

YOUR WORKPLACE QUESTIONS? ANSWERED



CHANGE
MOBILITY
TECHNOLOGY
SUSTAINABILITY
GENERATIONS

SUSTAINABILITY



You’ve probably heard “the most sustainable building is the one we don’t build.” In practical terms, though, sustainability is frequently about the better use and management of the facilities we already have. Real estate has been operating with some pretty wide margins for a long time; instead of real flexibility, we just had lots of “wiggle room.” But that can be an excuse or enabler of the mediocre management of resources. It is more and more apparent that successfully designed sustainable environments will come from a combination of new and repurposed spaces; that they will be informed and impacted by the behaviors of occupants; and that for every improvement we make, there is further to go.

Q Why does sustainable design cost more?

A It used to, and it still can; but it doesn’t need to. The triple bottom line is increasingly applicable: if you focus on investing in sustainable and socially responsible solutions, a cost savings will result. While some sustainable and flexible products cost a premium, this is less and less frequent. Sometimes, the sustainable solution is the less expensive one: for example, with increasing transportation costs, you can source your building materials locally to save time, money, and the environment.

Q Is LEED worth pursuing?

A It’s not about the certification—it’s about what you stand for in your marketplace and among your employees. Ask yourself why you want to take sustainable measures: is your commitment to the earth, your image, your culture, or all three? LEED should be used as a means to guide your decision-making in what can be a complicated process.

Q We planned and designed for sustainability—why isn't the building performing as expected?

A Likely it's the human factor: the users keep getting in the way! Unless they understand and fully buy into the principles of sustainability, they may override its relevant features with old habits. They leave lights on; pull down shades in an environment designed for daylighting; fail to recycle; use one-time plastic bottles. Your challenge may consist of developing various means for communicating the message: signs, witty competitions, amusing posts on your website, daily energy consumption updates. The more creative you are and the more regularly you repeat the message, the more effective it is. Look out for simple solutions: Do people pull down the shades because of glare on their monitors? Are you providing mugs for coffee? Can you offer an incentive for going paperless? If you still haven't closed the gap between potential and practice, consider benchmarking to find out where and how your facility is underperforming relative to others.



Q What's the relationship between work styles and a sustainable building?

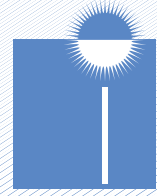
A Rather than starting with the building, start with the users. Activity-based space planning seeks first to understand how people work and what they do in the course of a day, and then seeks to design the space, technology, and relationships to support them. This can be a radical departure from the traditional, hierarchy-based approach to allocating space. With a focus on buildings as spaces for business activities, we can better achieve doing more with less. A focus on how people work also enables longer-term predictions and therefore more relevant buildings.



Q How much do bricks, mortar, furniture, and materials really matter?

A Not as much as you might think. In the building industry we sometimes focus a great deal of effort on a relatively small piece of the equation: first, on the embedded energies of building materials, even though they only account for 2% of energy use, and secondly on building operations, which represent 30%. What's missing is transportation—moving between buildings and moving to and from work—which accounts for another 33% of energy use. A more holistic approach to sustainability must emphasize this bigger piece of the pie: How do we design buildings so as to enhance the potential of virtual/distributed/remote working? How do we integrate the project with public transportation, while seeking to improve and simplify the lives of the occupants with proximity to housing, shopping, schools, and child or elder care?

Center for Workplace INNOVATION



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