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Energizing the neighborhood \ \ PAGE 44

Diverse Workplace ‘Neighborhoods’ are More Compelling



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elements

When I think about great communities, my thoughts turn to great neighborhoods. Great neighborhoods are diverse and inclusive – they have a pulse and a personality all their own, with places for connection, solitude, inspiration and rejuvenation, and plenty of choices. Don’t we all prefer the neighborhoods where the houses are unique, with cool, independent shops and restaurants, green space and cultural features that celebrate diversity? Home values in neighborhoods with these attributes indicate that we do, and people tend to value the same things at work that they like in life.

One of the things I felt I “lost” during the pandemic was my community – both at home and at work. Like most everyone, the social scene and sense of community on the home front has mostly returned to pre-pandemic normalcy, but many people are still longing for true connection to their workplace communities – even as they relish the flexibility and often newfound freedom of their remote or hybrid work experience.

Many leaders are on board with some degree of hybrid work, but most want their people to make the office their primary work location as their organizations are experiencing cultural erosion, lagging engagement, communication misses and languishing performance associated with a primarily remote workforce.

Hybrid work often means people will come and go at various times, so the typical pre-pandemic work-



This bank of different kinds of enclaves serves a variety of work modes and offers comfort, control, privacy and temporary ownership since people can reserve space.

place likely will feel empty and lifeless since it’s only partially occupied – who wants to put on hard pants and suffer through a commute for that experience? Commute-worthy workplaces offer a different, compelling, human-centered experience and a sense of place and belonging – a community.

Best-selling author Adam Grant, agrees: “A better vision for a workplace is a community – a place where people bond around shared values, feel valued as human beings, and have a voice in decisions that affect them.”

The idea of building a better vision for a workplace is especially top of mind for me as we embark on creating a new workplace to support our recently merged companies (OfficeScapes, Elements and Floorz) and bringing our house of brands together as our own special community.

To that end, we approach projects with a “place-making” mindset that draws inspiration from human-centered, neighborhood-based community planning practices instead of old, efficiency-driven models. With people at the center of the planning process, the workplace reflects the attributes of great neighborhoods that are far less homogenous, where everyone celebrates a full spectrum of unique human needs, and where everyone has more choice and control.

I recently had the opportunity to travel to New York and experience the new Steelcase WorkLife



A place to go when you want to connect with work friends. Comfortable lounge seating with integrated power supports work postures, personal tables and chalkboard help you get work done, even when you’re relaxed.



Hybrid teams need a place to call home in the office where they can find teammates, access a diverse range of inclusive spaces to support different needs, and feel a sense of belonging.

Center that features neighborhood-inspired planning. The space illustrates how we can create diverse neighborhoods in the workplace to harness the energy and connection we feel when we gather in a local coffee shop, or the peace and solitude we enjoy at a park or at home.

The experience of a workplace neighborhood embodies what we value in our real neighborhoods. It's a place that feels like home, that becomes part of our identity, and the

shared experience provides meaning and a sense of belonging through shared identity; this is how place shapes culture.

The best workplace neighborhoods, like residential neighborhoods, are diverse, including different types of spaces for different needs, in an interrelated and interconnected ecosystem to support a full range of activities and give people choice and control over where they can do their best work throughout the day. A workplace neighborhood contemplates:

- Shared and assigned individual spaces.
- Collaboration spaces that support in-person and virtual interactions.
- Quiet places for individual-focused work and rejuvenation.
- Community spaces to gather, socialize and learn together.

The idea of designing the office as a diverse neighborhood ecosystem isn't new, but it is so very timely as organizations strive to earn people's commute. It starts with the people and meeting their needs: supporting hybrid work, fostering connections and creating a sense of belonging and community. This can happen by drawing inspiration from the ideals associated with intentional placemaking and a human-centered design process aimed at strengthening the connection between people and the places they share.

I can't wait to share our own placemaking journey with you! \\\

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