

Anetta Pizag

CREATE A
THRIVING
WORKSPACE



EBOOK - PREVIEW EDITION

7 essential design principles
for positive high-performance
physical work environments

This is an excerpt of the book:

Create a Thriving Workspace – 7 Essential Design Principles for
Positive High-Performance Physical Work Environments

by Anetta Pizag

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WORKSPACE**

7 essential design principles
for positive high-performance
physical work environments

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I dedicate this book to:

This book is dedicated to everyone who is eager to make a difference in this world, and wants to be the best version of themselves both at work and in life.

This book is also for those who believe that work should be a fulfilling and meaningful part of life, and who want to give themselves and those around them the best chance to achieve this.

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LET'S BEGIN

Creating a high-performance workplace can be a daunting task, but it doesn't need to be. If you know where you are going, and have the roadmap to get there, not only are you more likely to find your destination, but you will enjoy the journey more. You have now made the first step.

The space is important

The spaces we inhabit greatly influence our lives and who we are. They can enhance our life experiences and form a part of our identity, as we often feel a special connection to particular spaces. At their best, they provide us with inspiration, energy, and support to do what we aim to do.

What we see, hear, smell and touch around us, whether in nature or in the built environment, influences how we think, feel and act. As Winston Churchill famously said, 'we shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us'.

Many wonderful pieces of art wouldn't have been produced and many scientific breakthroughs wouldn't have happened if their creators weren't in the right place to experience some sort of inspiration or epiphany. (A famous example is the doctor Jonas Salk, inventor of the polio vaccine, who experienced the key insights that led to the creation of the vaccine while taking a break from work in an Italian monastery.)

We also know from personal experience that we are different people in different places. Just think about where you go to recharge, to connect with friends, or to develop a deeper connection with yourself. Places can mean so much to us that we are willing to invest a great deal of money and time to visit or to live there. Many of us work hard for years or decades to buy that dream house, or reward ourselves with holidays to special destinations.

To be at our best, it's important for us to be in the right space, and this is also the case for workspaces. A well-designed or well-chosen space helps us to be in the right frame of mind, and to perform to the best of our abilities. Of course, no place can guarantee that things will always work out the way we want, but a space with the right features can make it much more likely that they will.

Where it all started

My best childhood memories take me back to places I loved: meadows, lakesides, special streets, buildings and rooms. The places I grew up in played an important role in who I became. Even today, when I find myself in places resembling those in my childhood, cherished memories instantly resurface.

As I grew older, I became fascinated by the possibility of creating amazing places through the marriage of art and science, places where people might have similarly powerful, memorable experiences. I studied architecture in Hungary, driven by a dream of creating beautiful, sustainable, high quality spaces. However, it wasn't yet clear for me what 'quality space' really meant, so I spent my studies and much of my career uncovering the answers to this question.

I then worked in architectural practices in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Australia. While I had valuable experiences and worked with the most inspiring people, the traditional architectural viewpoint about space design – seeing the building as a means to an end, a functional piece of art – left me with a void. I sensed that there was more to know about creating quality environments, so I decided to explore other disciplines.

For a few years I worked as an environmental consultant, advising other architects about designing environmentally efficient buildings. However, both as a consultant and as an architect, I saw how often the quality of a building was compromised, because members of design teams pursued different agendas, followed rigid processes, and made ill-considered decisions. (I've seen several buildings, for example, that turned out to be engineering masterpieces but were rather unpleasant places to be in.)

I love learning. Throughout my career I've studied a wide range of subjects to better understand the relationship between people, places and performance. I've learnt, for example, about how buildings can make people sick, how the environment can help people to learn better, and how we can design high-performance, people-centred spaces with the aid of science. I've also studied leadership skills, and what makes businesses succeed.

Studying neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), a form of psychology, was a turning point for me. As I learnt about the important role of people's thoughts and emotions in what they can achieve, I started to look at space design differently, kind of inside out. I realised that the purpose of a building was not only to be visually attractive, functional and environmentally efficient, but most importantly, it was to help the people who use it have an experience in the space that works for them.

Understanding people's relationship with their work environment was particularly intriguing for me. I have spent a large part of my work life in corporate offices, many of which made it difficult for me to think and work at my best. I also visited many other offices, and realised what dysfunctional, unpleasant, or even depressing places many people work, and in fact spend most of their lives in.

I became dedicated to doing something about this, creating workplaces that people actually love to go to and where they can truly thrive. I knew that if I succeeded, it would be a win-win-win for all involved: the people using the space, the organisation and the broader environment. This is when a new chapter in my career began, and when the idea for this book took root.

