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Workplace Redesign: Current Trends, Challenges, and Opportunities

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Executive Summary

As new technological advances arise, the way we work will continue to evolve as well. In order to keep up with this trend, companies have taken on the daunting task of changing their workspaces to better align with their needs. While some organizations focus on cost saving initiatives, others move forward with the explicit intention of changing the behavior of their workforce. Regardless of what motivates an organization, there is no single workplace layout that will guarantee success. With this in mind, this research paper is a collection of best practices from various organizations across different industries for those considering a workplace redesign. We've gathered these insights to assist organizations in making intentional decisions throughout their own redesign process in order to maximize their impact.

Methodology
We collected this data by interviewing representatives from 25 organizations. The participants spanned different roles, including Director of HR, Head of Real Estate, and Director of Organizational Design. Our interview process enabled us to define three distinct chronological stages of a redesign: the planning stage, the design & pilot stage, and the post-implementation stage.

Findings
Phase 1 (Planning Stage)
This stage is defined by organizations who are in the early portion of the redesign process. These organizations were either still collecting data, deciding on workplace layouts, or were waiting to hear back from those higher up before they could proceed.

Key Takeaways:
1) *Define your motivation:* A financially driven redesign process can look drastically different than a strategy meant to explicitly change workforce behavior. Knowing the driving force for the redesign from the beginning will enable organizations to make intentional decisions to accomplish their goal.
2) *Room for increased HR involvement:* HR's unique position as the voice of the employee can be better utilized not only in the early decision-making process, but throughout this initiative. Organizations should utilize HR more in this early stage to make design choices based on their understanding of workers and to initiate the change management process.

Phase 2 (Design & Piloting Stage)
This stage is defined by organizations who are just starting to engage employees in the process all the way to those engaged in rolling out their redesign plans.

Key Takeaways:

1) *Employee engagement is crucial:* Engaging with employees and getting their feedback early on in the process proved to be crucial for later success and ease of change management. Organizations shouldn't be afraid to get creative with this process and utilize different avenues of getting employees to brainstorm the ideal workplace situation.

2) *Losing an office is a pain point:* Many companies described being surprised by how attached employees felt to their offices. As a result, we recommend organizations establish a plan for offices before the redesign, and to start communicating the "why" behind this move to affected employees as soon as possible.

Phase 3 (Post-Implementation Phase)
This stage is defined by organizations who have finished their redesigns and are now collecting data on the effects of their initiative.

Key Takeaways:

1) *Invest in change management:* Organizations declared change management not only as their biggest challenge, but also their biggest regret. We recommend organizations engage with their HR teams early on in the design process in order to give them sufficient time to create and implement more effective change management efforts.

2) *No clear way to measure success:* Currently, no straightforward easy and accurate method of measuring success exist and it is something all the organizations we spoke to are struggling with. Despite this, we recommend organizations consider new innovative methods to assess progress. Some of these methods include using sociometric badges to measure the number of new collisions or even using a third party to hold observation studies on their behalf.

I. *Why* Study Workplace Design?

Workplace design has been top of mind for organizations and academics alike. Designs and redesigns can range in size and scope from simply updating the furniture of a space, to completely shifting from cubicle seating to Activity-Based Working (ABW) arrangements. In recent years, there have been shifts from traditional ways of working, like cubicles and assigned seats, to more progressive designs, like completely open layouts or hoteling arrangements for employees. The rapid emergence of these new strategies of working has created an equally rapid rise of conflicting information regarding their efficacy. One design strategy, open layouts, is regularly at the center of this debate. A 2018 study published in *Occupational & Environmental Medicine* found that workers in organizations with open office spaces felt less stressed and more active than workers in the aforementioned traditional workplace setting [1]. A frequently cited Harvard study published the same year found that workers in open settings are less likely than their cubicle working counterparts to engage in face-to-face interaction and more likely to communicate electronically[2]. This anecdote is just one example of the conflicting findings that exist within the field of workplace design. The purpose of this report, in part, is to provide insights and propose considerations for organizations who have or are currently pursuing a workplace redesign.

Workplace redesigns can have a profound impact on numerous factors that underlie an organization's performance. Redesigns are often executed with the goal of increasing productivity and engagement, decreasing costs associated with real estate, and even enhancing the attraction and retention of talent. Despite the drastic implications a redesign can have on employees, there is no single right way to conduct one, leaving many organizations to struggle with the process.

II. A Brief History of Workplace Redesign

Cubicles/Closed Spaces
The modern-day office cubicle was an attempt by Robert Probst to create a more pleasurable workplace environment. Through building off of the office landscape idea made popular by Wolfgang and Eberhard Schnelle in 1958, Probst created the notion of the Action Office in 1964.[3] Originally, his plan centered on giving employees more control over their workspaces. This meant providing a three walled space of fabric wrapped wood that was flexible enough for anyone to adjust to their needs. Regular employees could now personalize their space, have more privacy, or even create an impromptu conference room by joining pieces together if the need arose. Probst's creation would ultimately come to be known as the cubicle. Within no time, companies saw this as an avenue to cram as many people into as little space as possible in order to bring down costs.[4] They allowed employees to decorate the space with pictures, but drastically restricted their ability to customize it. Instead, they standardized the three-wall format to what we now associate with the standard cubicle. From there, they mass produced these mini cubicle-like offices to fill the space where desks once stood. While the cubicle does allow for personalization and more privacy than was previously available, it created a sense of isolation among employees. Current popular culture associates the cubicle with soul crushing mundane office work while also blaming it for isolating people and departments alike.[5]

Open Spaces
The desire to dismantle these inner and outer silos is what precipitated the current trend of open space design. This trend gained momentum in the 2000's as technology companies were looking for new ways to disrupt the status quo. Part of that disruption revolved around reconsidering whether the dominant cubicle plan was appropriate for their organizations. While many people had some appreciation for the privacy cubicles offer, these companies viewed them as deterrents to collaboration. By breaking down these walls, companies were hoping to boost communication amongst employees, which would hopefully boost innovation.[6] With work no longer centered around a set routine of tasks, the ability to innovate and match new age consumer trends became a priority for these tech and media companies.

