



AN EXTRAORDINARY HEADQUARTERS WITH PERSONALITY

NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE'S ADAPTABLE WORKPLACE

A WHITE PAPER BY GENSLER AND NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE

National Office Furniture's quest to create a better work environment has led to a remarkable shift in the paradigm of workplace design. Workplaces can no longer simply be described in terms of square footage and headcount. Rather than focusing solely on quantitative metrics, today's workspaces focus on optimizing user experience and providing spaces to which employees and clients naturally gravitate for work and other activities.

National recognizes the constantly evolving nature of the workplace and consistently delivers innovative workplace furniture solutions that maintain a high degree of craftsmanship and affordability. Having delivered exceptional quality and value to clients over many years, National is well-acquainted with the power of design to influence success.

The company's new Headquarters, completed in 2015 for approximately 150 people, offers a first-hand opportunity for everyone at National to experience what they recommend to customers - a workplace with a personality that strongly reflects company culture. National chose to be fully engaged in the process and capitalize on this experience, using their own furniture for spaces to collaborate, learn, interact, and focus.

The newly completed Headquarters doubles as a large working showroom that combines discovery and learning within a functioning work environment. The activity-based space is a working display of National's product line in a real-world setting and is tested daily by employees engaging in various work modes.

Their vision of a workspace that is fully aligned with their intentions and culture has resulted in a high-performing yet flexible environment that supports employees both professionally and personally. Post-occupancy survey results place National at the benchmark of top-performing companies in their industry.

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BACKGROUND

National partnered with Gensler, a global research-based design firm, to create their new Headquarters. Gensler's experience, data-driven approach, and seasoned change management services helped to establish project parameters and guidelines.

At the outset of the relationship, Gensler conducted a Workplace Performance Index (WPI) survey to understand how employees felt in their current workplace, the criticality of various work styles, and suggestions for workplace improvement.

A variety of tools were used during the process, including: 1) activity analysis, 2) focus groups, 3) workplace design strategy sessions, and 4) culture and identity mapping. With these elements, National and Gensler were able to establish a firm foundation for the design development of the new Headquarters. During this phase, a variety of factors influenced the design. Current space guidelines, technology usage, wellness elements, demographics, and design factors were studied and compared with benchmarking data and industry best practices.

National is committed to being at the forefront of the innovative workplace design. Early on during the project, they recognized that design factors such as daylight, interior lighting, air quality, acoustics, ergonomics, nutrition, and user control all have a demonstrable impact on their employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive health. These factors were carefully considered and designed to support well-being and enhance productivity.

One idea explored in an early workshop was to create spaces for respite and rejuvenation – spaces that feel like 'home away from home'. Another important design intervention was to deliberately create opportunities for conversations and idea sharing.

"The **"bump factor"** is an important component in increasing knowledge transfer and innovation. National's Headquarters was designed to support employees bumping into each other. Spontaneous interaction helps build relationships and provides opportunities for socializing."

ACTIVITY-BASED WORK

Historically, employees have often been assigned a single space from which to work, irrespective of their work style or activity. However, this emphasis on standardization has slowly started to shift. Delivering an employee experience unique to a department, group, or individual work style is now paramount.

This new approach is a fundamental driver to workplace transformation, well-being, and higher productivity. The space planning strategy used by National is activity-based. Even though employees have an assigned place to work, the entire building is available to work wherever suits them best. By providing choice, National is able to accommodate a much wider diversity of activities within a single work environment.

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WORK MODES

National has identified four critical work modes that encompass the majority of employee activities throughout the day: collaborate, learn, interact, and focus.

COLLABORATE

Human connection and collaboration are necessary in the development of key concepts and solutions. A workplace that accounts for this type of work style breaks down linear hierarchies within a company structure and promotes a freer flow of ideas between people and departments. For this reason, the design of the new Headquarters includes locating middle-level managers immediately adjacent to their teams in the open plan design.

LEARN

National's long-term commitment to the continuous improvement of the user and client experience is a key differentiator. Awareness of industry trends and the ability to distinguish which trends will carry the most impact is integral to any company's success. By providing a variety of spaces, tools, and furniture solutions, National is creating an environment that fosters professional growth.

INTERACT

Spontaneous interaction between teams and departments can be a surprising and welcome source of inspiration. As the line between work and life becomes increasingly blurred, the workplace begins to function as social hub, a place where employees can casually interact and relax away from their primary workspaces. Social interaction is a prelude to collaborative work and creates a stronger feeling of community within a company.

FOCUS

Despite the increased emphasis on collaborative and interactive workspaces, National employees spend over 60% of their day focusing on solitary tasks. Thus, a number of spaces and settings were included in the building's design. Focused work is integral to productivity. Innovative solutions are often the product of solitary work that is further refined by collaborative effort.