Let's speak the same language

In *Create a Thriving Workspace*, I intend to show you how you can enhance the performance of your business by creating an environment that supports your people's best work. But before getting into detail, let me clarify a few fundamental terms I'll use throughout this book:

- **Thriving:** This is a wonderful word which marries two powerful concepts – *feeling* and *performing* brilliantly – emphasising that the two go hand-in-hand. A thriving person lives up to their potential while having an amazing time. A thriving business enjoys great success while maintaining a positive, vibrant atmosphere. And a thriving workspace is a place that helps all these things happen.
- **People:** Despite this book being about workplaces and their occupants, you'll notice that I rarely mention the words *employee*, *staff* or *workforce*. Instead, I refer to them as *team members*, *workers* or simply *your people*. In my opinion these terms sound more respectful and better acknowledge people as individuals. But most importantly, workplace occupants also include members of non-hierarchical organisations, as well as coworkers, leaders, managers, and anyone else using the workplace.
- **Workplace:** I won't mention the word *office* a lot either. For many people, *office* means an institutional-looking and dispiriting place that is more designed around the perceived needs of the business than the needs of people. Furthermore, this book looks at workplaces in a much broader sense than just offices, recognising that knowledge work can take place in a wide variety of places.
- **Business performance:** Well, it means different things for different businesses, so it's up to you to define. What's most important for your business? Generating higher profits? Growing your brand? Attracting and retaining top talent? Providing an outstanding quality service? Solving a problem that previously seemed insoluble? Dealing with happy clients? Changing lives? Attracting exciting new opportunities? Being surrounded by a dedicated and passionate team? Or perhaps all of these?

- **Work performance:** What do your people need to achieve to make these things happen? What skills do they need to master? How do they need to think and behave in order to propel your business forward?
- **Knowledge workers:** If you're reading this book, it's extremely likely you're one of us: a person whose job is to solve non-routine problems, and whose greatest assets – your ideas, experience and knowledge – lie in your head. You are one of the people I wrote this book for and about.

Let me make it clear upfront: there's no point in me telling you how to create a space where people can complete routine tasks quicker and more accurately. And I'm certainly not going to talk about how to fit the largest number of people into the smallest possible space to save on rent (and wreck productivity into the bargain), because – despite some business owners and accountants thinking otherwise – that's a shockingly ineffective approach.

What you'll read about in this book is the ins and outs of creating a space where knowledge workers can turn their thoughts into results – whether developing or delivering products or services – in the most effective way, while enjoying what they do.

Work is changing

If a person from the year 2000 was suddenly transported to one of today's typical workspaces, they might not notice radical changes just by looking at the space, but they would certainly be astounded to see how differently people actually work now.

Business and work are changing

The advancement of information sharing has transformed the way we work. Using web-based and mobile technologies, most of us can now work pretty much anywhere and anytime, while staying connected to our organisation. New business models are emerging as online networking opportunities, outsourcing and remote working have transformed how teams are formed and work together.

New generations are reaching the workforce, bringing their own set of expectations and habits; they seek fun and freedom of choice, demand transparency, and want to be treated as equals. Boundaries between work and life are becoming blurred; people are looking to integrate work with their personal lives, and to be surrounded by friends at work. They strive for meaningful and enjoyable work, expect their organisations to demonstrate environmental and social responsibility, and are rarely willing to stay in an unsatisfying job for long.

Work is becoming more collaborative, and we can see a shift in emphasis from analytical to creative work. Play is becoming an integral activity in many organisations; games are used to enhance learning, problem solving and innovation.

Living up to new challenges

Instant communication and easy access to information impose new demands on us. Work is getting increasingly complex and requires constant learning. We need to deal with information overload, interruptions, and more time pressure than ever before.

To work well, we need to be able to focus amidst distractions, plan and manage our time and tasks effectively, and prioritise and delegate well. We also need to master a new set of skills and adopt new attitudes. Some of the most highly valued skills in today's business are non-technical, such as creativity, decision making and resourcefulness, along with empathy, networking, developing relationships, and working well in teams. And the most favoured attitudes include passion, motivation and confidence, as well as authenticity, flexibility, resilience, and commitment to the organisation's mission.

Organisations need to keep up

In order to deal with constant change and to remain competitive, organisations need to be lean, agile, and able to manage teams that are diverse in terms of age, background and skill-set. To attract and retain ideal candidates and to retain high performers, leaders need to accommodate these people's expectations. Common expectations include, for example, reducing

hierarchy, practising open communication, keeping up-to-date with technology, and offering flexible work arrangements.

The workspace needs to change too

Workspace design needs to respond to these changes and challenges, and support team members in all positions to meet the demands of modern work.

The way we use the workplace is also shifting. Many are now geared towards promoting social interaction and providing inspiration for workers, since in our technology-dominated world people tend to be hungry for personal connection and emotional support. Furthermore, more and more workplaces are turning into ‘hybrid’ spaces, also accommodating retail, education or hospitality facilities.

As leaders recognise that the physical space can enhance the profile of the business, and thus attract the loyalty of workers and customers, the best workplaces are now designed to communicate key messages – such as the organisation’s culture and mission – to anyone coming through the door.

Workspaces are lagging behind

As leaders start to recognise the potential of the physical space, more and more workplaces are being built or upgraded to provide a better environment to workers. But there is a long way to go, and sadly, inadequate, old-style offices are still the norm. The workspaces that served organisations relatively well over the past several decades are becoming increasingly unfit to support new ways of working, and even hinder both workers and businesses from reaching their full potential.

