THE WORKPLACE OF THE FUTURE

BY MICHELLE BOWLES

TO MAKE THE BEST DESIGN DECISIONS *TODAY,* corporate interior designers must understand what the workplace and workforce will look like *tomorrow.* What factors will weigh heavily on the minds of corporate executives and facilities managers in the year 2015? What emerging technologies stand to alter the way office work is conducted 10 years from now? "'Those who do not study the future are destined to be its victims.' I wrote that for Roger Herman [founder of business consultancy The Herman Group], and it was the opening of his book *Turbulence! Challenges and Opportunities in the World of Work* that he published in 1995. And it still holds true today," says Joyce Gioia, Strategic Business Futurist, President and CEO of The Herman Group in Greensboro, N.C. "Either you look ahead, or you are at the mercy of whatever happens."

1 People

Central to understanding what the future workplace will look like is knowing who will inhabit the spaces. Experts say one thing is certain: The workforce will be more diverse than ever, with multiple generations, cultures and ethnicities working side by side. Gioia predicts the variety won't stop there. "The workforce will be increasingly diverse in terms of not only old and young, but heavy/slim, sighted/not sighted and more people with disabilities," she says.

A SHRINKING POPULATION

Across the globe, the working-age population (ages 20 to 64) will continue to diminish in numbers up through 2050, according to *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent*, published by the Harvard Business School Press.

COUNTRY	PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE, 2000–2020	PERCENTAGE OF CHANGE, 2020–2050
United States	15 percent	16 percent
Canada	16 percent	2 percent
U.K.	7 percent	-7 percent
France	2 percent	-9 percent
Germany	-5 percent	-21 percent
Italy	-5 percent	-27 percent
Japan	-14 percent	-28 percent
China	20 percent	-13 percent

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent*

THE GENERATIONAL POOL

In the United States, data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows the 55–64 age group stands to grow most significantly through 2010, followed by those 65+ and 45–54.

AGE CATEGORY	PERCENTAGE OF GROWTH
16–24	15 percent
25–34	8 percent
35–44	-10 percent
45–54	21 percent
55–64	52 percent
65+	30 percent

Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Workforce Crisis: How to Beat the Coming Shortage of Skills and Talent*

A DIVERSE WORKPLACE

By 2015, women will make up **48 percent** of the U.S. workforce. A similar trend is predicted for most of the EU 15 member nations.

By 2025, approximately **40 percent** of U.S. workers will be Hispanic, African American or Asian American.

—*Next-Generation Talent Management,* Hewitt Associates

2 Technology

Think back just 15 years and picture a workplace with bulky computers – few of which were connected to the Internet – cumbersome wires, and oversized fax machines and copiers. Today, outdated equipment has been replaced with flat screens, wireless devices and high-tech conferencing systems. Ten years from now, modern devices will give way to more advanced technologies such as multilingual and sensory-recognition software that allows work to be conducted more efficiently – potentially meaning less people required to do a job. "More employers are embracing technology as a way to not hire as many people," Gioia says. "In the future, interior designers will need to think about how these expanded technologies must be incorporated into the spaces they are designing."
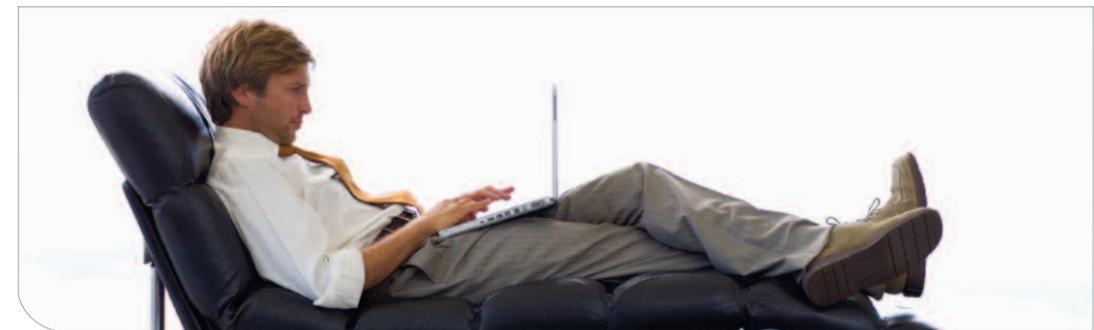
TOP EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WORKPLACE

In its *Office of the Future: 2020* survey and report, staffing agency OfficeTeam identified several technologies that stand to alter the workplace and the way work is conducted in the coming years, including:

> **Sensory-recognition software.** Computers in the future will increasingly be able to respond to voice, handwriting, fingerprint and optical input.

