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Chapter 9. User Empowerment in Workspace Change

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Chapter Overview

Facilities management is often seen as the instrument of change in organizations. However, this seemingly new profession is itself undergoing a revolution, with the emergence of participative involvement of building users in change management decisions. This chapter outlines a user-centric approach to building operations and management in which the identifying, managing and sharing of building-related information are key. As more information is shared with users, so employees have the potential to become more empowered to make decisions about their own workspace. The chapter describes how users resist change, and how the negative energy of resistance can be transformed into a positive force. Empowering building occupants leads to positive attitudes that generate a constructive and creative space planning process. This helps facilities managers achieve the objective of providing workspace that both meets users' needs and is a tool for getting work done.

Keywords: workspace, space planning, users' needs, empowerment, transformation.

9.1 The 'science' of user participation

Traditionally, one of the concerns that architects bring to building projects is *utilitas* – that is, the functionality of the space thus created. The other two, as any architecture student knows – are *venustas* or beauty and *firmitas* or structural soundness. As buildings have become more complex, and the process of designing and building them requires increasing numbers of specialists and experts, so those responsible for buildings – the designer to begin with, then the builder, then the manager owner or operator – have searched out a variety of ways of assuring *utilitas*, that is, that the built space supports the uses to which it is put.

In more modern times, the 'building user' has become a key source of specialised information about building use and function. Sometimes called the 'end user' in recognition of the parallel with computer technology and software development, the people who use the building for its intended function have become one of the specialised knowledge groups whose input, feedback, and opinions are increasingly taken into account by building industry professionals.

One of characteristics of today's building industry is the evolution of ever more systematic and effective ways of involving users and engaging their knowledge in useful and constructive ways. An entire sub-speciality of social psychology has grown up over the last forty or so years, based on gathering knowledge about how humans relate to (behave in, think about, perceive and assess) built space. Many of the activities of the discipline of environmental psychology are aimed at ways of applying such knowledge practically to the design, planning, construction and operation of buildings (Gifford, 2006). Such activities include collecting feedback from occupants on how the built environment they occupy functions (post-occupancy evaluation), asking occupants to rate various environmental qualities and properties in terms of their own comfort and satisfaction (user surveys), and engaging future occupants in various strategies of building decision-making, both in the design phase (programming or brief-writing), during detailed design, and post-construction (commissioning and facilities management) (Preiser & Vischer, 2004). Collectively, these endeavours might collectively be labelled forms of 'user participation'.

As part of the evolution of these practices it must be noted that, for various reasons, engagement of users is not widespread in the industry. Such reasons, which may or may not be based on evidence, include:

- concerns about the extra time it might take to consult users;
- liability of owner and managers if information from users is collected and not used; and
- cost issues if users, when questioned for information, profit from the opportunity to demand a long list of special features not included in the project budget.

In addition, some project teams have trouble identifying future users, and some projects have other priorities, such as building speculatively for maximum profit, so that user participation is a non-starter.

However, as the field of environmental psychology has evolved, so have techniques and strategies for engaging building users in ways that are both time- and cost-effective, and that result in long-term cost savings because wrong decisions are corrected earlier rather than later and costly mistakes avoided. One example is the rising interest in and acceptance of evidence-based design (Hamilton & Watkins, 2008). Others focus on ways of accessing users' unique knowledge of what they want to do in the spaces provided, and how they will do it. When such information is rapidly and accurately applied to building decision-making, users themselves have an opportunity to participate, to have a say in the design of the environment they will occupy, and to take ownership of the space and its *utilitas*.

9.2 Facilities managers and user participation

Some of the earliest supporters of user participation were members of the design professions. Indeed, many buildings were not built without extensive user participation in decision-making – designing houses for example (Stevenson & Leaman, 2010). However, involving users on an ongoing basis is increasingly becoming an option and even a decision-making tool for Facilities Managers of commercial buildings – places where people work – particularly where change is anticipated or required.

While Facility Managers have expertise in building management and operations, many also find themselves managing building users. Most aspects of building operations have pronounced technical requirements; but when users are uncomfortable with their thermal comfort, or when a change in use or configuration is planned, or when simple logistics (such as access to parking or bathrooms, slow elevators or storage requirements) become issues for occupants, then facility managers find themselves involved in more than the technical operations of the building.