Typically, more effort is being put into making workspaces ‘functional’ than into supporting people’s needs, and as a result, many office dwellers find themselves having to work in unpleasant and unhealthy conditions. (When people ask me what I do, and I tell them that I help create workplaces where people can work better and feel happier, they often reply, ‘That’s radical!’ or, ‘Good luck!’.) This is particularly alarming, if you consider that most people spend more time at work than in any other place, including their own living room.

Substandard working conditions disengage people and undermine their performance¹, and businesses pay a high price for this, including losing talent, opportunities, and reputation. As someone I know put it, 'You give someone a junk environment, you're going to get junk performance.'

Common mistakes

We all want to work in better environments. How come there's such a gap between our intentions and the reality?

Most workers have been conditioned that the workplace is not for them but for the 'organisation', so until recently, it didn't occur to them to strive for better work environments. (It's puzzling to see how much effort some people put into keeping their gadgets up to date, but are ready to settle for last-century workplaces.)

Designers and decision makers often set the wrong priorities. They tend to put more attention into reducing accommodation costs than into supporting workers' performance, despite the fact that accommodation costs are only a small fraction of what an average company pays for wages. They waste people's precious talent – the force that could propel the business forward – rather than pay a bit more for the space. (If you had a Ferrari, would you want to pull it with horses to save on petrol?)

Some business owners, on the other hand, have the right intentions, but don't quite know what they want. Astonishingly, many are ready to part with a large sum of money without having any idea of the results they are after. When asked the question, 'How will you know that your investment has been successful?' they seem lost. Also, they often choose ineffective design strategies: doing what they have always done, doing what has worked for other organisations, or falling for the hottest trend – all without considering the broader consequences of their decisions.

1 Here are a couple of devastating performance statistics about issues that could be greatly improved through better workspace design: Australians rank second last among their peers on the 2013 Global Innovation Index. The average worker loses over two productive hours a day due to unnecessary distractions. Most organisations operate at around 55-60% of their potential.

Misconceptions

There are a number of misconceptions floating around that lead to misguided decisions, such as:

- Work performance is a management issue; the space doesn't make much difference.
- Creating a high-performance workplace must be expensive, and is unlikely to be worth the investment.
- We probably have to rip out our current fitout and start things from scratch.
- We are already doing the right thing; we have a breakout space with a fish tank and bean bags, a ping-pong table, and a centralised utility room.
- Spending money on making things nice for people is a luxury.

And I also hear unfounded objections that stop people from doing the work on their space, for example:

- We have too many limitations; there are many things we can't change.
- There is not enough information about which design solutions work.
- You cannot plan people's behaviour, so how could you make them work better?
- Designing a great workplace is just common sense; there's no need to think too much about it.
- We are not Google; we don't have their budget, nor do we want to work in a theme park.

Do any of these sound familiar? I trust that after reading this book you will feel clearer and more confident about what you can actually achieve with the resources you have, and understand your opportunities to make a real difference.

Where is the evidence?

- A vast amount of research information is available for us to better understand the relationship between the physical space and high performance. Modern science confirms what we already know from personal experience: that the qualities of our environment do matter; our emotions, thoughts and actions are not only shaped by our personality, relationships, history and other personal circumstances, but also by our surroundings.
- But most importantly, research provides a valuable resource for designing better work environments. Here is an example:

Zoo design is showing the way

To explore what a space needs to be like in order to make people feel well, researchers have looked at the design of zoos. Zoos have dramatically transformed over the past decades. You may remember visiting some as a child, and seeing sad animals locked in tiny cages. Today, more and more zoos make the effort to place their animals into a setting as close as possible to their natural habitat. The enclosures are now much larger and more diversified, giving the animals control over their behaviour. They can choose to be within sight or hide; they can forage, play or rest, just like they would do in nature. And in some places, it's the visitors who are enclosed, and the animals roam free.

What led to this change in zoo design? It was the realisation that an animal might stay alive in a barren cage, but it won't flourish. Scientists now know that animals can only thrive in environments that are natural to them, and which allows them to feel well – physically, mentally and socially.² Are zoo designers ahead of the game? Well, there's certainly a lot we can learn from them.

² 'Biologist Stephen Boyden (1971) defines the optimum healthy environment as "the conditions which tend to promote or permit an animal optimal physiological, mental, and social performance in its natural or 'evolutionary' environment.'" – as stated on the website of Whole Building Design Guide.

We have a lot of similarities to animals, in that we can only realise our potential in spaces that suit our evolutionary needs. Our environment not only needs to be habitable – being healthy, having clean air, and providing opportunity to rest – but it also needs to help us to feel well, find fulfilment and pursue a high quality life.

After studying what sort of environmental conditions are required for animals and people to feel well, environmental psychologists and biologists have identified a set of criteria that buildings should aim to fulfil. These include³:

- Providing opportunities for spontaneous social encounters
- Providing opportunities for us to rest, physically and mentally
- Allowing us to find privacy, and to be alone or mix with others as desired
- Offering connection to nature
- Providing opportunities for movement and exercise
- Having sound levels that are neither too high nor too low
- Being aesthetic, interesting and diverse environments, engaging our senses
- Providing us with a sense of social equality
- Allowing us to stay comfortable
- Making it easy to find our way around

3 As outlined on the website of Whole Building Design Guide. (See Related Readings at the end of this book.)

It's easy to get lost in the jungle

People often ask me, ‘**So what’s the Magic Pill? What is the one thing that makes workplaces work?**’ My answer is rarely what they expect; it’s not about taking a side in one of the hot debates (such as whether open-plan offices are better than private offices), or picking a favourite trend (like using standing desks).