The switch to open offices was aimed at creating a vibrant environment characterized by increased collaboration. The hope was that by removing the physical dividers, employees would be better able to have more of what researchers in the field call collisions.[7] A collision is an unplanned encounter that produces something good for the company or for the individuals involved. Each unplanned engagement is a collision as it represents an opportunity for the sharing of ideas and the strengthening of working relationships.

Like any new thing, the reality of the open office space did not always live up to expectations. Naturally, one of the main complaints is the lack of privacy. While upper management still gets their corner offices, employees are brought into the view of the watchful eyes of each other, which can be daunting.[8] Another common complaint centers around the potential for over stimulation. While the cubicle may not have been the prettiest thing, they did serve the purpose of limiting outside distractions, like noise. Once the walls came down, employees are bombarded with extra noise from conversations they would not have heard previously, distracted by the computer screen of someone else watching YouTube videos, or are constantly being interrupted by someone who wants to chat.[9] These constant distractions and the lack of privacy have driven many to resent the open office space design.

Activity Based Working
Despite its limitations, many companies have continued to pursue the open office design due to its cost saving benefits.[10] At the same time they have begun to explore ABW as a way to ameliorate some of the negatives of the open space environment. ABW focuses on creating adaptable spaces that can be organized to match people's needs. For example, ABW could entail a company creating designated huddle spaces for group discussions, quiet rooms for those who don't want to be disturbed, and collaboration booths for the impromptu meeting.[11] ABW is often implemented in conjunction with an open office design as a way to mitigate the distractions that can arise by providing these alternative spaces to work.

ABW benefits employees by giving them more autonomy on how and where their work gets done. With employees no longer limited to their desk for eight hours a day, they are free to find the ideal space that is beneficial for their productivity. In order to work

properly, ABW does require a companywide cultural shift. Employees may find themselves more accustomed to more traditional work methods and find their new autonomy somewhat discomforting.[12] This can create tension when they decide to pass judgment on others who exercise their right and work away from their desks much more often. The more traditional person may assume that the other is not pulling his or her weight because of this. Thus, it is important for leadership to implement appropriate change management methods when implementing ABW. Getting everyone to see the benefits and realize that accountability remains central to their success is key.

III. Study Design & Methodology

The findings of this study were based on interviews conducted during the months of March and April 2019 that typically lasted about 45 minutes. The interviews were structured, using the template found in Appendix on page 23. Interview topics included questions about the strategy behind the workplace redesign, process of the redesign, and post-implementation. Organizations were asked to volunteer for the study, regardless of whether they had recently completed a redesign. Participating organizations were given the questions one week in advance, and the organizations were responsible for selecting representatives that could best speak to the redesign process. Titles of the participants tended to span functions, ranging from Director of HR, to Head of Real Estate, to Director of Organizational Design. The participating organizations spanned several industries (see Appendix on page 23 for full list); however, due to the sample size, industry-effects were not examined. Once the qualitative data was obtained, it was compiled into a master file for analysis. In addition to interview data, insights from an extensive lit review, as well as from conversations with redesign consultants, were included in the analysis.

IV. Workplace Redesign Strategy Spectrum

To help make sense of the data that was collected from participating organizations, we created a model that functions across two separate axes. This model is shown in Figure 1 on page 8. The first axis is the initial motivation of an organization for pursuing a redesign. There were two primary motivators for organizations: financial motivations and people motivations. Almost all organizations stated a dominant motive focused on

either financial objectives or people objectives. However, many organizations cited other factors from the non-dominant motive that pulled them closer to the center of this model. The second axis of this model is the stage of the organization's redesign. Using our data, we were able to establish three chronological stages of a redesign: the planning stage, the design & pilot stage, and the post-implementation stage. We then placed each participating organization in the model based on their primary strategic drivers and where they were in their redesign process. Each organization is represented by an **X**.