This is particularly noticeable when user groups decide to change their environment, usually by adding or subtracting workstations, or by reconfiguring to allow more space for meetings, or when organisational shifts require groups to merge or separate. Facility managers often find themselves not only managing change to the physical environment, but also at a social and organisational level. The process of changing the physical environment cannot proceed in an effective manner without engaging users in the change process – and in so doing, discover that the workspace change process benefits from empowered users.

The building occupant is in some ways the facility manager's best resource. Proactive facility managers seek out feedback from occupants to help them maintain comfortable conditions inside the building, and also to ensure that FM services meet occupants' requirements and expectations. In addition, proactive facility managers understand that while they are the experts on operating the building, the occupants are experts on the work they are doing and on the tasks they are required to complete in the environment the building provides. Increasingly therefore, facility managers seek out more of a 'partnership' relationship with building users, in which occupants provide useful and constructive feedback to facility operators that help the latter not only provide a more comfortable and supportive environment, but also devise workspace changes that result in a more effective work environment for occupants, making them more effective and productive in their work (Vischer, 1996).

This partnership between users and managers needs to be carefully designed and structured to ensure that it is beneficial to both sides. Inviting user participation in environmental decision-making can, if not well managed, lead to a prolonged and inconclusive process, to raised expectations that are not met, and to other negative outcomes that have undesirable consequences. On the other hand, a clear and explicit process, in which objectives are known, feedback is sought in a specific form on specific issues, and information is exchanged openly on both sides, can only improve decisions and increase the quality of workspace outcomes.

9.3 The New Workspace Opportunity

The New Workspace Opportunity (NWO) is offered every time workspace is changed, even if the scale of physical change is modest (Vischer, 2005). Every change to the environment offers users an opportunity to rethink their processes, their tools, and organisational structure so as to make themselves

more effective at what they do. Facility managers need to be aware of the NWO, to help occupants take advantage of it, and to provide the tools and skills needed to make it effective. Some of the tools employed in such a process include:

- a managed survey of occupants with a specific set of reliable questions whose answers can be applied to design decision-making;
- focus groups in which users are encouraged to identify environmental elements they find both supportive and not supportive to their work; and
- ideas sessions – oral, written or on-line – where members of the target user group are invited to suggest solutions to problems identified by designers and planners as part of the process.

These and other similar tools are ways of eliciting effective and constructive suggestions from users without encouraging users to generate their ‘wish list’ and unduly raising their expectations (Vischer, *ibid.*). Typically employees engaging in their work do not seek out additional information about their workspace, the building, or how it operates. FM controls this information, and can disseminate it if needed, during workspace change. When renovations or moves to new premises are being planned, users benefit from information that otherwise they invent themselves. Such fabricated facts can be used to develop negative scenarios about the new space, based on occupants’ fear of change.

Unfortunately, pressures to reduce the time and money spent on new workspace mean that participants do not always have the resources to systematically analyse and review opportunities for solving problems and improving processes before they move. Not all companies are equipped to analyze their existing business processes with a view to improving them; in fact not all organizations are rational enough to be motivated to do so (Mintzberg, 1994). Key workspace decisions often end up being made on the basis of lowest construction (not operations) cost. However, even a conventional design process anticipates a payback to the organisation in terms of more effective work performance, lower staff turnover, and higher staff morale – all of which can and should be considered when making decisions about new space.

As in all change management processes in organisations, managing the acquisition, dissemination and flow of information is critical. The planning and design process for new workspace has specific information requirements at different stages. Building occupants and decision-makers also need to be informed as the process advances. The information that is acquired and applied needs to be accurate and appropriate - therefore from reliable sources – as well as up-to-date, and unambiguous. Very often the information available is neither adequate nor reliable, so hearsay and gossip risk replacing the facts, and decisions get made based on fear and suspicion.

The Facility Manager has a strong voice in the how information is gathered, who receives it and in what form, and how it is applied to planning and design decisions. In renovations to existing buildings, FM staff provide key information about building maintenance and operations, about energy management objectives and sustainability, about floor loadings and bearing walls, about wiring and cables – power and data – (both vertically in a multi-storey building, and horizontally distributed on each floor) – and they specify cleaning and security requirements. FM staff are often responsible for managing access to users for the design team and others who need information about how the organisation operates and what – if any – business process changes are planned. Thus FM can and often do control the degree to which the organisation takes advantage of the New Workspace Opportunity when designing new workspace.