As every business and every team is unique, you can’t expect to find universal design solutions for your specific needs. For me, the magic pill is: asking the right questions, talking to the right people, learning from the best resources, and considering everything that’s important for the business and everyone associated with it. **In short, for your workspace design project to succeed, you need to make well-informed decisions.**

However, if you are ready to get started, you might find it challenging to find trusted advice and answers to your questions. Chances are that you are also unsure about how far your budget can take you, and what sort of results and returns you can anticipate. **To navigate through the complexity of a workspace design project, it’s best to follow a framework or some sort of expert guidance.**

The difficulty is that currently there is no well-established design model for creating high-performance work environments. When you look at publications or search online, what you find is lots of scattered ideas, many of which are contradictory, fashion-driven, biased, or only suitable for specific types of businesses. There’s an abundance of exciting theoretical ideas, but few practical solutions.

High quality, reliable information is hard to find, as it is mostly published in academic literature. These publications also tend to be hard to digest, written by and for designers and scholars, in their own jargon.

You might assume that the architects or interior designers you work with should be able to provide the answers and guidance you need; however, they are rarely the right people for this role (even though many of them would disagree). This is not so surprising if you consider that designing an attractive-looking, functional and buildable fitout requires a whole different skill-set from providing advice on how your workspace could make your team members feel, think and work better, in alignment with the strategy and culture of your business.

Some architectural and workplace consulting firms do offer expert Workplace Strategy advice, but this service can be extremely costly and time consuming, as the process usually involves extensive project-specific research conducted by a large team of consultants. Only big businesses can afford such fees, and so smaller ones miss out on this service.

In short, there are no easy resources showing business owners, in a structured manner, what they need to know about creating a well-designed, tailored workspace. The intention of this book is to fill this gap.

The way forward

This book offers a comprehensive range of practical and powerful strategies for creating thriving physical work environments. We will look at aspects of performance and productivity that are most relevant to today's businesses – such as innovation, collaboration, and trusting relationships – and explore the key principles that make workspaces, as well as businesses, highly successful.

Create a Thriving Workspace is neither a book of inspirational ideas, nor a book about management or psychology; however, it ventures into these fields and presents design strategies in context. The strategies outlined in this book can benefit new building and interior projects, as well as upgrades and relocations. Furthermore, you will learn to make better choices about where and how you and your teams work, and thus improve your results without even changing your physical space. Finally, this book will prepare you to effectively collaborate with consultants and contractors involved in your workspace project.

Why do you need to know about this?

‘Shouldn't I just leave all this to the specialists?’ you may ask. Going down the traditional path – leaving the design to the ‘experts’ and staying out of their way – is likely to lead to disappointment. And if they are true professionals, they might even refuse to work with you under such conditions.

Even if you engage the best professionals, your active participation in the design process is imperative. You are the expert on your own business, so the knowledge you share with your consulting team will form the foundation of the design. You will also need to take responsibility for your decisions; designers can give you suggestions, but at the end of the day, you and your decision-making team will sign off on the plans.

What makes a high-performance workplace

When looking at the most successful, consistently high-performing businesses, including how their workplaces are designed and how their people work there, we can find some recurring patterns. These organisations all possess the seven qualities described below, which are also reflected in and supported by the way their work environments are designed:

1. **VISIONARY** – They pursue a powerful vision for the business, follow a clear set of values, and have a strong brand. Their workspaces send inspiring messages about the organisation – who they are and what they stand for – which helps motivate their people, align their teams, and attract the right talent and business opportunities.
2. **SMART** – They have effective systems, processes and technology in place to optimise communication and delivery of work. Their workspaces are designed to make it easy for people to access all the resources they need – including other people, information, work tools and technology – so that they can communicate better, collaborate better, and work more intelligently.
3. **PRODUCTIVE** – They give their people the best support to be able to work efficiently. Their workplaces are comfortable and minimise negative influences such as distractions and stress, providing people with the best conditions to focus and think clearly.
4. **DIVERSIFIED** – They nurture diverse teams, knowing that diversity fuels problem solving and innovation, and promotes a culture of respect. Their workplaces allow everyone to work effectively, using different skills and engaging in different activities, regardless of their age, personality or preferred work style.
5. **CARING** – They genuinely care about their team members and customers, and in turn, their people care about the company more and are happy to work harder. Their work environments are healthy and attractive, and promote a positive work experience; they are places people actually want to go, and where they find it easier to excel.

6. **ENGAGING** – They nurture a vibrant culture where people feel they belong, and are simply great places to work. Their workspaces assist people in building trusting relationships, allow them to have fun, and serve as a home for a flourishing work community of highly engaged and proactive team members who work brilliantly together and also deliver an outstanding customer experience.
7. **EVOLVING** – They not only keep up with, but thrive on change. And as they never see their business strategies as ‘finished’, they don’t see their workplaces as finished either. They operate in flexible, frequently-changing environments that make it easy for people to constantly evolve the way they work in response to new opportunities and challenges.

