

Rethinking the Office Landscape: Storage as a Strategic Tool

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The Terrain

The days of one-size-fits-all, single-task job functions are behind us in the modern workplace. As a result, the office requires a three dimensional, dynamic model that supports a broader range of activities than ever before. Today's office requires "topography," creating a rhythm physically supportive of the work, and a visual diversity that stimulates the workforce. The need is to balance the open with the enclosed, the collaborative with the personal. And the desire is to have all of this coexist in a holistic model that is in sync with the business process. These challenges are examined in this paper by linking work trends with planning attributes worth considering when landscaping a modern office.

The Integration of Individual and Group Work

Companies are attempting to break down silos, encouraging teams to cross pollinate and to be multi-disciplinary. This goal of fostering collaboration to drive innovation is producing a new landscape for the modern office. The individual work area has evolved away from being a *private* space to becoming a *personal* one. Individual and group work now coexist—and work must flow nimbly between them. As a result, the concept of a single destination to collaborate is no longer valid. The physical integration of individual and group settings allows for the fluid exchange of ideas which then enables the collective wisdom of the group to become the driving source of innovation.

Capturing Collective Wisdom

Findings from a broad sector research program for Knoll tracked the utilization of square footage within major companies that practice some degree of innovation when it comes to the workplace. Use was tracked as a percentage of overall square footage within various practice groups. Results indicate a doubling of square footage allocated to group work within the open plan over a three year period (Knoll 2007). Yet, even this significant shift may not be enough.

In a recent Knoll study, group work (sharing, teaming, or the social aspect of activity work) was cited as a far higher contributor to business effectiveness than individual work. However, study participants acknowledged that today's facility planning predominantly supports the individual (Knoll 2009). Clearly, there is a discrepancy between the type of workplace being deployed and what is actually contributing to organizational performance. To overcome this gap, facilities need a variety of settings to support the variety of work modes now occurring.

The Push for Knowledge Sharing among Diverse Workers

Industry now has a culturally and generationally more diverse workforce than at any time in North American history. The amalgamation of The Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y adds another layer of diversity to a workforce that is increasingly disparate in terms of gender and geography, as well as generation. In particular, the transference of knowledge from one generation to the next is an increasingly critical endeavor for companies. Most studies support mentoring as the best model for that transference, believing that is when knowledge exchange truly occurs. Mentoring is a model nurtured socially by Generation Y, and they seek it in the workplace. Baby Boomers are eager to contribute by sharing their amassed amounts of business knowledge. Boomers also benefit from mentoring, as the younger generation offers a fresh perspective from their knowledge base—technology.

The Blueprint

Workplace planning has migrated from a static standard to a dynamic tool kit supporting multiple modes of work. Importantly, contemporary planning solutions are not based solely on a low vistas; a sea of low horizons is as monotonous as a sea of high panels. Multiple sightlines make the workplace more dynamic and visually interesting. Companies seek a variety of settings to serve the variety of work that occurs. While offering variety, that choice must be managed within a defined product mix that scales and makes managing facilities easier. A tightly managed tool kit can provide facility efficiency while providing workplace effectiveness.

A comprehensive storage program has become a key element in this tool kit, helping to foster a seamlessly integrated workplace. Beyond accommodating work materials, displaying personal effects, and storing shoes, coats, and gym bags, a smart storage system helps define space. In that role, storage can be tall or short, closed (visually solid) or open (visually transparent), providing apertures and physical relief within the facility.

Zoning Macros and Micros

Real estate utilization is a key measure that most companies are eager to capture. A better understanding of what real estate is being used, when, helps determines the proper mix of various work spaces in support of multiple work modes. This data can assist in what corporate real estate executives are referring to as “right sizing the real estate portfolio.” The acquired data would then support any of the three scenarios requiring change—enough real estate used in the improper balance; too much real estate; or not enough.

Balancing business unit adjacencies to their occurrence in the business process is demanding more effective zoning of floor plates. Benefits include better circulation and buffering workers primarily involved in focus work from constant interruption. Zoning should map the work flow as it occurs across the organization. That work plan should be reflected in the floor plan.

Some basic elements to zoning include a perimeter to delineate the overall workspace, borders to define teams, and shared resources to encourage collaboration among small clusters of peers. In each of these examples, storage can be leveraged for planning purposes:

- For perimeter planning, storage can define space, store reference materials and display objects, while balancing the open and the enclosed in a space efficient manner.
- To identify larger teams, non-architectural work walls speak to a more fluid, agile workspace. Multi-use components that store, divide and display utilize resources more effectively.
- In small collaborative teams, shared storage reduces the overall footprint and fosters interaction while setting boundaries to a group’s space.
- For individuals, an interplay of closed and open planning elements enables workers to stay connected while maintaining a sense of personal space. With frequent interruptions and less privacy the norm in open plan environments, a defined place of refuge is important to the individual. It also supports the need to personalize.