FM professionals in some organisations have developed a relationship with building users that goes beyond simply providing services related to the building and policing access and uses of space and facilities. FM personnel who have been entrusted by senior managers to occupy a strategic role in terms of organisational planning and future change maintain a more intimate connection with building users. This enables them to understand the varying needs and requirements of different business unit managers

and to respond to managers' requests in ways that help them solve problems and improve business processes. In many cases they do this by implementing systematic feedback from building users regarding their occupancy experiences, requirements and comfort.

Feedback from building users usually takes the form of questionnaire surveys administered to occupants. The content of such surveys can vary from simple opinion polling: "Was the FM service you received excellent, adequate or unacceptable?" to more complex questions concerning occupants' feelings of well-being, satisfaction and comfort, or lack thereof, as a function of building conditions. Occupant surveys that are performed on a regular basis provide FM staff with a diagnostic tool to assess what is working well and what is problematic for different groups performing different types of task in different parts of the building. When the questionnaire instrument is well-designed and reliable, the information obtained from users provides a diagnostic profile of how effectively various building features are performing in terms of users' requirements. Workspace conditions that are problematic – for example, indoor air quality problems in some areas, or glare from overhead lights in others, or heat gain and solar glare from windows – then become priorities for change in the workspace redesign process. Those building features that show up on a regular basis as causing discomfort or fatigue clearly affect occupants' performance and therefore the productivity of the group. Investment in workspace redesign solves many of these problems and improves occupant comfort levels, thereby assuring a legitimate objective for any workspace change project (Vischer, 2007).

In addition Facility Managers may also acquire and disseminate feedback from occupants that has implications beyond the functional effect of specific building conditions and affects business processes. Almost any employee at any level has a few ideas about improvements that would enable them to work more effectively. Sometimes these ideas are limited to working physically closer to another individual or group, or, indeed, being more separated; sometimes these are more far-reaching, and pertain to the location of and access to equipment, to ways of communicating and sharing information, and even to organisational restructuring. A common example is the need for more abundant and accessible places to meet and work together with one or a few colleagues on an as-needed basis. Conventional office-space has often failed to meet this need, and the lack of collaborative workspace slows down decision-making and limits information exchange – priorities in the modern business environment.

The planning and design team may survey or interview building occupants to gain this type of information, but time constraints often prevent them from developing ideas with employees about ways of improving the functional support they receive from their workspace. The FM team who has already acquired this information and understood its importance to the overall health of the organisation is better placed to share it and ensure that the consultants prioritise it in their design decision-making.

In maintaining an intimate awareness of their constituents' needs and aspirations, Facilities Managers are in a position to manage the all-important exchange of relevant information. Design decisions that have already been taken, such as a more open concept workspace, a building or site selected for the new space, or a change or upgrade to more powerful IT tools, need to be shared with building users. When they are not informed, such 'information' is fabricated by employees and moves quickly in the form of rumours throughout the organisation, convincing employees that they will have to relocate to another town or suburb, that there will be no enclosed offices, or that their parking privileges are to be removed, regardless of whether or not any of these are likely to happen.

This is not to say that sharing all information and all design decisions entirely eliminates employees' concerns about the future of their workspace. In spite of the rational need to identify and appreciate workspace features that support work, people also have emotional attachments to the space they know, whatever its limitations, and an urge to resist any changes that risk altering the status quo.

9.4 Principles of Workspace Transformation

In all situations of workspace change, whether these are minor changes involving rearranging or replacing workstations or major changes involving completely renovating a floor or moving to new premises, employees are likely to express resistance to that which is new and unknown. While studies of organisational change largely focus on contextual conditions as drivers of change, recent research has also examined the pressure of organisational change on managers and their relative abilities to manage the stress this creates (Judge et al, 1999). The study reports on seven personality traits that affect how managers respond to organisational change. Results show that of these, 'positive self-concept' made up of locus of control, generalized self-efficacy, self-esteem, and positive affectivity, and 'risk tolerance' made up of openness to experience, tolerance of ambiguity and risk aversion, are strong dispositional predictors of managers' ability of cope well with change.