These companies reap the fruit of their efforts on many levels, showing us what a thriving workplace can achieve. Their people are more productive, have more breakthrough ideas, and solve problems better. They work in better spirits, are more loyal and committed, and are happy to go the extra mile. Team members trust each other more, support each other better, and communicate and collaborate more effectively. The company improves its reputation and market position as a result of providing a higher quality service and improved client experience. Costs are reduced and profits are increased through major improvements in work efficiency, attracting and retaining top talent, and making more and better sales. Work becomes more enjoyable and rewarding for anyone associated with the business.

Here's the recipe

The way I see it, **these seven qualities are benchmarks of excellence in workplace design.** If you compare the workspaces of, say, a booming tech-development company like Google and a successful bank like NAB, you'll find that they look vastly different. However, both of them do a wonderful job in demonstrating these qualities – in their own ways.

By considering these seven qualities whenever you have a decision to make about your workspace, you can ensure that by the end of the day, every single aspect of the physical space – e.g. colours, textures, materials, lights, sounds, room layouts, furniture, technology and media – will work towards the flourishing of your business.

I'm about to show you exactly how to do it.

PRINCIPLE

1

VISIONARY



CREATE SPACE FOR A VISIONARY BUSINESS

Creating a workspace that embodies the DNA of your organisation

Who are we? Why are we here? What is important to us? What difference are we making? ... Creating a 'Visionary' workspace is about asking these big questions and then translating the answers into timber and steel, furniture and paint – the physical environment. A space that embodies the essence and purpose of your business not only unifies people and makes them a stronger team, but keeps everyone on track on the company's journey towards creating a better future for its clients, members and stakeholders.

The big picture

The 'visionary' workplace

By looking at the place where a person lives, we can find out a lot about them: Are they shy or outgoing? Rebellious or conforming? Adventurous or creatures of habit? Loners or team players? What are their interests and hobbies? Do they make their own path or follow others? Are they pursuing clear goals or just drifting around? ... And we get a sense of how well we would probably get along.

Similarly, when looking around a workplace, we tend to draw conclusions about the organisation: who their members are, what is important to them, how they aim to improve people's lives, and what sort of experience they create for their own teams as well as their clients through their products, services, and the way they do business.

In a 'visionary' workplace these messages reflect the truth and highlight the best of the business. The space embodies the organisation's purpose, values and brand. Everything people see and feel in the space aligns with, and even enhances, what they already know about the business.

Why is this important?

Both as workers and as customers, we don't just want to make transactions; we want to engage with organisations that stand for something bigger than themselves – a worthwhile cause. We want to feel that through our work or purchase we contribute to a happier, fairer, more inspiring world. We want to be on a journey with those who are on our side, who share our standards, beliefs and passions.

To attract committed people, your businesses needs to present itself clearly and consistently across all communication platforms, including the work environment; it needs to demonstrate the values, beliefs and personalities you seek to attract. This will make it easier for your clients to get to know and trust you, and for your team members to commit to your vision. Imagine

dealing with people who just know they are in the right place as soon as they come through the door, whether for the first time or for the thousandth time.

Miscommunication happens

Relatively few organisations operate in workspaces that speak the same ‘language’ as they do. The question I often ask of leaders, ‘What messages do you aim to communicate through the space to your teams, clients and the market?’ usually remains unanswered.

It’s a common misconception that people don’t need constant reinforcement of what the business aims to achieve; it’s assumed that those who are in touch with the business should already be clear about that.

Many leaders believe that in order to articulate who they are as a business, all they need to do is market their business well, engage in conversations with their stakeholders, and offer products or services that speak for themselves. These are of course important. However, those leaders fail to recognise that the workplace also has its role in this process – that it essentially acts as a ‘message board’, speaking either for or against them.

Some organisations don’t have clearly defined goals, values and brands, so they simply don’t have much of an identity to portray. In contrast, others have solid ideas about who they are, but are confused about how to capture certain elements of their identity through building and interior design. (For example, some people seem to be convinced that the only way to present a clean-cut image¹ is to create a sterile-looking environment, or that the only way to incorporate the brand is to use the company’s corporate colours throughout the space, regardless how those colours influence people’s psychology.)

1 It’s not uncommon that presenting a respectable, authoritative, clean-cut image is the main driver for designing buildings with their facades fully clad with unshaded glass. While recent energy efficiency regulations make it very difficult for such building designs to obtain a permit in Australia, some business owners and developers are still aiming to create buildings that look as close to a shiny glass box as possible.

Misleading workspaces

As a result, most workplaces express messages which are incongruent with the organisation's purpose, values and brand. Even if leaders communicate the most powerful messages through words, this lack of congruence can weaken their meaning!

For example, I know organisations that care about the resolution of environmental issues, but their workspaces waste resources such as energy and water, and send mixed messages about sustainable living and working practices. (I worked for a company in the environmental sector that encouraged its employees to cycle to work, but we were not allowed to store our bikes in the office, because that would look unprofessional.)