> **"Knowbots."** These future programs scan databases to filter and retrieve information for users. For example, the program could summarize key points of a report, and deliver an e-mail and voicemail to the device a user is working on.

> **Smart devices.** Computers will use algorithm-based programs to learn the relationships between words and phrases, creating a smoother interface and enabling users to conduct more effective information searches.

> **Miniature wireless communication tools.** These future devices will combine, for example, a personal computer, phone, fax, scanner, electronic organizer and camera all in one.

> **Wireless everywhere.** Users can connect to the office in taxis, in buses, on planes, in parks, in building lobbies or even on beaches.

> **Interactive office spaces.** By 2020, offices will be embedded with sensors that monitor and maintain the environment, including temperature, humidity and lighting. For example, a sensor in a desk chair could detect back tension and signal the chair to give a massage.

> **Virtual conferencing technology.** Offices may be equipped with walk-in facilities outfitted with wall-sized screens that project 360-degree views of videoconference participants.

> **Automated business process management.** Collaborative software will streamline the process by which teams work together on documents, eliminating the need for e-mail as the means of document transmission and sharing.

3 Corporate Real Estate

For interior designers, it's important to recognize where, physically, jobs will and won't be in the future. How will corporate real-estate budgets be tightened? "Employers will be looking for greater value, that's for sure, because they're always looking for greater value," Gioia says. The good news? "They are going to recognize that, all things being equal, the workplace of the future can be an additional way to set themselves apart from the competition – win that candidate's heart and mind as opposed to losing that person to the competitive organization."

WHERE THE JOBS ARE

According to Hewitt Associates' *Next-Generation Talent Management,* jobs in the future will continue to move overseas. By 2010, the number of U.S. jobs moved off-shore will grow 30 to 40 percent. The jobs being sent offshore will become increasingly sophisticated and will more frequently shift to nations in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia.

A TELE-COMMUNITY

More than 100 million people are expected to telecommute by 2015. Eighty-seven percent of executives predict there will be increased telecommuting in the next decade.

—*Office of the Future: 2020,* OfficeTeam

HIGHER DEMANDS

In the next 10 to 15 years, will employees be working more or fewer hours?

Significantly more	6 percent
Somewhat more	36 percent
Will stay the same	49 percent
Somewhat fewer	8 percent
Significantly fewer	1 percent

Source: *Office of the Future: 2020,* OfficeTeam

4 Collaboration

Experts predict collaboration to be a top business objective in the workplace of the future. In fact, according to OfficeTeam, a new type of business organization will emerge: the hybrid organization, inter-disciplinary in nature and drawing talent from academia, science, business and government. It's a business objective interior designers are poised to help meet.
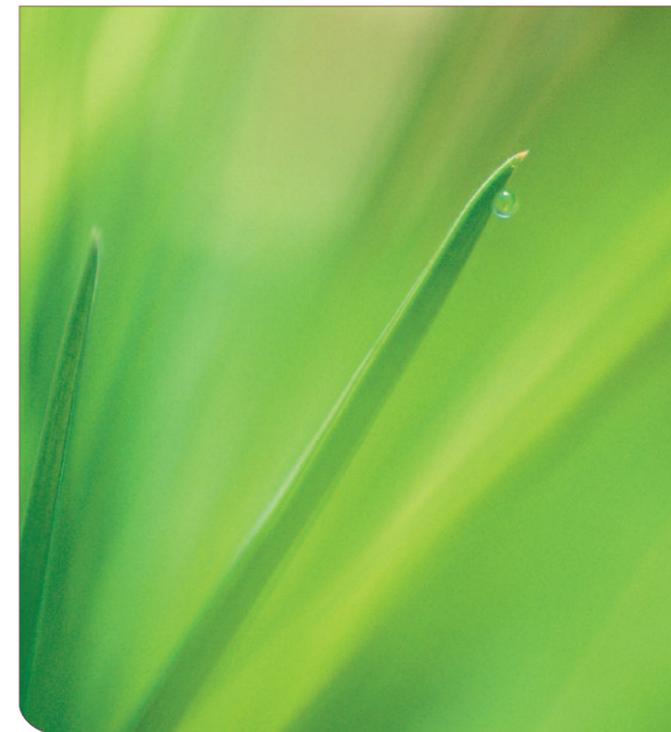
LET'S GET TOGETHER

In its *Predicts 2008: Disruptive Shifts in the High Performance Workplace,* the Gartner Group says the demand for collaboration in the workplace is on the rise:

- By 2010, the average salaried worker will actively participate in at least five different ad hoc teams simultaneously.