Figure 1. Workplace Redesign Strategy Spectrum
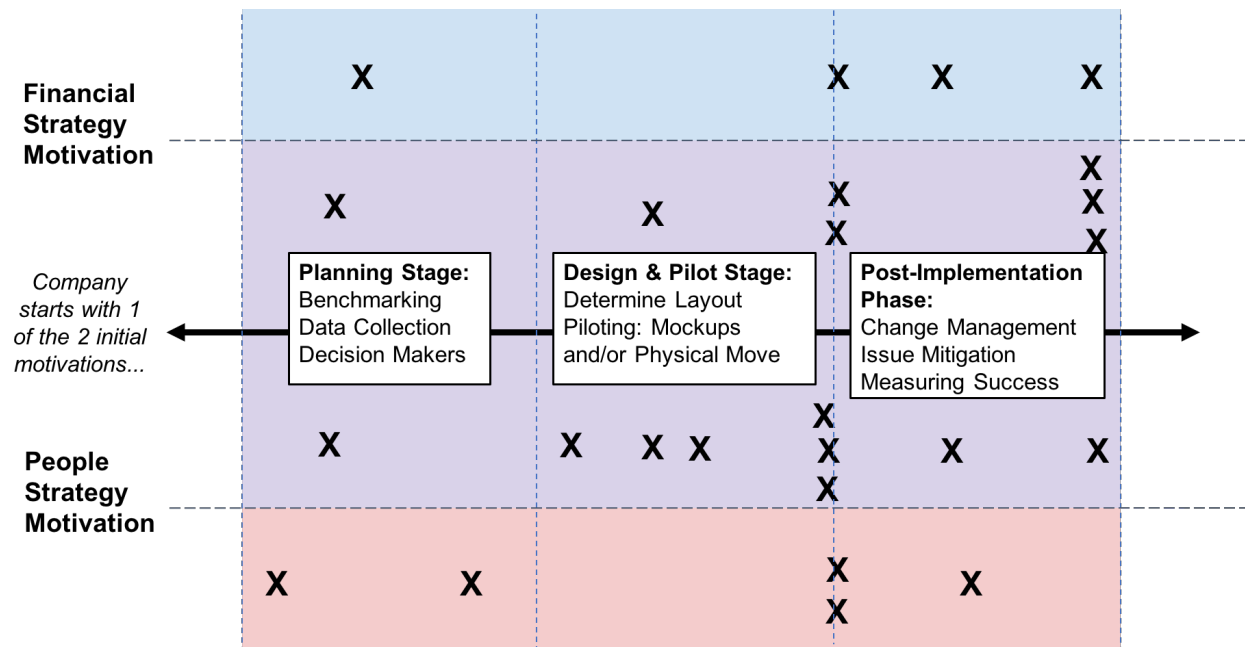
V. Findings

Phase 1 (Planning Stage)

Motivations for Pursuing a Redesign

There were two main drivers for an organization to pursue a redesign: to incite a change in people strategy or to impact financial strategy. A desire to change people strategy was cited by 62% of organizations as their main driver, with the remaining 38% citing the want to impact financial strategy as their main driver. Irrespective of what initially motivated a redesign, 46% of organizations stated that they had an explicit motivation to

What Motivated The Redesign?

enhance collaboration and engagement as a result. The next most frequently cited consideration was the need to attract or retain talent. In a labor market with historically low unemployment that has industry leading companies constantly competing for top talent, 42% of organizations saw redesigns as a way to further differentiate themselves from competitors and ensure that they were able to attract and retain key talent.

To help them achieve their goals, organizations leveraged numerous external partners. External design firms were used by 67% of organizations. The scope of these design firms varied. In some cases, organizations enlisted design firms as partners and strategized how to best change the workplace. In other cases, organizations had already decided on the design of their desired workplace, and utilized design firms to execute on this vision.
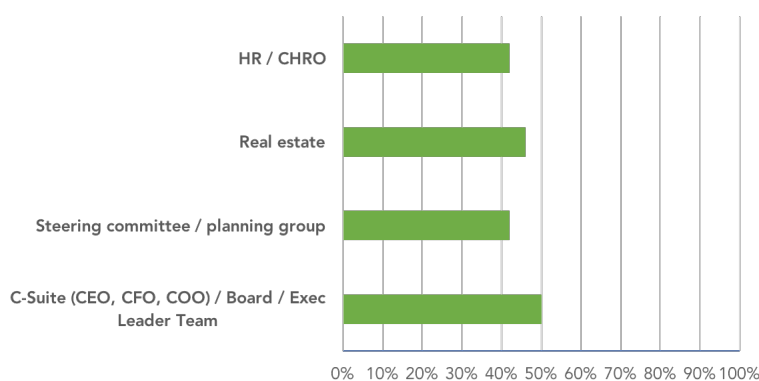
HR in the Redesign Process
Many decisions are made in the early phases of a redesign process. It was discovered that 42% of organizations leverage HR as a decision maker throughout the various phases of the redesign process, including the planning stage. In some organizations, the CHRO was a prominent

Key Decision Makers

decision maker, while in others, lower levels of the HR function were involved. The decision makers utilized varied across organizations, and also depended on what stage of a redesign an organization was in.

After determining if HR was a key-decision maker, we asked organizations what HR's specific role was in the redesign process. Though numerous roles and behaviors were cited, it was found that 58% of organizations used HR as a strategic partner. In these

HR's Role in the Process

companies, HR took on the responsibility of engaging with employees regarding the redesign, addressing implications and changes to the employee experience, and tailoring messaging to employees. However, 42% of organizations used HR in more of a non-strategic capacity. HR in these organizations was often involved with validating strategies already agreed upon by decision makers, serving as a messenger or intermediary in between decision making bodies, or solving issues that employees had as a result of a redesign.
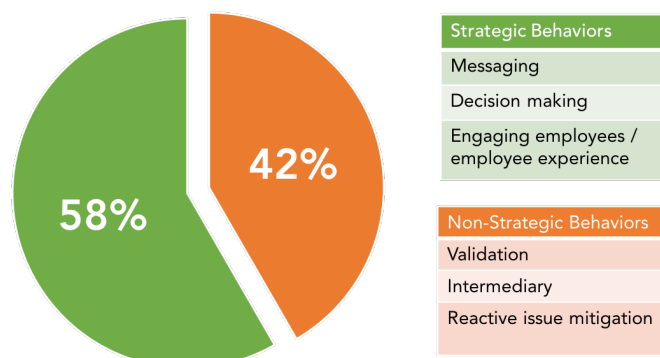
Phase 1 (Planning Stage)