I have seen the workplaces of promising start-ups where confidence and belief in the company's success were among the most appreciated personal attributes of the team. However, their office suggested that the organisation didn't believe in itself. (The interior showed no sign of planning; every element was thrown together as a quick reaction to urgent needs of accommodating extra staff or equipment. The space communicated scarcity; it was only fitted with the bare essentials, as if spending even a little time and money on making the office nice was something the company couldn't afford.)

And when you see all those workplaces that look alike, with no character, you just can't get a sense of the people who work there. These spaces leave us with a feeling of void – a bit like talking to a machine instead of a real person when making a phone call.

These workplaces can erode relationships with anyone coming in. Workers may get inconsistent messages about the vision of the business, and about what sort of behaviour and attitude is expected from them. This can lead to a lack of direction, conflict and indifference – all enemies of high performance. And clients or prospects may get mixed messages about what the business really stands for and struggle to build a connection with the brand.

In such environments, businesses often struggle to attract the right people (staff, clients and business partners) and opportunities, or keep attracting the wrong ones. Clients are more likely to see the business as a commodity, so it is forced to compete on price. The space can even undermine the reputation of the business, and raise questions about its integrity.

 **Saying ‘no’ to my heroes**

I’ve never in the past applied for a job without researching the employer and checking out if their vision and values aligned with mine. It was always important for me that the company I worked for was committed to creating healthy, aesthetic, green environments. I was competitive; I got an offer after most of my interviews. However, I stopped counting how many times I needed to say ‘no’ to employers that I had previously seen as heroes, because their workplaces didn’t at all reflect the values they claimed to have. While they took pride in creating high quality architecture, they worked in dark, stuffy, uninspiring offices.

Some may perceive this attitude as superficial judgement, or maybe even arrogance. But would you trust working with building professionals whose own workspace was clearly a low priority for them? And how enthusiastic would you be about joining their teams?

Following our calling, finding our fellows

We all strive to make a difference in our lives, to make this world a better place somehow. But the extent to which are we able to fulfil our purpose through work varies. We view our work either as a ‘job’, a ‘career’, or a ‘mission’ / ‘calling’. Those with a ‘job’ only work to make a living, and they look forward to being somewhere else after work where real life happens. Those who pursue a ‘career’ are motivated to learn, and they want to improve their skills and succeed. But only those who see their work as a ‘mission’ or ‘calling’ find their work truly fulfilling, knowing that they are contributing to something meaningful.

We all know that developing a compelling business vision and a powerful brand identity require effort; so does setting up a work environment that reflects all of these. But the payback is huge, as shown by the results of companies like LEGO or Pixar, whose workplaces are extensions of the company’s vision.

Visionary leaders know that a workplace that embodies the DNA of the organisation is better at attracting the kind of people and opportunities that will advance the business, and contributes to a positive customer experience.

Team members are more motivated, know their direction, and set better priorities, with the result that they need less management. They work in greater synergy and with a stronger sense of purpose. What's more, they tend to be more involved in maintaining a dynamic and inspiring environment. With the space and the people mutually supporting each other, the business has the potential to gain unprecedented momentum.

You not only need a clear vision and goals for your business, but also for creating your workplace. Designing a building or a new fitout can be a complex process with unexpected twists and turns. It requires coordination between many parties (users, consultants, suppliers, contractors, authorities, etc.), and even if everything is carefully planned, you often come across unforeseen issues to deal with. You often need to work under time pressure and make quick decisions. Developing a set of specific goals and guidelines for your design project right at the beginning will help you make better choices throughout this process, and create a workspace that you and your teams can be really proud of.

And then saying 'yes'

Eventually I got an offer from a company I was happy to say 'yes' to. As soon as I entered the office, I got the impression that this environmental consultancy walked the talk, and it cemented my trust in it. The space had plenty of daylight, lots of indoor plants, design features to improve energy efficiency, and an elaborate waste recycling system. Most of the materials and products were recycled or reused, but their creative use made the space look attractive and fresh. It was a green workplace with an honest and easy-going atmosphere. After settling into this environment, I wasn't surprised to find myself in a team of diverse but like-minded people, all living an active and environmentally conscious lifestyle (both at work and at home) as second nature. I had finally found a team where I belonged.

Key design strategies

Key design strategies for creating a ‘visionary’ environment:

1. Invite people on an exciting journey
2. Let your company’s values shine
3. Make your workspace a part of your brand
4. Stay in harmony with the environment

By adopting these strategies, your workspace will become a powerful communication tool as well as a source of inspiration for your team members and clients. In your new space, you will find it easier to attract well-aligned people and exciting opportunities. Your teams will become more motivated and cohesive, and will work with greater focus towards a shared vision.

To progress well towards this vision on a day-to-day basis, your people will need to be able to communicate seamlessly and organise their work efficiently. The associated strategies will be introduced in the following chapter, Principle 2: Smart.

Strategy 1: Invite people on an exciting journey



Breaking the mould

‘Doing good can help improve your prospects, your profits and your business; and it can change the world.’ – says Richard Branson, founder of Virgin Group, in his book *Screw Business as Usual*.