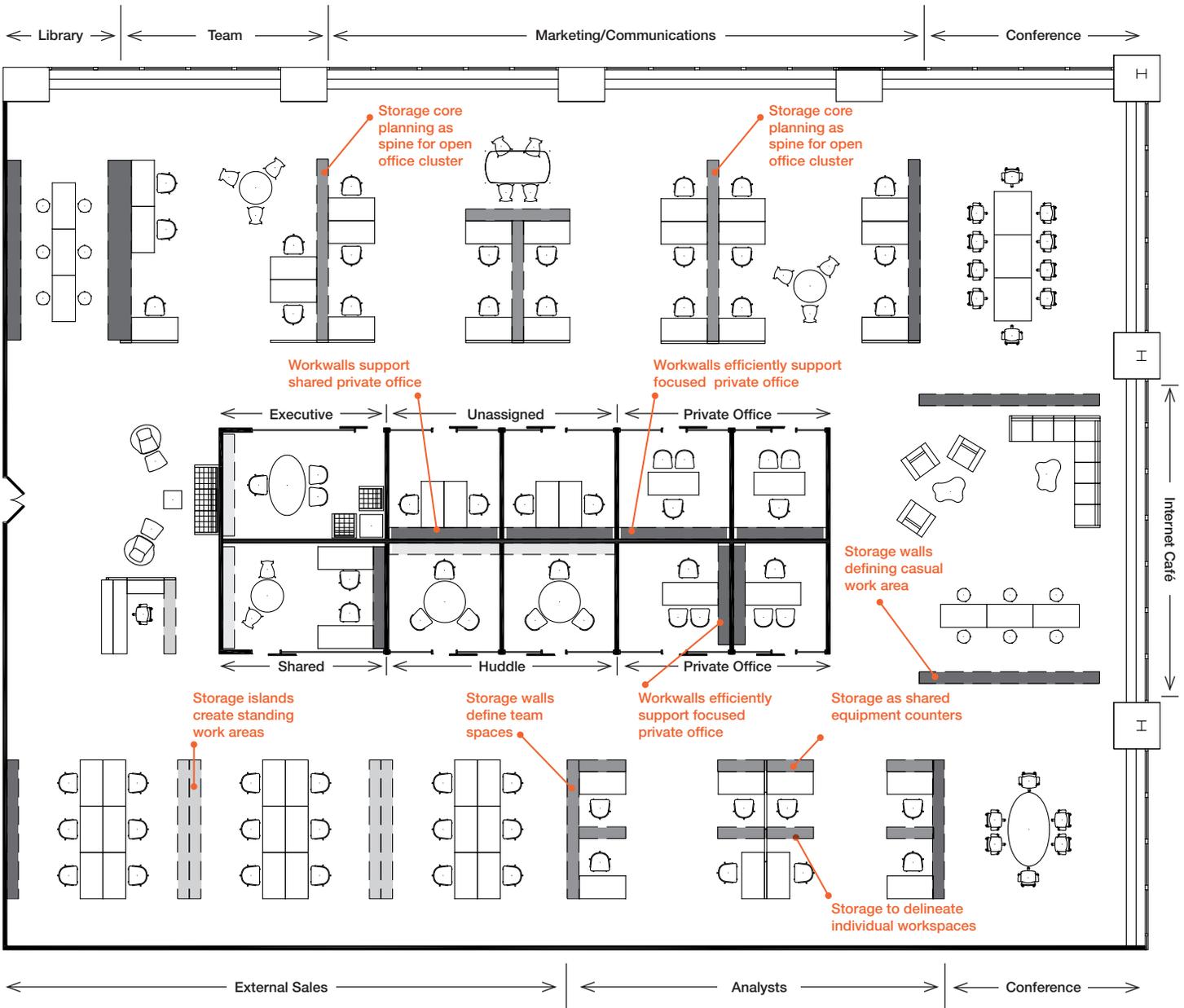
Scaling Along a Variety of Axes

Team-based work scales by size, intensity and means of communication. Small, intimate gatherings differ from large gatherings focused on group consumption of information. A highly mentored, traditional environment looks and functions differently than a highly focused, progressive facility. And the spaces that support these varying engagements differ as well. The ability to seamlessly integrate a work environment along a spectrum of activities and cultures is a balancing act.

The need to divide, store, and connect all the needs of occupants requires solutions with a rhythm and scale—elements that aid in connecting the workplace to the work. Among the tools at hand: small footprint storage elements that can plan high or low, balance the open and the enclosed, and accommodate storage requirements of both individual and group.

The need to identify and define specific environments in today's office requires a blueprint, with physical elements that help facilities catch up with the way people are already working. Within that tool kit, a nimble, modular storage system can do just that.

A Storage-Based Strategy for Zoning the Modern Office



- 24" high storage
- 42" high storage
- 50" high storage
- 71" or higher storage