- Thirty percent of these people will participate in teams with external participants.

- By 2011, social networking and social interaction will be more popular than team collaboration among enterprise users.
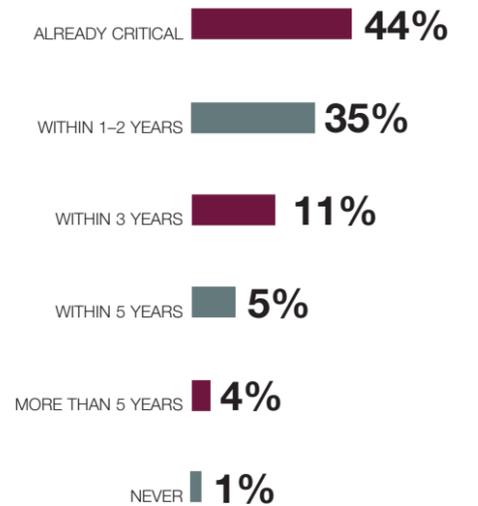
A COLLABORATIVE CASE STUDY

In 2004, Pittsburgh-based communications design firm Agnew Moyer Smith Inc. debuted its new workplace designed to promote free exchange of ideas, frequent brainstorming and work sessions, and peer critiques. Since then, using Steelcase's workplace effectiveness measurement tools, the firm has tracked the effectiveness of these collaborative design measures:

- Networks that encourage collaboration are now 14 percent healthier.

- Innovation measures are up 15 percent.

- The effectiveness of work processes is up 37 percent.

5 Sustainability

The global demand for energy-efficient, sustainable buildings will continue full speed ahead in the future, fueled by high energy costs and government mandates. Eighty-four percent of corporate users and 77 percent of developers surveyed in *National Real Estate Investor*'s 2007 survey expect to own, manage or lease at least some green properties five years from now. Also fueling the demand will be end-users, especially younger generations. Says Gioia, "Sustainability is very, very important, particularly for young people. Companies get major points for being green among the younger generations."

IT'S ALL ABOUT TRANSIT

Corporate office locations in the future may depend to a great extent on transit. Already, high fuel and energy costs are boosting demand for transit-oriented developments (mixed-use facilities with maximum access to public transportation) and sustainable buildings. According to Coldwell Banker Commercial and *National Real Estate Investor*'s *2008 Corporate Real Estate Survey: The Outlook for Expansion,* 40 percent of corporate users and 27 percent of developers own or lease space in transit-oriented developments. Fifty-six percent of respondents said a transit-oriented location is important in site selection, and 39 percent consider it to be important in attracting employees. Looking ahead, industry observers expect corporations to expand cautiously in 2008 and beyond, as questions about the economy settle.

WHEN WILL SUSTAINABILITY BE A CRITICAL BUSINESS ISSUE TO CORPORATE REAL ESTATE?

ALREADY CRITICAL	44%
WITHIN 1–2 YEARS	35%
WITHIN 3 YEARS	11%
WITHIN 5 YEARS	5%
MORE THAN 5 YEARS	4%
NEVER	1%

Source: Jones Lang LaSalle and CoreNet Global's *Sustainability Perceptions and Trends in Corporate Real Estate,* a survey of 414 attendees at CoreNet Global Summits in London, Melbourne, Denver and Singapore

GOVERNMENT ACTION

A 2007 study by the American Institute of Architects (AIA), *Local Leaders in Sustainability: A Study of Green Building Programs in Our Nation's Communities,* examined the current state of green building laws across the United States. It found 92 U.S. cities have green building programs, or 14 percent of all cities with populations greater than 50,000. An additional 36 cities say they are in more advanced stages of developing green building programs.

Adapted as an exercise by Jane Larkin, Research Librarian/Interim Director of Education

exercise:

1) Describe three ways in which you would use the emerging technologies discussed in this article to support a client's need to hire fewer employees.

2) Explain how you would design office space to accommodate an increased number of older workers, female employees and people with disabilities.

3) Do you think the hybrid business organization will be the model for how work is conducted in the future? Why?

4) What are some of the challenges involved in designing a workspace for a hybrid organization?

5) In your experience, how is the corporate real-estate market responding to rising energy costs? How do you think energy costs will affect the future of workspace design?

After reading this article, you will be aware of:
• The influence of social, cultural and technological changes in the workforce of the future
• The impact of economic forces on the corporate real-estate market
• Emerging technologies that will influence workplace design
• The importance of the hybrid business organization.

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