Branson is known for an uninhibited and rebellious nature that some find controversial. But what he stands for is magnetic: revolutionising how business is done by shifting the focus from

short-term financial goals towards repairing the damage to the environment, elevating humanity and enriching the life of everyone affected by the business. He believes – and his enterprises testify – that pursuing these goals will naturally improve the profitability of a business, and that the best way to get there is by pushing boundaries, focusing on the best in people and having fun.

Virgin constantly raises the bar of customer experience. Their facilities – from airport terminals to gyms, from retail outlets to offices – are all shining examples of what Virgin stands for. They are welcoming, friendly, innovative spaces that stand out from the crowd, designed to operate efficiently and to invite people to do business ‘the Virgin way’. (Some of the messages you can read on the walls in Virgin’s offices include: ‘I can see you workin’ good’, ‘Life’s too short for boring’, and ‘Your journey into space starts here’.)

Virgin is a business with a clear purpose which you can see and feel in their facilities.

Meaningful work boosts performance

But what exactly is the purpose of a business? Purpose is the impact it aims to create beyond making profit, the way it wants to enhance people’s lives. This is the primary reason why you and your colleagues started or got involved in the business in the first place, and a big part of why you want to go to work each day. This is the answer to the questions: What’s the ultimate goal you’re all striving towards? How do you make a difference? What are you and your teams most passionate about?

Purpose is a key part of your business and workplace strategy. Don’t move on before you find answers that touch something deep inside you and your team members. Once you’ve nailed it, you’ll be ready to create a space that sends the right messages to everyone who walks in.

Communicating your business purpose clearly and consistently – including how your workplace looks and feels – will certainly strike a chord with those

whose personal mission or calling aligns with your organisation's objectives. When we work with meaning and a strong sense of purpose, we are more driven to live up to our potential and thus perform better. We work with passion and pride, and are willing to go the extra mile. We are still affected by challenges, as everyone is, but are better equipped to deal with them.

We don't need to be superheroes to qualify for the badge of pursuing a mission or calling. When our team works towards an inspiring goal, and we understand how our contribution moves things forward, even a simple job can be fulfilling.²



Let's have some scary goals!

Love, fear and high performance was a keynote speech I attended given by Michael Rennie, Managing Partner of McKinsey & Company.

Rennie talked about how he had been trying to understand the drivers of human performance throughout his career. The answer he found is very simple and consistent across cultures: there needs to be a big, scary, almost impossible, meaningful goal, as well as a supportive, trusting, caring team environment. If the goal is not exciting enough it just doesn't bring out the best in the team.

He also asked the audience, 'If you think back on your career, think of a time that you describe as a peak performance experience, what was there more of or less of? What was different about it?' Interestingly, the answers coming back from the room matched his experience, as well as with the findings of 10 years' and \$30m worth of research.

When these two things – 'love' and 'fear' – line up, the performance increase is substantial. A lot of research shows that productivity of labour in factories nearly doubles, and in knowledge-based jobs it increases by 5 to 8 times!

² This is well illustrated by the popular urban legend: 'President John F. Kennedy was visiting NASA headquarters for the first time, in 1961. While touring the facility, he introduced himself to a janitor who was mopping the floor and asked him what he did at NASA. The janitor replied, "I'm helping put a man on the moon!"'

The role of the workplace

A well-designed workspace helps people develop a stronger sense of purpose at work. The best workplaces embody what their users stand for and reflect their enthusiasm. When we walk into a workplace like this, we're immediately reminded of why we are there, and the difference our work makes. Furthermore, these spaces strengthen our belief that we can in fact hit those 'scary big' goals, and help us develop a sense of camaraderie by reinforcing that we are all on the same journey. Beyond inspiring us to perform better, these spaces attract new talent, clients and business partners who want to be part of the same vision.

Design suggestions

- Express your business vision and mission throughout the space. Decorate your walls with images, graphics and statements that showcase your enthusiasm and illustrate how your organisation makes this world a better place. These might be, for example, simple words (perhaps presented as wall art), photos of those who benefit from your contribution, and display boards of completed as well as future projects, along with inspiring examples to follow.
- If your niche allows, integrate your products or services into the fitout, or create opportunities for visitors to get a taster of what you do when they come in. (For example, The office of the Automotive Aftermarket Industry Association in Maryland, US, has created a car-themed office with a 1955 Nash Metropolitan automobile serving as the reception desk, and with artworks built from car parts. The whole office has a vintage automotive feel.)
- Create opportunities for your people to share their passion. You might allocate rooms or wall surfaces where everyone is welcome to display their own artefacts and put up messages. (I have worked in offices where the walls were covered by photographs and inspiring pieces of art made by those who worked there.)

- What's the ultimate purpose of your business? To create memorable experiences? To make life safe, pain-free and happy? To bring out the best in people and help them live their dreams? To establish better harmony between people and the Earth? Whatever it may be, **create a mini version of your ideal world in your workplace.** Read on, and hopefully you'll find the ideas you need to do this successfully.