Key Takeaways
- What is your motivation? Organizations have a multitude of drivers when deciding whether to pursue a workplace redesign. It is important to know what the desired outcome of a redesign is during the planning phase, as a financially driven redesign process and decisions made along the way may be drastically different than those in a people strategy driven redesign.
- *HR: A decision maker.* Almost half of the study participants used HR at some point in the redesign process as a key decision maker. Although their involvement varied at different stages of the redesign, it is clear that many organizations see benefit from the decision making capabilities of the function. Including HR as a decision maker is an area of opportunity for organizations who do not already leverage the function in the redesign process.
- *Strategic HR meets strategic design.* The role of HR is adapting to the changing world of work and tackling more challenges than before. The realm of workplace redesign is no exception. Organizations leverage HR in numerous methods throughout a redesign. However, HR is well equipped to tackle strategic initiatives within a workplace redesign, such as engaging with employees and making design choices based on their understanding of workers. Organizations who leverage HR early and often throughout the redesign process will surely benefit when the process is complete.

Phase 2 (Design & Pilot Stage)

Layout Type & Process
Based on the descriptions given of the new office layouts, results were coded into three categories: open (floors have predominantly open seating, minimal offices), cube-based (predominantly cubicles), or a combination of open and cube-based. A majority of organizations in this study (68%) had moved or are moving to an open floor plan. The theme of ABW also arose in the layout discussion. Approximately 72% of organizations were using some form of ABW, some explicitly stating this as their goal. This trend in the data matches the literature on this topic, and we predict ABW will only continue to grow in popularity.

Organizations were asked how they decided on which layout to use in their new space and often used a combination of methods. The most popular method was piloting: 84% of organizations used some form of piloting to decide on a layout. About one-third of these organizations performed a large-scale pilot that involved moving an entire team or floor to a new space for a specific amount of time, iterating based on feedback, and completing the pilot before moving the rest of the organization into the new space. Those involved in these larger pilots tended to vary; some organizations opted to use HR or Real Estate as guinea pigs, while others stated the importance of using employees from the affected business unit in the pilot.

The other two-thirds of organizations performed smaller scale pilots for various reasons (limited time, space, resources, etc.) and this included mockups such as furniture fairs, model spaces, and virtual tours of a new space. Either way, a majority of organizations found that it was most effective to test out a new configuration before full implementation.

How Did You Decide Which Layout to Use?

*Categories are not mutually exclusive

Other methods that organizations used included conducting studies. Data was used by 60% of organizations as a way to help make layout decisions, with a majority stating that focus groups were the most effective way to collect this data. Exploratory employee surveys, benchmarking studies, observation studies, and sensor studies were also cited as collection methods. Finally, 44% of organizations stated that they found leveraging their external partner useful in helping decide on their layout. Architects were the most common partner at this stage in the redesign process.
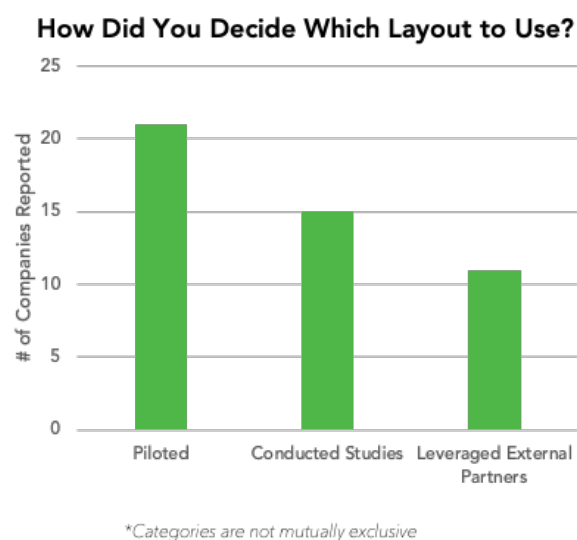
Involving the Voice of the Employee
Virtually all organizations chose to involve a subset of their employee base in the design process; for the few who said no, they stated either that it "slowed them down" or "we've done this so often that we know what they need." There were two main motivations behind involving employees: to make change management easier later on, and/or because they needed to better understand what employees needed before moving forward with the design. Regardless of motivation, the most common way to incorporate employee voice was through the data collection process (surveys and focus groups). Forty percent of organizations encouraged some sort of physical participation in the process, such as hosting tours of a new space, allowing voting on designs, and hosting company-wide events devoted to the redesign.

Degree of Design Standardization & Personalization
Sixty-eight percent of organizations stated that they had some sort of standardized[13] design throughout their company. The reasons for having standardization varied: One organization that has offices across the country stated it's important to have a common look and feel from a company culture perspective, while another spoke about how it's just operationally easier to have a standard design. About half of the organizations allowed for local customizations - one stated that while there is a standard design, they promote "freedom of responsibility, meaning if someone wants a customization and it makes sense, then they'll do it." The most common factor in allowing for customizations was based on specific team/department needs (e.g., needing more whiteboard space).

