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Destination Workplace: Longing for Connection, Meaning

Rob Hill
Co-owner, elements

We are in a talent war. And the idea of going back to the workplace that anticipates an outdated version of ourselves does not make it easier to think about what's next. As we envision our collective reentry, we need to instead understand and embrace the appeal for a fresh start.

Many of us want to reclaim the boundaries between work and life as remote working has invited companies into our living rooms, kitchens and family life for more than a year while retaining the benefits of more flexible, choice-driven work environments. Employers need to listen to what their workforce is saying and intentionally design in ways that make coming to the office desirable – ways that make it a true destination.

Placemaking is the physical manifestation and balance of people, brand and culture. Creating destination-worthy workplaces must become the collective goal for all businesses as a means of developing the culture they want, representing their brand identity, attracting and keeping the best talent, and supporting emerging work styles to better foster collaboration and innovation.

• **Culture.** Imagine the power of creating a place

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where employees want to be and want to be seen. The emerging office will be a cultural hub where people can connect both in person and remotely – a place where people are empowered to ideate, share experiences and otherwise engage as a community, the byproduct of which is a thriving culture tied to the brand.

Environments with a sense of belonging foster free-flowing conversations and are where people regularly seek opportunities to collaborate and solve problems, enjoying the social benefits of learning from one another. Serendipitous encounters in the office provide quality versus quantity of personal interaction.

In order to accomplish this kind of environment in the workplace of the future, we need to rethink large, undefined environments in favor of smaller, more intimate and humanistic areas to work and grow as individuals, teams and organizations.

Your brand is your culture, and your space is a reflection of your ideals and principles. The longer your team is apart, the more challenging it is to evolve culturally. Dedicated space also can provide a haven for promoting equity and supporting a broad range of di-

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versity and inclusion initiatives. Through a thoughtful approach to the environment you create and the activities and behaviors you cultivate in your space, you can build respect among people in new ways.

• **Attract and retain.** Flexibility, adaptability, wellness, practical amenities, flexible furnishings and the seamless integration of technology are the baseline for productive work environments. Both community and collaboration are at the core of the new work experience. The office and the pieces that make up the office are shifting to enable new behaviors, policies and virtual work to thrive.

The workspace is an experience that will need to prioritize more "we" spaces and fewer "me" spaces. The emerging atmosphere of the future office is influenced by the hospitality industry and foregoes excess formality. Free address in the open plan will be more the norm to support real estate strategies and hybrid work, and private offices will transform to provide for the need for different types of meeting spaces.

Adapting furniture as an extension of interior architecture provides flexible space planning solutions that allow employees to change their space to adapt to their needs and shape their own experiences. Every individual and team is different, and companies need to create a free flow of space the gives employees latitude, with a landscape of choice of where to work within the office depending upon their job function.

Ultimately, if we've learned anything from the last year when it comes to the world of work, it's that workplace environments have to support higher levels of uncertainty. You can't always anticipate future needs, but you can expect change and proactively respond by making adaptability a functional goal of your workplace criteria.

• **The hybrid spark.** The workplace is there to create sparks. Hybrid work offers both focused "deep work"

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opportunities for individuals to concentrate on tasks remotely as well as opportunities to come together in any number of inviting atmospheres within the workplace for collaboration.

Advancing technologies are the defining challenge of these times. Having the right technology and teaching your team how to use it properly is the key to effective, flexible work environments, particularly in the hybrid model. Creating "phygital" spaces is one key opportunity. This refers to the process of using technology to equalize the physical space to interface with the digital technology that connects people in order to enhance communication across all platforms.

Working anywhere requires a superior technological infrastructure to support collaboration and innovation. General expectations include streamlined video conferencing, live interactive working sessions, up-to-date mobile tools, and cybersecurity. Careful design and planning are needed to manage the increasingly ubiquitous nature of technology to respect visual and acoustic privacy and minimize distraction within the office.

• **The office is here to stay.** The workplace must go beyond accountability and efficiency – humans are social beings who long for connection and meaning. We want to be part of something larger than ourselves and feel valued as a contributor, and good design can foster community.

Understanding the characteristics of the evolving workforce and the elements stimulating workplace transformation will secure a talent-driven experience, inherent adaptability and flexibility, a positive culture, and a balance between real estate costs and employee amenities.\\

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