

Avison Young's experimental workspace explores how spaces can foster productivity and collaboration

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Strategic real estate advisor releases case study report on workplace transformation.

Taking the opportunity to rethink its workplace approach throughout the pandemic, Avison Young used its London Gresham Street office to create two pilot spaces – one transformed, one legacy floor that remained unaltered – to compare the effect of different layouts and amenities.

While employees in Avison Young's London office were already working in an agile way before the disruption of COVID-19, the newly configured floor underwent a transformation to an activity-based model. In place of the reduced number of individual desks, a large variety of additional spaces and work settings were installed: focus pods, phone rooms, open collaborative areas, quiet reading spaces, and a large "war room".

Measuring success

Using a combination of data sources, Avison Young developed a holistic methodology to get the most out of the transformed space, despite launching during a period of low utilisation.

Avison Young deployed the Leesman Office Survey to measure employee sentiment about workplace effectiveness across all its UK locations, including home offices. The data generates several outputs, including an Lmi Effectiveness Score, a composite measure of each unique workplace and group within it. It also presents a set of Super Drivers, comprising 13 fundamental attributes that are consistently required for effective work.

Access-control and regular observations helped the team track how many people attended the office on a

given day, as well as how and where they were working. In addition, sensors allowed for real-time, objective measurement of light, temperature, humidity, particulate matter, noise, and other elements of indoor air quality (IAQ).

Key lessons and take-aways

- Avison Young's overall workplace effectiveness score exceeded not only the Leesman Index, but also the Leesman+ benchmark, which designates a superior level of workplace. The Gresham Street office was in line with this performance, scoring in line with the Leesman+ benchmark.
- Results found that employees who spent more of their time in the transformed space rated the space as more effective as compared to those using primarily the legacy floor.
- Younger team members preferred the new floor, supporting the notion that younger workers prefer the office environment to homeworking for superior amenities, as well as opportunities for learning and mentorship.
- While the transformed floor earned a slightly better Lmi than the legacy floor, an analysis of the individual attributes that together comprise the Lmi shows that the latter actually outperforms the former on nearly half of them – the legacy floor earned higher satisfaction for physical and service features including meeting rooms, personal storage, and computer equipment.
- The transformed floor's success can therefore be traced back to it more fully delivering on Leesman's "Super Drivers", activities and features that are common in importance to workers in roles across the spectrum of collaboration and complexity, and that form the bedrock of workplace effectiveness. It provides more of what matters most, including superior ratings for informal break-out areas, general décor, desk quality and noise levels.

Individual vs collaborative work

Overall, employees on both floors indicated that approximately a third of their important activities involve individual work, while nearly half are collaborative. The remaining activities are split between learning and social activities.

Despite the similarity in work activities, the observed usage pattern was dramatically different across the two floors. Employees on the legacy floor were much more likely to be at a desk than those on the transformed floor. They were also nearly twice as likely to be in a formal meeting room, while those on transformed floor tended to make greater use of informal collaboration areas and specialty spaces.

Choice itself impacts behaviour

Given a variety of options, people seem to choose to use the one that supports them best at any given moment. The transformed floor offers more variety to employees than the legacy floor, so choice itself appears to influence behaviour.

This underscores the importance of providing multiple settings, including ample individual desk space. If employees are properly supported with appropriate settings at the office, they need not plan attendance based on how they want to work. Instead, they can work effectively whether they choose to be onsite or remote.

Finally, no matter how attractive the amenities and layout of a space are – its success is also based on getting a few underlying fundamentals right. Lack of fresh air, comfortable temperatures and adequate lighting are some of the factors which can adversely affect employee wellbeing and productivity, but often fly under the radar.

Anna Scally, Director Workplace Project Management at Avison Young, said:

“As a strategic real estate advisor to our clients, it was important for us to ‘walk the walk’, exploring how changing our own spaces could impact collaboration, wellbeing and productivity. Lessons learnt will benefit our people, as well as allowing us to better guide our clients, so our goal is for future analysis of the space to provide ongoing insights.

What we have identified from observing employees in our experimental workspace, is that measuring and understanding workers’ priorities properly must come first to avoid acting on assumptions. Once these have been identified, providing a range of corresponding, appropriate settings, which must not neglect space for individual work, creates a work environment that encourages agility and adaptability.

Navigating the new workplace is nuanced, and there are no one-size-fits-all solutions. By keeping a few key starting points in mind, occupiers can facilitate future ways of working that support connection, collaboration and innovation.”

To read the full report, [click here](#).

Image credit: Avison Young