Organizations were also asked whether they allow employees to personalize their workstations (e.g., hanging up photos, bringing in plants, etc.). The responses to this question tended to vary: yes, employees are still allowed to decorate their workstation post-redesign in 44% of organizations, while 39% stated that no, there is now a policy in place that restricts workstation personalization (mainly for

Are Employees Allowed to Personalize Their Workspace?

No 39%
Yes 44%
Limited 17%
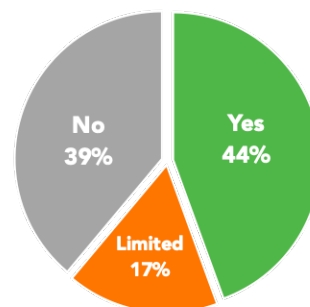
*Based on the 19 companies that answered this question

reasons relating to standardization as explained above). The other 17% had limited personalization, meaning that they restricted personal workspace personalization but allowed employees to decorate shared spaces (lockers, team photo boards, etc.)

Hoteling & Assigned Seating
Despite the recent literature on the benefits of hoteling, only 24% of organizations cited the use of hoteling across the entire company. Forty-three percent of organizations tried to use hoteling more on a case-by-case basis. Many of these organizations spoke about how some teams were more remote by nature, and therefore were much more suited to share space than other teams. The most common concern when it came to hoteling was the issue of privacy. Some of the organizations in this study require privacy due to industry requirements (e.g., insurance or financial) and were resistant to this concept because of this.

Handling the Office Hierarchy
In the redesign process, it was common for organizations to take the valuable square footage of larger offices and convert it into new areas like huddle rooms, conference rooms, and open seating. This meant that many employees were losing offices – which, for some employees, can be upsetting especially if the office carries a level of status or prestige with it. We asked organizations how they dealt with this issue when limiting the number of offices. About one-third of the organizations completely eliminated office spaces. As one organization stated, "This way, we're promoting fairness and avoiding a have, have-nots philosophy."

The other two-thirds of organizations limited the number of offices and had to grapple with this issue. The most common way to handle this was by adjusting the level requirement - i.e., if before managers and above got offices, now only VPs and above get them. While this was a clear-cut policy, it often didn't pacify the affected employees. Other organizations tried to appease employees by implementing a by-request process (e.g., employees needing disability accommodations were prioritized) or by having offices assigned functionally (e.g., only the legal team has them). Several organizations also cited moving offices to the middle of the floor so that the majority of employees were able to sit near windows, knowing that windowless offices were less attractive.

How Do You Handle Hierarchy in Your New Space?
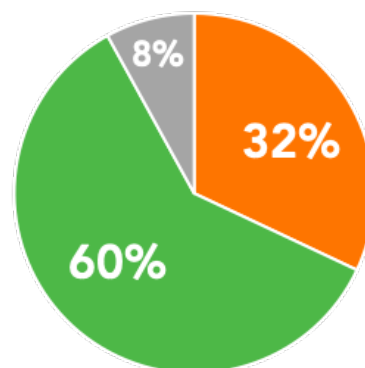
- Completely open - no one has an office
- Defined line of who gets an office
- Unsure/Haven't gotten that far

Key Takeaways - Phase 2 (Design & Pilot Stage):

- Test and retest...with your employees. One of the most commonly cited and successful techniques for finding the ideal design was involving employees in the pilot process. This doesn't need to be a long, expensive process – it can be something as small as virtual tours or having employees vote for chair designs online. But engaging with employees and getting their feedback early on in the process proved to be crucial for later success and ease of change management.

- The need for adaptability. Most organizations are now dealing with diverse, multiple generations in their workforce who have different needs and working styles. At the same time, many organizations desire a consistent design throughout their workplace. How should these competing demands be handled? One suggestion based on this data is to allow for employee choice in the design. Whether this is achieved through ABW or hoteling or something else, organizations need to think about putting some of the onus back on the individual to figure out what's best for them.

