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BY DUNCAN WHITE

WATCH YOUR SPACE

As corporate management recognise that their people are their most important asset, it is imperative that the place where their greatest assets work is carefully considered to allow continued evolution and success

“IT’S not what it used to be” is a common phrase bandied about on a regular basis with reference to a multitude of different places and experiences in life. Does this statement now apply to the conventional office space as we know it today? As corporate management continue to recognise that their people are their most important asset, it is imperative now more than ever that the place in which their greatest assets work and occupy is carefully considered to allow continued evolution and success.

Can this be achieved through innovation? Innovation is defined simply as a “new idea, device or method”. However, innovation is often also viewed as the application of better or improved solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs or existing market needs.

Workplaces have been evolving for as long as they have existed, but what drives their evolution and how does innovation play a part in the changing office landscape?

Looking at data released by the Ministry of Manpower on June 13, 2016, a resident employed on a full-time basis usually works 47 hours per week, regardless of whether he/she is paid or not. Given that employees dedicate a large part of their time to work, it is important to understand what drives employees to commit to this schedule and what keeps them present and driven.

A corporation should consider their most valuable asset (their people) from the onset of selecting a physical office. Location plays a key role in these considerations, but in today’s world, many other factors such as building image, natural light, layout efficiencies, communication, “the way we work”, collaboration and general wellness within the workplace need to be taken into consideration.

A healthy, vibrant, energised and inspired workforce will bring you greater returns. With that in mind, large multinational corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), startups and entrepreneurs seem to gravitate to considering new trends in the workplace,

predominantly based around flexible working or the concept of “the way we work”.

Innovation has raised its head in the form of flexible working. Flexible working is accepted as a general term for all workplace trends such as the traditional hot-desking, the revised hotelling, the general activity-based working initiatives and the new trend of co-working.

These new ways of working aim to cover three major factors that are considered to create a flexible and engaging working space. These three major factors are the attraction and retention of a new generation in the workforce; an increasing awareness of technology and the importance of innovation within the workplace; and the continued growth and adoption of collaboration throughout the workplace. The successful integration of all these three factors will enable colleagues to interact and share their experiences and ideas, ultimately creating hybrids of solutions previously undiscovered.

Flexible working leads to further innovation by simply allowing interactions in the workplace. Learning is a two-way street, and there are various lessons to be taught and learnt in a multi-generation workforce.

In a report released by PWC, millennials (those born between 1980 and 2000) will make up 50 per cent of the global workforce by 2020. Millennials are drawn to flexible working environments, and they bring a different way of thinking and working to the conventional workplace.

Companies that are quick to embrace this will be in a better position to adapt to a changing workforce and mindset. These new ways of working and collaboration may result in new and different types of successful outcomes for companies. In order to stay relevant and current, should SMEs consider how to attract and retain this talented workforce to build for the future of business? Yes. Take a page from the co-working global service providers like WeWork and the regional service providers like JustCo. Consider what drives their high occupancy

of driven, collaborative, entrepreneurial and engaging innovators in their co-working spaces.

Occupiers of co-working spaces are referred to as members because they are encouraged to integrate and collaborate throughout the different member companies and industries that occupy the same “office” space. Bringing like-minded individuals together from a multitude of backgrounds and skillsets enables them to work and develop concepts together, sell together and build their own synergies within their environments.

The same should be true for the workforce within an SME, for example. The encouraged interaction of different departments through open office concepts, dedicated and non-dedicated collaboration areas such as relaxed break-out areas or cafes within the workplace and strategic positioning of printing utility areas can offer a similar environment to the innovators within startups. It initially forces collaboration through accidental interaction but if it is done right, the ideas are adopted as the norm.

Cubicles are disappearing, fully open office design has its drawbacks, but hit the right blend of flexible working and your people will grow, innovative concepts will develop and your overall workplace will be a place that employees will be excited to occupy for a large part of their day.

When embarking on the progression of the workplace, it is important to consult the right people at the right time. When speaking to your real estate adviser, consider going beyond the normal conversation about physical space and seek their advice on workplace consulting and workplace strategy. It is critical that the right concepts of flexible working are incorporated into the design of an office. What does your most important asset really need to accelerate their success and that of your business? ■

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