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# **New Demographics New Workspace**

Office design for the  
changing workforce

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# Preface

Offices shape the lives of millions of people. How we plan, design and equip them says a great deal about the culture of organisations, the mentality of managers and the motivations of staff.

Some office design is accidental or unthinking, the result of decisions deferred rather than made. But today companies are generally paying more attention to the design of their workplaces, recognising that new business challenges, new technologies and new ways of working require environments better able to flex and adapt. As a result, office design has become one of the fastest-moving areas of design practice, its landscape constantly altered by managers, architects, designers and estates professionals in a bid to stay abreast of the demands placed upon it by organisational change.

In 1998, I co-authored a book for Gower entitled *New Culture New Workspace* with Gavin Turner. Our book aimed to persuade senior managers in business and government to tear down walls, eradicate bureaucratic structures and remove cultural barriers to create more open work environments. At a time when many companies in the 1990s were introducing change management programmes for employees to cope with volatile business conditions, we argued that such exercises were largely futile unless accompanied by a redesign of the office environment to improve teamwork, communication and morale. We provided a range of conceptual models to assist in that process – from town squares and village neighbourhoods to clubs and campaign rooms.

By the turn of the millennium, many of the more open and collaborative principles that we advocated in *New Culture New Workspace* were being widely adopted by different types of organisation. From city workers to civil servants, there was a gradual shift to open-plan working, first a trickle and then a tide. We felt we'd helped to win the argument about the direct impact of physical conditions on how people work, an issue often overlooked in management. We felt we'd succeeded in getting companies to think

in a fresh way about culture and environment rather than imposing the dead hand of process and systems.

But as the new decade wore on and such concepts as ‘open innovation’ and ‘collaborative culture’ became buzzwords, I began to recognise that maybe the pendulum was beginning to swing too far in the opposite direction. Maybe the call to break down barriers and introduce a cappuccino culture in every organisation was creating as many discomforts as opportunities. The type of workforce we originally discussed in *New Culture New Workspace* was changing – in terms of demographics and attitude and, crucially, in terms of the type of work being done in an increasingly knowledge-based economy.

Twelve years on from the 1998 publication, this new book is in many ways a sequel. *New Demographics New Workspace* adopts the same three-part structure of the original – reviewing the context and then rethinking the culture and redesigning the environment. Once again a series of new conceptual design models are discussed. *Financial Times* cartoonist Roger Beale, who brings a welcome levity to the serious business of the office environment, again comments wryly on the action.

Whereas *New Culture New Workspace* alerted senior managers to how office design can support changes to organisational culture to enable more effective and fulfilled working lives, this new volume has a modified message – its purpose is to alert senior managers to how the design of the work environment can support an ageing workforce to enjoy an extended working life inside knowledge-based organisations.

My co-author on the first book, Gavin Turner, was an expert in management and marketing; our focus for the most part was on business productivity. To develop this new book, I collaborated with an anthropologist, Jo-Anne Bichard, and a psychologist, Alma Erlich. It is no surprise that a design and architectural writer should seek a partnership with experts in the social sciences given the profound links between work habitat and human behaviour. Our focus for the most part here is on motivating the workforce.

Just as the original book was based partly on an academic study – a De Montfort University review of *The Changing Government Workplace* led by Gavin Turner – so *New Demographics New Workspace* also has an academic research project at its centre. Jo-Anne Bichard and Alma Erlich worked closely with me at the Royal College of Art’s Helen Hamlyn Centre on the two-year study *Welcoming Workplace*, funded jointly by two UK research councils, the AHRC and EPSRC, as part of the Designing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century initiative. Many of the ideas in this book are based on that study and I wish to pay tribute to my co-authors for their expertise and endeavour.

What I learnt 12 years ago was that office environment and corporate culture are entwined – that physical barriers reinforce mental ones and that territorial imperatives hold up a mirror to the power plays of managers. In 2010, many of the physical barriers that characterised the inflexible and unloved late twentieth century office are gone, but getting the balance right between management efficiency and individual wellbeing is as elusive as ever. *New Demographics New Workspace* looks for answers in some new places.

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