- Don't be afraid to get creative. There are many ways to figure out which layout is best for your employees. One organization recalled architects coming in to host focus groups and having employees use Play-Doh and Legos to build a prototype of their ideal space, which we believe is a creative tactic to both collect data as well as involve the employee in the process.
- There's no perfect way to handle office assignments. Taking away offices will always be hard for some employees, no matter what. The most important takeaway for this issue was the change management piece. It is crucial to establish a plan for offices before the redesign, and to start communicating the "why" behind this move to affected employees as soon as possible. Then, be sure to engage leaders who will be out on the floor as change leaders. They will be crucial in modeling new behaviors from a top-down perspective.
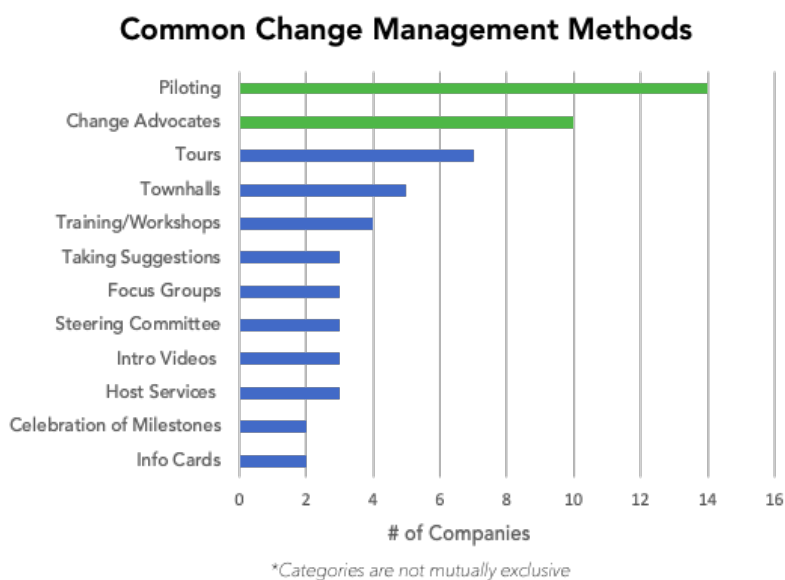
Phase 3 (Post-Implementation Phase)
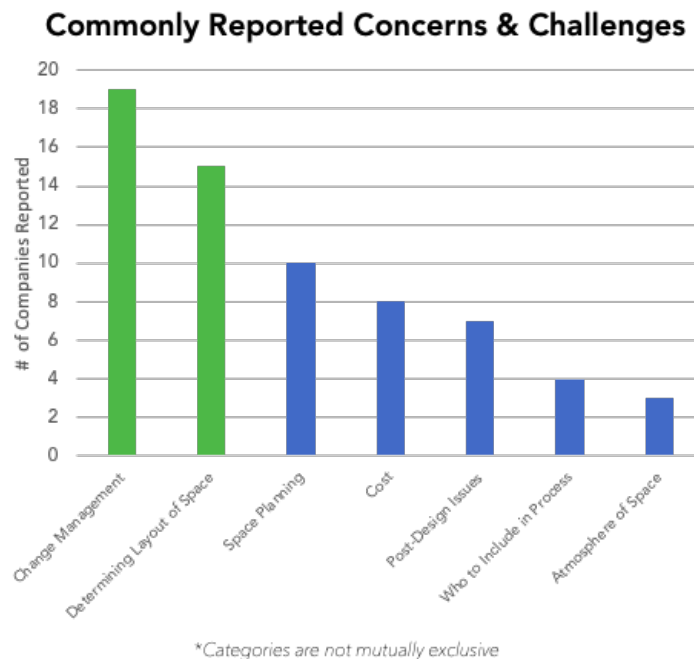
Change Management Strategies

Organizations were asked to name and describe the various methods utilized in the change management process. Piloting was cited by 56% of companies as the most common change management method[14]. Nominating "change advocates" was also a common strategy, which involved nominating a person on each team who would act as the conveyor of information to their team as well as bring input and feedback from their team back to the lead designers. Other more unique methods included holding etiquette training for how to use the new space, as well as sending out introduction videos to get employees excited about the space.

Common Concerns and Challenges

Common Change Management Methods

(Bar chart showing # of Companies for each method)
- Piloting: 14
- Change Advocates: 10
- Tours: 7
- Townhalls: 5
- Training/Workshops: 4
- Taking Suggestions: 3
- Focus Groups: 3
- Steering Committee: 3
- Intro Videos: 3
- Host Services: 3
- Celebration of Milestones: 2
- Info Cards: 2

# of Companies

*Categories are not mutually exclusive

While most organizations had a lot of change management tactics to employ, 76% of them also cited change management as being their biggest challenge in the redesign process. While "change management" can encompass many things, in this instance, it primarily related to changing mindsets and behaviors of employees when moving into a new space. For example, in redesigns where organizations moved from closed cubicles to an open layout, the expectations of how work should be done had to shift, and this was challenging for organizations to communicate.

Commonly Reported Concerns & Challenges

# of Companies Reported

Categories (left to right): Change Management (19), Determining Layout of Space (15), Space Planning (10), Cost (8), Post-Design Issues (7), Who to Include in Process (4), Atmosphere of Space (3)

*Categories are not mutually exclusive

Another common challenge that 60% of organizations faced related to selecting the right configuration of the space: As one organization explained, "Getting the right mix of huddle rooms and conference rooms and individual work spaces is something we never get right the first time." Figuring out how to make their space adaptable to different types of workers and workstyles was also included in the configuration challenge category.

Other cited challenges included figuring out how to deal with severe space limitations (40%), managing a tight budget (32%), and handling post-design regrets like lack of storage and parking spaces (28%).

Issue Mitigation Strategies

Once the design was completed, we asked organizations how they mitigated issues as they arose. Issues were categorized by prevalence (comment frequency) and sorted into three buckets: high, medium, and low. The top three issues that required the most mitigation included work privacy, lighting, and handling complaints. Less cited but still important was noise, followed by temperature and the inability to personalize a workspace. To see the full list of mitigation strategies for each of these topics, please see the Appendix.

Commonly Reported Success Measures & Observed Behaviors

Perhaps the most challenging question for organizations to answer was related to measuring success. Organizations had specific goals when undertaking the redesign (e.g., "to increase collaboration," "to better the employee experience") but often did not have ways to measure them. All organizations in this study used, or plan on using, surveys as a means of collecting data to measure success. These surveys are typically distributed six months post-redesign to gauge reactions. The most common metrics include overall employee satisfaction, as well as utilization and occupancy of the new space. When measuring things like collaboration, which is inherently difficult to quantify, most companies relied on self-report measure (e.g., "Is it easier to collaborate in this space?"). Overall, this was an area where organizations had more questions than answers.

