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7 top trends for the future of corporate real estate

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Trend #1

From cubicles to co-working

Many corporates are now in full flight from the cube farm to funky, friendlier co-working spaces that offer higher levels of service and mission.

The rise of co-working is a "perfect storm" of freelancers and corporates both chasing innovation. Tech startups need plug-and-play workspaces, with each new round of investment triggering another space move; corporates, meanwhile, are determined to learn the wiles and ways of the agile disruptors. What was once on the margins of corporate real estate is now becoming mainstream, as co-working starts to figure on big corporate property agendas.

Trend #2

From design for appearance to design for experience

Workplace architects and designers are paid to make things look good. But appearance is no longer enough. Workplace experience is what counts. In the war for talent, the appeal of the workplace has to be much more than skin-deep.

In this context, we can expect growing focus on improving workplace acoustics, as the number one complaint in offices is noise. Don't hold your breath, however. As one leading workplace acoustician recently said: "If you ask an architect what they are working on, they are visual people, so they'll show you a drawing or a model. Tell you how it is going to sound? I don't think so."

From productivity to well-being

The health and well-being agenda is set to remain high throughout 2017. A traditional focus on productivity, which treats employees like cogs in a machine, is being replaced by a drive towards more holistic policies around health and well-being at work.

Furniture, settings, technology, culture, circulation, nutrition, and exercise are all considered in the round. We can also expect a growing focus on mental health, as stress, depression, and anxiety rises; on certification schemes such as the Well Building Standard; and on smart building systems that enhance well-being by creating a more responsive environment in real time.

From cake to calorie-counting

Once an ancillary service given little or no strategic thought, the provision of food and drink in the workplace is becoming central to corporate mission and culture.

There is now serious focus on the impact of provisions on productivity, on its nutritional content, and on the design of the spaces in which employees consume it. A key question is how to better integrate food and drink at work, as restaurants and café areas become multi-purpose meeting and social spaces, and food is integrated into collaborative activities to enhance knowledge and sharing ideas. The UK's Royal College of Surgeons recently drew attention to the damage that workplace "cake culture" is doing to our teeth and waistlines. CRE professionals are increasingly required to put a healthier workplace on the agenda.

Trend #5

From static to agile working

Agile working in office buildings is on the rise. Agile working refers to practices that let people move away from being tethered at a fixed point for long hours within the office building.

In this scenario, working life expands beyond the desk into a series of shared learning and social spaces dedicated to fostering collaboration and innovation. This approach suits organizations with growing numbers of freelance, part-time, and project-based workers, but it challenges the traditional workplace model. Traditional office interiors must be remodeled to suit agile work with more varied settings, and employees must be trusted to work away from line-of-sight supervision.

Trend #6

From control to curation

Command-and-control workplaces are out: curated communities are in.

The days of uniform office layouts, vanilla design solutions, unchanging lighting, and temperature constant within a narrow band are numbered. Smart technologies are supporting the idea of "curating" the environment for specific groups of workers, creating an ambience and set of conditions that people have specified – sometimes through a co-design process.

Trend #7

From facilities to hospitality

Is facilities management morphing into the hospitality industry? Signs of change are everywhere.

Workplaces are now being judged not on how many people they can cram into a space but on the quality of the coffee served. Corporate offices are learning fast from the retail and hotel industries, especially in the use of smart, real-time technologies to respond to the needs of customers. Expect more "hybrid" property solutions in which corp space shares with retail, co-working, and hospitality offerings, and utilizes the same digital infrastructures.

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