"The emphasis on activity-based work creates an entirely new lens with which to view the contemporary workplace; the focus has shifted from the quantitative to the qualitative, from numerical metrics to the potential of human connection and subjective experience. National's new workplace fosters productivity by elevating the employee experience."

WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE

Happiness is directly correlated with productivity - we know intuitively that better work environments create more success for a company. This has been well documented by NEF Consulting and illustrated in their Happiness Index. Additional tools, such as Gensler's Workplace Performance Index (WPI), are able to quantifiably measure the effectiveness of a workplace before and after a change.

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The WPI is a proprietary survey tool developed by Gensler and is an industry standard. Since 2008, Gensler has compiled WPI results and analyzed clients, by industry or sector, against a list of best performing companies to establish benchmarks for design development. Gensler's database now houses 300 clients with over 200,000 completed surveys. The value and relevance of the WPI results are directly impacted by employee participation. The average participation rate of WPIs hover around 40%.

“National's employees demonstrated a very high level of engagement in the workplace, with unprecedented response rates of 96% and 93% in the pre-occupancy and post occupancy surveys respectively.”



The WPI assesses the following factors: 1) employee perception of the company and workplace, 2) work activities and where they typically occur, 3) functionality and effectiveness of current spaces, 4) brand values and brand perception of the workplace, and 5) effectiveness of employee communication and change management during the transition to the new workplace.

In the post-occupancy survey, conducted after move-in, National's overall WPI score improved 8 points from 66 to 74, placing it among the highest performing companies in its industry. This score is a testament to the collaboration between Gensler and National and the extensive development and execution of a clear and effective design strategy.

WORKPLACE KEY FINDINGS

The findings of the survey conducted after move-in, along with focus groups held by National internally, reveals that the new workplace successfully provides more collaborative space, flexibility, opportunities for interaction, and access to technology. The ongoing change management program supported by the establishment of policies and protocols will continue to improve already high marks in the work environment.

During the pre-occupancy WPI, National employees cited a lack of support for collaboration, particularly in regards to technology. Meeting rooms were either unavailable or unusable due to the lack of technology, leading to almost half of employees using private offices to collaborate virtually. In the previous space, employees rated their meeting rooms as just slightly above average in effectiveness (6.6 out of 10). The post-occupancy survey reveals much higher ratings for the new meeting room (8.5 out of 10). Over 75% of employees are choosing to collaborate in meeting rooms and common areas. This is due to both the shift from private offices to an open workplace and to improvements in meeting room technology.

MEETING ROOM EFFECTIVENESS



Access to technology has also improved both on-site and off-site, which improves connectivity and accessibility both within and outside the office space. Remote workers note a significant increase in the ability to access documents offsite (from a 6.5 to 8.4 out of 10).

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Employees cite major improvements – visually and experientially – in the overall quality of the workspace. They describe the new building as bright, modern, and beautiful. In particular, the workspace’s rating for access to natural light has far surpassed the benchmark of the top-performing companies in this industry. National scored an 8.2 out of 10 for access to daylight, whereas top-performing companies hover at 5.9 and the industry average is a mere 4.6.

ACCESS TO NATURAL LIGHT



National’s new work environment also better supports the health and well-being of employees. Employees enjoy spaces that provide respite from the demands of the workday. According to the post-occupancy survey, accessibility to these types of spaces has improved drastically – from a low rating of 3.3 to 7.3 out of 10. Many employees cited the flexibility of using the café or common areas as a place to relax or handle personal business. When employees are able to spend more time determining their own needs throughout the day, they tend to become more engaged and productive. The diversity in social spaces contribute to the “bump factor” – chance occurrences between people from disparate groups or departments.

“Nearly half, or **45%**, of National employees now use non-reservable spaces to interact. An additional **30%** use transit areas such as hallways and stairs to gather. By definition, these fluid spaces promote much more spontaneous interaction.”

Learning is accelerated as people share their ideas and discuss their work with others. In time, National will be able to ascertain if these chance meetings increase innovation in their culture.

CLOSING

National’s new Headquarters will continue to evolve over time. The company recognizes that today’s workspace must be adaptable. We are now designing for a diverse and multi-generational workforce. Any space built today needs to be resilient and sustainable over business cycles while also supporting wellbeing and productivity.

No environment is neutral – all workspaces communicate a narrative and a purpose. If the workplace is speaking to us, what do we want it to say? What does a company communicate to its employees and clients when they build a workplace?

Aligning people and place through purpose and experience are strong factors in National’s continued success and support of their employees and customers. The organization’s determination to increase flexibility and choice within the workplace has brought the innovation, craftsmanship, and emotional connection of National’s furniture to the design of their new workplace. The ability to translate National’s vision and culture into a tangible physical environment is a truly remarkable achievement that will continue to deliver unprecedented results for years to come.