Another less formalized way of measuring success is by observing behaviors in the new space. Organizations were asked whether they had observed new behaviors post redesign. The most commonly observed behavior was increased collaboration and socialization[15]. One respondent explained that "the vibe has changed...more people are getting together for lunch, spending more time in open spaces" while another thought that "the number of quick, impromptu meetings have increased." Besides increased collaboration and socialization, three organizations cited increased headphone use, likely as an employee response to being in a more open/less private space. Feelings of pride for the workspace (e.g., bringing in family members for tours) and increased requests for older spaces to be redesigned were also reported. These are positive signs, but more rigorous evaluation is needed to verify these observations.

Effect of Redesign on Remote Work

We attempted to see if there was any connection between remote work and workplace design. First, we asked if the organization had a formal remote work policy. Organizations with a formal policy comprised 72% of those interviewed, yet all organizations – regardless of their answer – explained that they ultimately leave remote work up to the manager's discretion. With functions having various needs that differ from each other, most organizations felt it was best not to strictly enforce a company-wide policy, but instead leave it up to the managers who are more in tune with local needs.

Second, we asked organizations whether they saw redesign as having an impact on the prevalence of remote work. Those that stated that they didn't believe there was a relationship between the two made up 44% of the group; in other words, their redesign efforts would have no impact on the number of people working remotely. Nearly 40% of organizations thought that there would be an increase in remote work, due to the preferences of the new generations in the workforce and the new ways of working. This attitude often led these firms to use things like hoteling to ensure that their occupancy rates weren't negatively impacted.

Key Takeaways - Phase 3 (Post-Design Stage):

- Change management is worth the investment. Change management was the biggest challenge organizations faced, and it's also one that can be mitigated with proactive planning. Engaging your HR team early on in the design process can make a difference.
- There is a huge gap in measuring success. Organizations don't have the answer for this...yet. A good place to start is ensuring that each project has a defined Return On Investment, which is then revisited intermittently once the redesign has been completed. Cost, occupancy, and utilization numbers can all inform the ROI. For the harder-to-measure items like collaboration, organizations will have to get creative. Leveraging new technologies like sociometric badges can help organizations figure out who's talking to who and whether connectivity and socialization are actually increasing. Bringing in third parties for observational studies is another way to get a more objective measure of how the space is meeting its goals. Overall, this area is worth the investment of additional time and money.
- Pay attention to remote work. Interestingly, 21% of organizations in this study had the explicit aim of using their redesign to bring people back into the workforce, despite the growing trend of remote work. For some organizations, with the amount invested in the workplace redesign and goals for increased in-person collaboration, this makes sense. But collaboration technologies will only continue to improve, and organizations should keep their eye on what new generations of workers are needing in order to stay engaged.

VI. Conclusion

Despite the vast amount of information circulating done on workplace redesign trends and strategies, there is still no single right way for organizations to go about the process. Instead of trying to approach redesigns from a "one strategy fits all" perspective, our research found that it is more effective for organizations to understand their real estate, their employees, and their desired outcomes to determine a path forward. With only 42% of the organizations we surveyed stating that HR was a key decision maker, there is a great opportunity for the function to make a greater impact in the space. Employee engagement and change management initiatives are vital throughout the process, and have a profound impact on the success and adoption of a redesign. Organizations are still figuring out how to measure success, and survey data is the most prominent form of measurement. Organizations can consider innovative methods to assess redesign progress, such as the sociometric badge data or third-party observational studies. Though the redesign process may seem daunting, the step-by-step checklist we have created and included in the Appendix is aimed at helping organizations plan their path forward.

In a rapidly changing area of study like workplace redesign, it is important to consider the future. Technology will continue to revolutionize the world of work, and workplaces will continue to change with it. As artificial intelligence continues to improve, "smart building design" will create workplaces that constantly change and adapt to the preferences of employees. As health and wellness becomes top of mind for organizations, it will influence building design. Organizations will find ways to increase their employees' connection to nature through the planning and layout of their buildings.

Endnotes:

[1] Casey M. Lindberg et al., "Effects of Office Workstation Type on Physical Activity and Stress," Occupational & Environmental Medicine, October 01, 2018, accessed May 29, 2019, https://oem.bmj.com/content/75/10/689.

[2] "The Impact of the 'open' Workspace on Human Collaboration," Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, accessed May 29, 2019, https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rstb.2017.0239.

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[13] Standardized: Having one design or a set of design options that are applied across the entire company.

[14] Note: This data was based on anecdotal examples from the lens of our respondents. These behaviors were not being formally measured by companies.

[15] Of the 21 companies described earlier, 14 companies were coded as using piloting in this question. This reflects a difference in motivations for pilots: There were 14 of the 21 companies that utilized pilots earlier on in the process as both a decision-making strategy *and* change management strategy.

Appendix

List of Participating Organizations

Interview Template

Are you currently undergoing or have you recently undergone a workplace redesign?
- Could you provide an overview of the past office setup versus how it is today?
- Who are/were the decision-makers? Are you relying on building design companies?
  - What is/was HR's role in this process?

