly - the single highest complaint about managers by their staff is the unwillingness to deal with someone's bad behaviour.

Change is stress enough – people who experience positive moods solve problems more quickly and come up more creative solutions.

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Note: This paper was written in 2004