

## How Workspaces Matter: A Generational Perspective

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### Congratulations!

Congratulations to **Jennifer Rigas** from Molson! She won a Lunch & Learn at the 2009 Top Employer Summit, where n-gen was an exhibitor.

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### How Workspaces Matter: A Generational Perspective

Why does the VP get a door? Why don't I get a laptop? Why can't we meet at the coffee shop, when the meeting rooms are always booked?

While much of our work supports clients in improving management and strategic organizational practices, there are other areas within our workplaces where understanding the generational perspective is important. In the last 7 years, we have heard countless anecdotes about the confusion of many Gen Ys and Gen Xers about how their workspaces are physically structured. This newsletter explores how workspaces are evaluated by the four generations.

### Workspaces: Walls, Doors and Cubicles

Traditionally, the way in which a workplace was physically constructed represented the status of the colleagues within the office. The more senior the colleagues, the more they were separated from everyone else. The dream was to have the corner office - there are only 4 of them on any floor, thereby signifying employee value through scarcity. In some traditional offices, the quality of furniture, and the quality of the carpet also signified status. For those who did not achieve the status to a private office, the next symbol of status was having your own cubicle whose wall height was used to demarcate hierarchical levels.

In an article by Peter Simpson, "Designing Multigenerational Work Areas" (InterBusiness, October 2007), he raises the point that many organizations today are moving away from the historical construction of offices. The formal, structured workspace is being changed by many organizations in favour of more open spaces that allow for greater technology use and collaboration.

Whether as a response to Gen X and Gen Y employee expectations and views, more and more organizations are paying attention to how workspaces are structured. From a generational perspective, the historical entrapments of hierarchy and status through workspace seem counter-intuitive. During the high-tech era in which many Gen Xers worked, the workspace was designed to be open - lower or no cubicle walls and lunch rooms that looked more like cafes. For many Gen Ys, they see doors and walls as counterproductive to collaboration and innovation. Since they view every colleague as a peer, why separate people who are all working on the same project or organizational goal? Also, they don't want to be tied to a desk, they want to have the possibility of working wirelessly throughout and outside of the office.

## E-Learning

n-gen's e-learning course, **Four Generations**, is now available for individual purchase.

Click [here](#) to visit the n-gen store.

## n-gen's Book



**Loyalty Unplugged: How to Get, Keep & Grow All Four Generations** tackles the why, what, and how-to, from a generational perspective, in all people practice areas.

Please click [here](#) to purchase your copy.

## About n-gen

We have worked with 10 of the 14 Canadian Fortune 500 companies, as selected by Forbes magazine in 2008.

We have trained over 8000 people through our various workshops.

We have delivered keynote presentations to more than 18,000 individuals.

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A Steelcase survey indicated that Gen Ys are three times more likely to work from home or while traveling than other generations. Accustomed to high levels of collaboration and teamwork, Gen Ys expect that the physical space and the office technology will facilitate their work style. They are just as inclined to use Skype to hold a meeting as they are to pick up the phone.

## Meeting Rooms & Training Rooms

Meeting rooms in many organizations are often hard to book - there are not enough of them. During the high-tech era, many organizations solved this issue by designing workspaces that allowed for impromptu meetings. Often employees' desks were grouped together and with moveable tables, so that impromptu workspaces could be created where and when they were needed. The intent was to show that a workspace could be flexible, while still driving productivity. This type of workspace aligned well to Gen Xers expectation of being kept in the loop as to what people were working on, without actually having to attend the meeting. If an Xer was not involved in that meeting, he or she had the option of wearing earphones. And according to Simpson, Gen Ys are less distracted by noise, and in fact, they thrive in noisy, busy environments.

Training rooms have definitely changed to be much more multi-purpose. Tiered classrooms with fixed tables and chairs are a thing of the past. Today, the best training rooms are multi-purpose. With movable tables and chairs, they allow for all types of set-up - from the classroom style, to u-shape to pods. It is also important that they be fully equipped with the right technology and that the technology works consistently.

## Hoteling

Conversely, it is important for organizations to create workspaces that meet the expectations of Baby Boomers and Traditionalist as well. In the last 10 years, some organizations moved to the concept of 'hoteling' where few employees had offices, rather they would sign out a desk space to work for the day. This practice was particularly popular in consulting firms where employees spent a large portion of time on site with clients. Other organizations, however, which were looking to cut operational costs, also used this approach. A participant in one of our workshops was charged with executing hoteling in her organization. She was less concerned with how the younger employees would respond to the change, as many would be happy to work from home as well. Her concern was the response from her Baby Boomer colleagues. She said her colleagues were used to having a desk to call their own, and they wanted a place where they could put up pictures of their children. Space equaled security.

Given the range of workspace design options, spend some time evaluating your office space - does it meet the expectations of all four generations? How could you make small or large physical changes to your workspace that would drive greater employee engagement and team results?

## **Sign up for our next webinar: Managing Change**

Join us for our live webinar on **Thursday December 17th, from 1-2pm EST.**

### **Managing Four Generations Managing Change**

In change management, plans are built to manage technological and physical changes. Often there are no effective plans, however, to manage the people who will have to manage these changes. One necessary consideration is the fact that not every person responds to change the same way. From a generational perspective, the four generations view 'change' differently, so their behaviours and responses to change often differ.

Join this 45-minute webinar and learn:

- why building a people change component is an important element within a change management plan
- how the four generations view change
- what key factors organizations need to consider in building a people change management plan

**Please click [here](#) to register for this event.**

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