Strategy/Overview
- What is/was the rationale for it? What are you trying to achieve?
- There isn't a perfect design – there are trade-offs. How did you weigh these different factors against each other?
- What are changes you regret making? What are some that you wish you could still do?
- What are challenges you've faced along the way?

Process
- How did you decide which layout to use?
- To what extent was the layout you adopted standardized across the company vs. customized to different departments, locations, etc…?
  - If customized, what factors were taken into consideration when making modifications to the basic design?
  - How does this work with a hierarchy? How open is open? Does it stop at a certain level?
- Are employees involved in the process? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
- How are you mitigating issues? (Noise/lighting/disruption/privacy/etc.)
- Personalization of workspace: How much choice do you give employees?

Measuring Success
- Has the change reaped any benefits yet? How are you trying to measure the impact of the new space? Engagement, productivity, knowledge sharing – how are they being measured?
- Are there any new behaviors you're noticing post-redesign?

Change Management Process
- What did the change efforts behind moving to a new space look like?

Miscellaneous

- Hoteling versus assigning seats – which one do you do? Are there perceived benefits or drawbacks to your strategy?
- How does a company encourage wellness (e.g., regular physical activity) during the day via workplace design?

Remote Work

- Does your company currently allow employees to work remotely/virtually?
  - If yes, who, how much? If no, why not?
- How did your workplace redesign impact the prevalence of remote work? Did remote work increase, decrease, stay the same?
  - Over the next few years, do you expect the prevalence of remote work to increase, decrease, or stay the same within your company? Why? What do you see as some of the opportunities and challenges this may create?

Issue Mitigation Strategies – Ordered by Prevalence

(key: red – high prevalence, yellow – medium prevalence, green – low prevalence)

Issue Category	Mitigation Strategies
Work Privacy	Privacy screens on computers, building out more private rooms/phone booths, acoustic panels on walls, increase in flex work options
Lighting	Shades for afternoon sun, dimmer lights, open seating near windows, adjusting the height of panels to limit lighting, special dark rooms created for people with light sensitivity
Handling Complaints	"War rooms", pulse surveys, ticketing systems/facilities service requests, temporary help desks, proactive communication strategy
Noise	White noise, headphones, sound masking, construction only after hours, choosing ceiling tile and carpet that absorbs more noise
Temperature	Comfy App, flexibility in where you can work
Lacking Personalization	Photos in lockers, shared boards in neighborhoods

Checklist for Embarking On the Redesign Journey

Phase One: Planning Stage
- What are your primary strategic drivers for undertaking this project? (i.e., financial versus people strategy drivers). How does this inform which types of data you need to collect before moving into the design stage?
- Data Collection - Understanding Your Business Context and Employees:
  - Benchmarking: What are other organizations similar to yours doing? What are the innovative pioneers in this space doing? Which ideas would work within your organization's context?
  - Observation: How do your employees work today/what are their needs? How may they be working and what will they need in the future? What's the gap between these two?
  - Forecasting Headcount: What are the headcount projections for the impacted population? (Tip: Complement these figures with the above observational data to create a more informed plan.)
  - Employee Sentiment: What's the current engagement climate of each team that will be impacted?
- Develop an ROI for this project: How will this be measured? (Tip: Start by looking at financial metrics, utilization, and occupancy metrics.)
- Decision makers - Who are the key stakeholders?
  - Internally: Many organizations will build out a steering committee and project team to manage the project. (Tip: Think cross-functionally.)
  - Externally: Who can you leverage as a partner to bring outside expertise into your redesign? Common partners include architects, design firms, and construction companies.
- Change management: Mapping out a plan in advance has proven to be crucial for success. What will this process look like during and after the project?

Phase Two: Design and Pilot Stage
- Determining layout: Based on the data collected in the planning stage, what does this tell you about what your employees need? How much adaptability do you need in the space?
- Testing before implementing:
  - What scale of pilot is necessary/realistic for your organization?
  - How should employees be involved? Which employees should be involved? When should they be involved? (Tip: It's helpful to think about this question in the frame of change management - leveraging allies and resistors, etc.)

- Space planning:
  - What mix of spaces should you have? (e.g., if increasing collaboration, you may want more huddle and conference rooms)
  - Do you have a contingency plan in case more space is needed?
  - Think about common pitfalls: Do you have enough parking spaces & storage space?
- Develop strategies for:
  - How will employees be able to give feedback about the new space? (e.g., online ticketing system.)
  - How will you determine office assignments, if the number of offices will decrease post-design?
  - Will you utilize hoteling, assigned seating, or a combination of the two in the new space? (Tip: Consider the benefits of both and whether it makes sense for your business context.)
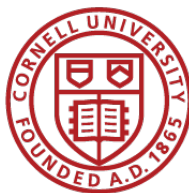
Phase Three: Post-Design Phase
- Change management: Who's leading this effort operationally? Are you involving change leaders and change advocates? (Tip: Implementing a rule of no big changes for 6 months post-move can give the employees a chance to learn how the new environment works.)
- Issue mitigation: Are employees utilizing available feedback channels? Is this feedback being translated into real change?
- Measuring success:
  - Is this redesign meeting the goals that were initially established? (Tip: Beyond sending out surveys, think about leveraging other technologies that may help you collect data - occupancy sensors, sociometric badges, etc.)
  - Which methods will be best for this data collection? (e.g., surveys, focus groups, etc.)
- Reflection: What went well? What would you change? How can you apply these insights to future redesigns?

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