Similar arguments may be advanced to explain how well building users cope with workspace change. As with organisational change, workspace change generates resistance based on fear of the unknown – an effect especially pronounced where users are insufficiently informed. However, it can be argued that fear of workspace change is expressed in territorial terms, motivating users to defend territory and generating resistance to territorial loss and all that it means. While there are certainly personality differences that explain why some occupants may react more defiantly than others, there are also basic stages in coming to terms with workspace change that are common to all office occupants, and have some parallel to Kubler-Ross's process of accepting dying (Kübler-Ross, 1973). Typically, the stages of resisting and then coming to accept workspace change include:

- Fear of loss
- Mistrust of superiors
- Identifying a champion
- Too much change
- Engaging in the process
- Managing costs
- Learning new processes (Vischer 2005).

FM personnel can learn to anticipate these stages and to manage and distribute information within the context of the strategic user involvement process. The advantage of a proactive approach is fewer negative impacts arising from moving workers into an environment they did not anticipate and do not understand. Such negative impacts include importing previous processes and ways of working that no longer fit, anticipating a degree of comfort or luxury that is not provided, or simply not being able to find key contacts and resources that they need for their work.

Just as there are predictable stages to users' resistance to workspace change, there are opportunities throughout the design and planning process to take advantage of the opportunities these offer for constructive and useful feedback from users. Each stage of resistance or conflict offers a chance to empower users and give them a stake in the outcome. Typical stages of managing user resistance in a workspace change process are described below, and suggestions are offered for constructive FM responses that manage conflict and improve process outcomes.

9.4.1 Transformation as imperative

Companies cannot afford not to take advantage of the opportunity for organizational change and improvement that new workspace provides. The process of transforming workspace needs to articulate objective measurable improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational and work

processes. All reconfiguration offers an opportunity for improvement, not just to space but at all levels of organisational functioning.

Insert Figure 1 here

In acknowledging that space change is a tool for organizational change, managers need to commit to a rational analysis of how much and what sort of change they favour, but this is not easy to bring about. Taking a rational approach to planning workspace change can be frustrating in view of the emotional attachment people have to space. For example, employees at Boston Financial had their own offices, but the overall space configuration meant that very few of them had windows and most of the rooms had limited space. People sat in virtual closets, alone and cut off from colleagues, and were often too warm, and subjected to vibration from the air handling system located in the building's core. But when a major renovation was planned to open up the floor, give everyone a daylit space with access to windows and move them away from the building core and into a light and airy open space with adequate ventilation, employees rebelled on the basis that they would be accommodated in workstations and not in private offices. This is not an unfamiliar scenario. Rational thinking would assert that better light and air, not to mention ergonomic furniture, would help people work. Emotional attachment asserts that any enclosed space that can be viewed as 'private' is a marker of personal territory and status in the organisation and therefore should not be given up (Duffy et al, 1998).

On the other hand, a complete vision of the future is not necessary for the process to be effective. Answers to smaller and more manageable questions about who we are and where we are going – and where we want to live – may be sufficient in minor move or change situations. Nevertheless, whether they see it at the beginning, middle or end of the process, decision-makers ultimately recognize that planning workspace is a powerful tool to be used to achieve a variety of ends.

As mentioned above, feedback from users is a critical ingredient of the new workspace opportunity; the need for user involvement increases with the degree of change envisaged. At the small end of the scale of change, feedback from occupants may be applied to improving thermal comfort or lighting, or making sure better amenities – a windowed coffee-room, a quiet room or 'serenity space' – are included. In more major projects, where workspace change is part of a cultural transformation, user involvement should increase and users empowered to participate in decisions that affect them. As indicated in Figure 1, the scale of user involvement should keep pace with the scale of opportunity. Minimally, employees are consulted; more ambitious consultation leads to involvement in decision-making; and at the large end of the scale of workspace transformation, employees need some control over decisions. Examples of the various tools and techniques for consultation, involvement and empowerment include surveys, interviews, focus groups and various forms of brainstorming and ideas sharing (DeWulf and Van Meel, 2003).

