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The Gensler Institute Finds an Intersection of Factors Makes a Great Workplace

MOSTLY OPEN ENVIRONMENTS DELIVER BEST ON PERFORMANCE AND EXPERIENCE, THE RISING SCORES DRIVEN BY HIGH LEVELS OF CHOICE, VARIETY AND BALANCE.

Is the open office working for you? Do you really care about the perks at your workplace?

The Gensler Research Institute U.S. Workplace Survey 2019 provides some interesting insight into those questions.

The report, which was released last week, surveyed more than 6,000 people working full-time across the U.S. to understand the

key issues facing today's workers and workplaces.

"A highly effective workplace is key to the best experience strategies; but focusing only on effectiveness can overlook broader cultural or behavioral opportunities to optimize engagement and performance," the report stated.

Open for deliberation

The open office is up for de-

bate, mainly because there is no consistent definition of the open office. It can be noisy, distracting and destroy one's ability to focus and collaborate, but it also may make workers more physically active and less stressed.

As the world becomes more urban, today's workplace landscape is rapidly changing along with shifting business and social con-

texts. Millennials have become the largest contingent of the U.S. workforce. They want to work in a place that provides a healthy work/life balance. Unemployment is at its lowest rate in 20 years, and the workplace is also accommodating five generations. Diversity of gender and culture are increasing at every level in the workplace.

Gensler found the ideal workplace includes many variables and often show significant variation by role. The most senior roles tend to prefer more open environments, while those in administrative, professional and technical roles seek more privacy. Respondents are asking for more privacy at work. On average, people seek greater levels of privacy than they have. Women's preferences lean slightly toward privacy while millennial and Gen Z respondents lean toward openness.

Mostly open environments deliver best on performance and experience, the rising scores driven by high levels of choice, variety and balance.

Over the past 15 years of workplace study, Gensler finds 2019 to have the highest effectiveness scores, as measured by its Workplace Performance Index (WPI) score, but there are opportunities for leveraging the workplace environment to optimize individual performance.

For example, 8 percent of respondents are highly engaged but struggle with ineffective workplaces. People working in the consumer goods, not-for-profit

and media industries fall into this category. Eight percent also fell into the opposite category of highly effective workplaces, but still struggle to have a great experience. Examples of these workers would include people in the legal industry.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents, such as those working in government and defense, consistently rank lowest on engagement and performance. The group which scored the highest — 45 percent — in the intersection of experience and effectiveness at work are people working in the technology, finance and management/advisory industries.

“To optimize performance, we must address effectiveness and experience in tandem,” the report stated.

Gensler developed the Workplace Experience Framework to understand the factors that make a great workplace experience: culture (mission, inspiration, empowerment, awareness, creativity and innovation); space (functionality, effectiveness, variety, choice and aesthetic); interaction (social connection, technology, tools and autonomy) and behavior (reflection, experimentation and working away from the desk work mode).

Incentives under scrutiny

Work perks are up for debate as well. Gensler finds the workplace is increasingly amenity rich, but asks if those amenities are truly delivering value. Not all are worth the investment.

“The amenities that deliver the

greatest impact connect directly to people's most salient needs and preferences: spaces directly connected to innovation, making and collaboration; and quiet places to perform focused or individual work. Amenities with a nonwork focus, such as lounges and break rooms, deliver the smallest performance gains in our sample. Amenities that are versatile in their function — such as outdoor workspaces and work cafés — fall toward the middle.

The key takeaway: Work-focused amenities that align with the direct needs and priorities of people's jobs have the most value. Amenities aren't for escaping work, they're for optimizing it, the report stated.

Amenities which rank highest in value include innovation hubs, maker spaces, quiet/tech-free zones and outdoor workspaces. Break rooms, cafeterias and libraries rank the lowest in value. Workspaces that provide variety and encourage in-office mobility have higher effectiveness and experience scores. Seventy-one percent of people with a choice of where to work report a great workplace experience. Seventy-nine percent of people in workplaces with a variety of settings report a great experience.

What people really want from their workplace is a great experience.

Gensler suggests a great workplace experience shouldn't just be for leadership. Every worker should be afforded a great workplace experience. **BoF**