9.4.2 Play out the process

People at different levels and with different functions in the organization react differently to the idea of workspace change, and to the idea of changing organizational culture. Stakeholders in the change process range from members of 'the C-suite' who may have a vision of the future of the organization they want to implement, to middle managers and departmental leaders who have to make decisions about the space their staff will occupy while at the same time protecting their own status and territory. Employees are also stakeholders, and often stand to gain or lose most from new space. FM staff also have a point of view,

often tied to practical considerations of cleaning and maintenance, as well as financial concerns as they often manage the budget for new construction as well as for facilities operation. Finally consultants such as designers and space planners have opinions based on their specialized knowledge and experience.

Insert Figure 2 here

Because each interest group has different priorities, a major challenge is to find ways of aligning stakeholders' priorities so that the project advances towards real change and does not revert to the 'tried and true' (see next principle). Not all stakeholders want change, or want the same amount of change, and some actively resist change. Moreover, their reasons for supporting or resisting change are likely to vary. As Figure 2 shows, sometimes senior managers in the C-suite favour change, whereas middle management and employees do not share the vision and are more inclined to protect what they have already. Sometimes the initiative for change comes from employees, who might or might not be supported by their managers, and who then have to convince senior management that change is desirable. In some projects the impetus for change is driven by consultants who gather enough wide-ranging information about the organization to see where the opportunities for improvement lie. They might be supported by the FM people that hired them, but, in order to be effective, senior members of the organisation have to be convinced as well.

Stakeholders are aware that organizational culture and values are transmitted through workspace and building decisions (O'Mara, 2000). Both pro-change and anti-change proponents must understand that not all aspects of an organization's culture need to be thrown out when change is envisioned: part of workspace transformation is to decide what to keep and what to change. Some companies have important cultural ties to their communities, and do not want to lose them. Others have traditional corporate rituals and symbols that give the corporation a human face to its employees. The recently built corporate headquarters of the Caisse de Dépôt et Placement in Montreal, Canada, has imprinted all the words that indicate its corporate values on the glass walls that soar above the 6-storey atrium. The magnified letters are projected into the interior by the light outside, and serve as reminder to all employees and all visitors of the values the company stands for.

In the process of deciding what to keep and what to drop, the yes-groups and the no-groups have to negotiate, and the negotiating process has to be facilitated. New workspace means change, no matter how carefully stakeholders attempt to maintain the status quo, so an effort should be made to ensure that the changes that are implemented are advantageous to the organization. The fact that all stakeholders have a different attitude towards and tolerance of change is an indicator of the importance of the process selected, and an indicator of the inevitability of conflict.

9.4.3 Embrace conflict

Typically conflicts in the change management process are about territory: territorial gains and losses, boundaries and claims. Changing territorial boundaries (and claims) inevitably causes conflict, but the energy released by conflict can be dynamic and constructive if it is recognized and harnessed by the change management process.

Embracing and resolving conflict allows the organization's degree of tolerance for change to be identified. However, not all conflicts are resolved without some cost. Sometimes employees feel strongly enough about losing their private offices or their proximity to the window or their visitor's chair that they leave their jobs. Sometimes conflict is expressed in the form of threats: signed petitions, union action, official (and unofficial) complaints. One Canadian provincial government agency filed a grievance against

management for moving staff out of 2.4m x 2.4m workstations with 1.5m partitions into 1.8m x 2.4m workstations with 1.2m partitions. They claimed they would no longer be able to do their work, as the worksurfaces would be too small and the noise level would be too high. If senior managers ignore such concerns, employees will continue to resist workspace change; if they give in to such actions, the new workspace will be a compromise that will leave everyone unhappy. The conflict needs to be managed.

Tactics to get people talking about space and making their values explicit include presenting extreme scenarios ('let's take away all partitions around cubicles'), issuing status challenges ('let's put all the senior executives in open workstations'), and framing futuristic scenarios (wireless throughout the building, remote work, shared desks, mobile offices, new intranet portals. . .). These tactics are an effective way of getting stakeholders to engage in debate that makes their values explicit, but are more easily employed by outside consultants with experience in using them, rather than by internal FM personnel that may fear making enemies.

Conflict intimidates many people and in many organizational cultures overt conflict is considered wrong or shameful - somehow it is seen as evidence of failure. Conflicts that focus on space are a less threatening and less problematic way to express value differences, making people's differing viewpoints more explicit and more manageable than when abstract organizational values are at issue.

9.4.4 Avoid the default

The language that clients and users use ('demand'), and the language that building professionals and designers use ('supply') are not the same (Blyth & Worthington, 2001). One effect of the difference is that at certain critical decision points along the way, clients and users do not have a response to the questions they are being asked and cannot provide needed feedback to the design team about space use. They cannot easily envision future space: what a new place will look like, how it will affect them, whether or not they will be able to work comfortably. This knowledge vacuum creates pressure to go back to what is already known – the default position. This pressure exists throughout the workspace change process.

Requiring participants to be explicit about the goals and business objectives of workspace change is useful, especially at the beginning of the process. But it is not enough – these must be documented and accepted by all stakeholders. If not, they will remember later on important priorities they did not think of at the beginning, and they will forget the important priorities that they set at the beginning. Writing decisions down, making lists of goals and objectives, drafting design principles to guide later stage decision-making – all these are tactics that help move the process forward and help avoid an automatic reversion to 'tried and true' solutions, which are, for the most part, repeat versions of what they already have.

Evidence of the pressure to default to the tried and true occurs when decision-makers use cost and the possibility of cost overruns to avoid an innovative solution. Whether or not participants' new ideas are really 'pushing up costs', invoking this argument can effectively apply the brakes to real change. The whole question of whether or not innovative workspace is more costly than conventional offices and conference rooms is more complex than the easily understood but incomplete conventional real estate formulas such as cost-per-square foot and net useable-to-gross floor area. If workspace innovation, like new technology and business processes, is predicated on improving worker performance and making tasks easier and quicker to perform, then 'costs' are really 'investments' and a return rather than a loss should be expected.

9.4.5 Not a zero-sum game

Fear of loss is an area of territorial conflict. Workspace occupants often tend to think more about what they are going to lose than what they might gain from new workspace. Anticipating and managing this expectation is an important part of managing workspace change. Building occupants tend to fear that organizational gains - such as reducing occupancy costs, opening up workspace, and facilitating communication - are more likely to be gains to the company and not to themselves. They may experience these 'gains' as losses: smaller workspaces, fewer partitions, and being more closely observed at work. Managing the workspace change process means taking steps to help users understand and believe that ultimately there are gains to both sides.

The key to creating a win-win situation is the dissemination of information. If gains in functional comfort and productivity, as well as cost savings, are the objectives of the innovative workspace project, then all stakeholders must be informed. It can take months after moving before people who fought against smaller workstations, lower partitions and clustered lay-outs find out that they like being close to co-workers, hearing others talk without having to call meetings, and being able to access other spaces when they need to concentrate or meet privately. Hypertherm Inc. is one of many organisations that had so outgrown its workspace that people were working in workstations squeezed into hallways, had lost virtually all their meeting-rooms and informal space, placing tables in hallways to have a place to meet, and were constantly too warm and experiencing poor indoor air quality because of the overly dense occupancy. Yet when a new building was being planned, several groups complained that it would be 'too open' and would prevent them from concentrating – not because this was likely to be true, but because they were moving into an unknown environment and they feared territorial loss.

The experience of loss is part of the change process – people resist loss, they fight not to have loss, they feel grief when loss occurs. Gains are not automatic – some teaching and preparation is needed so that people learn to function in new ways and take advantage of the interesting new possibilities their new space presents. While the threat of territorial loss automatically accompanies all workspace change initiatives, the possibility of gains must be learned. The most powerful antidote to territorial loss is empowerment through information and involvement.

9.4.6 Empowerment is key

People affected by change need to have some involvement in order for change to be successful. Because people's territorial rules and boundaries are emotional, users need some control over decisions, and to be effectively involved they need to be informed. This is what is meant by environmental empowerment. Deciding which decisions they have a say in, at which stages in the process they are consulted, and how much control they have over the outcome are key issues in the design of the strategic user involvement process.

There is no one right way of empowering people to make decisions about their workspace. The concept of empowerment is based on user feedback and consultation opportunities designed to be effective within specific time and cost parameters and to respond to real project constraints. By being clear and explicit about how much control users have and when they may exercise it, Facilities Managers can perform the important act of actually giving away control for that part of the process. A wide range of styles and degrees of empowerment have been developed, drawing from a variety of participation techniques and selected to correspond to the scale of transformation opportunity (Sanoff, 1999).

A major advantage of involving users is that their professional and technical knowledge can inform design decisions. Workers themselves are the experts on how their jobs are done. The experiences they have had, the ideas they present and the information they share all help improve the quality of decisions, especially functional decisions such as distance from co-workers and equipment, special lighting or acoustic requirements, and needed furniture elements. Techniques of accessing feedback from occupants help to access this information and ideally need to be part of a phased and planned strategic approach: gathering knowledge about how people work is not the same as asking people to plan their own workspace. Indeed, with too much say in the process, workers tend to favour workspace design that reproduces much of what they already have. Thus the approach to involving occupants must be as carefully designed and managed as the design process itself (Becker and Steele, 1994; Steele, 1986).

There are many ways of environmentally empowering users and not all of them work well in all situations. In many organizations, participation in a space planning process takes too much time away from the job. Not only do managers not welcome these kinds of interruptions, but workers themselves are often not comfortable spending their time on tasks that are not in their job descriptions. Another barrier to empowerment is aversion to conflict. People have different ideas about space and how it should work, and not everyone likes to stand up and express unpopular ideas to their peers. A third barrier is the disempowerment most office-workers feel towards workspace. Accustomed to being told where to sit and what kind of space they can have, employees in many companies lack adequate information to make responsible decisions. Workers should be informed so that they can make decisions themselves – not just provided with information about the decisions the design team or CEO is making on their behalf.

9.4.7 Change is positive

Workspace transformation is by nature a positive force. However, it is negative when workspace is changed without attending to its effects on the social order, behavioural norms and work processes, in short, without integrating physical space into a holistic vision of the organization. The presence of a facilitator can help move such a process forward constructively. When stakeholders are unwilling or unable to resolve or even tolerate conflict, a facilitator should initiate an explicit strategic workspace planning process designed to have buy-in at all levels. Knowing they will have a chance to voice their opinion helps stakeholders be more tolerant of different points of view. In addition, such a process allows decision-makers to determine limits on employee empowerment, such as degree of participation, time and cost constraints, and fundamental values and principles to be respected. This ensures accountability and ensures that the process will move forward and will not degenerate.

In view of their experience of building management and operations, and their big-picture understanding of the organization, individuals with FM training are well placed to facilitate the planning process and to ensure that the full range of user groups and interests are represented. While some training in process facilitation may be necessary (and not all FM professionals will want to take this on), a well-facilitated process can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful outcome.

Facilitating the user empowerment process helps make workspace decisions more rational while at the same time respecting occupants' emotional and territorial concerns. Conventional design decision-making often means that workspace decisions are made on the basis of one person or committee giving approval to plans and specifications presented by design consultants. In such a

context, change founders on the shoals of territorial defence, lack of user empowerment, and the pressure to revert to old familiar ways of doing things. As a result, workers may protest and even mutiny – sometimes after move-in. This may account for those cases in which extensive time and effort was spent on innovative workspace, and the company floundered or failed shortly after moving into new premises.

The evidence suggests that workspace change is often not managed as an empowering process for employees, and that companies fail to take advantage of the New Workspace Opportunity. In successful examples, workers who have participated, learned, understood and felt empowered by the process have moved into new workspace with an already established sense of ownership and are effective in immediately using the space as a tool and making it work to their advantage. Senior managers see the value of this in better performance, higher morale, more engaged employees and increased competitive advantage.

9.5 Results of empowering building users

In view of the major investment that new buildings and workspace is becoming for modern organisations, and of the increasing contrast between the speed of change in the business world and the lengthy terms of leases and a building's useful life, companies today are becoming more aware of the New Workspace Opportunity. Directing and managing workspace change, and taking advantage of the opportunities offered by designing new accommodation, is increasingly falling to Facilities Managers, who are increasingly in a position to contribute to organisational effectiveness.

The larger and more complex the organisation planning new accommodation, the more urgent decisions-makers feel about involving and empowering employees so that they (and their knowledge) contribute to a successful outcome. Companies in recent years who have invested in user feedback and used their employees' specialised knowledge to help make workspace decisions include Google, Muzak, Shell Oil, Hewlett Packard, Bloomberg, New York Times, Pfizer, a wide range of government agencies, and innumerable smaller companies. While different organisations' approaches to empowering users in the context of a user involvement strategy vary, the principle – that of accessing people's specialised knowledge about their work to help make decisions about workspace change – is the same. In fact, in future companies are likely to draw increasingly on their 'human capital' to help make good workspace decisions, with some innovative and inventive results. To do this effectively, FM is teaming up with HR to take joint responsibility for environmental quality at work.

In taking on this role, and acquiring the skills necessary to exercise it, Facilities Managers increasingly control the degree to which new workspace is linked with improved productivity – not in the old sense of employees being able to produce more widgets faster, but in the more modern sense of a company that reduces staff turnover, is an effective recruiter of new talent, sustains good customer relations, has a clearly recognizable brand, and is quick to recognize and adopt new tools and processes to ensure competitive advantage.

Informing and empowering users to take responsibility for the environment they work in also changes the FM-user relationship from one of providing a service to clients to one of shared responsibility and partnership. Just as organisations increasingly need to invest in their human capital and to provide an environment that encourages creativity, innovation and initiative as well as rapid and accurate task performance, so they need Facilities Managers to direct and manage their investment in supportive workspace. In the future, FM will need the skills and insight to

devise an appropriate change management process, and to manage occupants' involvement in it and empowerment through it.

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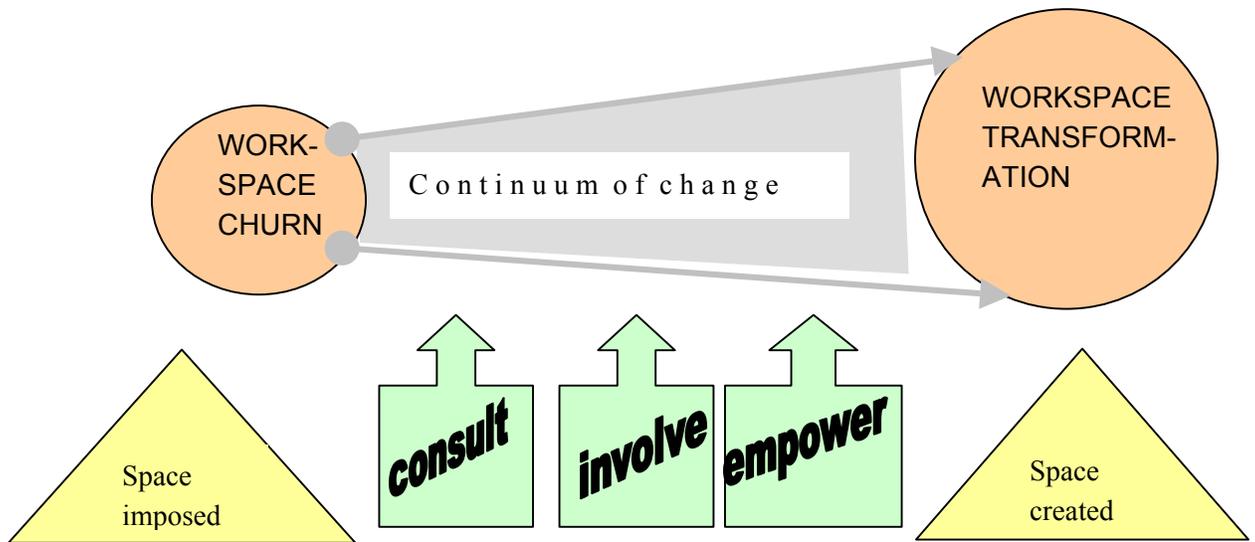
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Figure 1. The New Workspace Opportunity*



* From Vischer, J.C. (2005) *Space Meets Status: Designing Workplace Performance* London, UK: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, Chapter 6.

Figure 2. Consensus Matrix on Transforming Workspace*

<div style="text-align: center;"> YES <hr style="border: none; border-top: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"/> NO </div>	Senior management	Middle management	Employees	Facilities staff	Design consultants
Senior management					
Middle management					
Employees					
Facilities staff					
Design consultants					

* From Vischer, J.C. (2005) *Space Meets Status: Designing Workplace Performance* London, UK: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, Chapter 6.