Strategy 2: Let your company's values shine

An inspiring business vision is hugely powerful in attracting team members who are striving towards the same goals as you do, and in getting them to jump into work with focus and enthusiasm. But this can only be maintained when they feel they are on the right path to turn that vision into reality, and when they are actually able to work well together and agree on the steps to take.

Your set of business values is the compass that helps your team members stay on track towards the desired destination. They are guiding principles that shape your people's behaviour, and assist them in setting priorities and making decisions in everyday practice. (While your purpose is the answer to the question WHY, your values are answers to the question HOW.)

Aligned values make relationships stronger, whether in business or in other areas of life. Therefore, we are more attracted to working in organisations that share our personal values, and collaborate better with them. Knowing that we all stand on common ground makes us more flexible, empathic and tolerant. We need less management and supervision, we know how to act in certain situations, and we make better decisions to move the business forward.

Values are often the main deciding factors (for all parties) in recruitment, as well as in establishing partnerships. Furthermore, the values embraced by the business are also an essential part of the customer experience, and often drive customers' decisions about who to engage.

Shared values go a long way

I have heard of a large company where management decided to consolidate all employees' personal values into a set of company values. This ensured that everyone could come to work being true to themselves, instead of checking their personal values at the door and conforming to standards imposed on them (as so many workers do). This gave a huge boost to their engagement and teamwork, and it became nearly impossible to get a job at that company, since almost no-one left.

Values and the physical space

When the physical space embodies the core values of the organisation, workers relate to those values better and live up to them more. They become an integral part of the work experience.

Unfortunately, many leaders communicate one thing with their words and another with their work environment. (This can be just as confusing as talking to a person whose words don't match their body language. They might say what we want to hear, but their whole presentation suggests deceit.)

For example, leaders who claim to stand for the highest quality in everything they do often provide sub-standard conditions for their people to work in. And businesses that claim to be innovative, flexible, and ready to take risks have workplaces that seem stuck in the last century. This incongruence not only affects workers, but can undermine the reputation of the organisation.

Design strategies

So how can your workspace speak your values?

You often see words and images that represent the organisation's values stuck up on office walls. This might be a good start, but we are only skimming the surface. If the workspace as a whole does not embody these values, these displays will probably be met with rolling eyes.

The formula for creating a values-aligned work environment is simple: **use the same philosophies to guide your design decisions as you use for your business decisions.** If *ABC* is one of your values, create a workplace that either does or promotes *ABC*. Here are a few examples:

- Innovation – Use innovative features, and make your workplace conducive to lateral thinking.
- Transparency – Minimise barriers; make it easy for people to see, hear and talk to each other.
- Authenticity – Create a workplace with a genuine feel, and which invites people to be themselves.
- Environmental sustainability – Minimise the negative environmental impact of your workplace.
- Putting people first – Create a comfortable, pleasant and empowering environment.
- Fun – Create a positive environment, employ humour, and provide opportunities for fun and play.
- Flexibility – Create a flexible and adaptable work environment that can be suited to different ways of working.

Do these sound trivial? Yes, of course they do. But you'll find that making these distinctions at the beginning of your design project will really help you create a space that feels like your second skin.

(The following chapters will provide specific strategies that support each of these objectives.)



Case study: IT Success Recruitment Services

When Graeme Isaacs, director of IT Success Recruitment Services, engaged me to help him design his company's new office fitout, he knew exactly what set his business apart from the competition. Their core values included *authenticity*, *honesty*, *transparency* and *dynamism*. IT Success had no hidden agenda; it served its candidates' best interests and opened up amazing new opportunities to them. Graeme also took special care of his staff; he worked

hard to ensure that they came to work with a smile on their face each day, and that they loved to be in the office.

Graeme wanted to create a space that reflected the company's values – which helped visiting candidates feel more trusting and open and which was an energising and nurturing environment to work in.

The space we created had no visual barriers between the visitors and staff areas – it was all open, which was unprecedented in the recruitment industry. To further emphasise transparency, we chose workstation desks without dividing screens. The space had bright uplifting colours and beautiful artworks throughout, along with domestic-style furniture. At the centre of the office was a lounge area which was tastefully decorated with personal artefacts, some of which reflected Graeme's spiritual views.

Graeme's original objectives have all been achieved. Beyond that, his office has proven to be successful in encouraging a free flow of ideas and maximising the energy and productivity of staff. (While Graeme originally planned to put his company values on the walls as word graphics, he found later on that this wasn't necessary.)

Strategy 3: Make your workspace a part of your brand

Learning from retail

When we walk into a shop, we quickly get a glimpse of the type of products we can find there (e.g. style, quality, price) and the level of service we can expect. In other words, we get a sense of whether we are in the right place to find what we need, just from the look and the vibe of the shop fitout. Apple shops are excellent examples; you can walk into any of them and immediately recognise that the qualities of the space are similar to the qualities of the products you can buy there, such as sleek design and easy navigation.

This is because shop designers tend to put great effort into creating spaces that reflect the brand they're working with. They know that the retail space serves as a marketing tool, and if it sends the right messages to customers, sales go up.

How does it work?

People are emotional beings whose purchase decisions are strongly guided by their moods and gut feelings. They want to get a sense that the new product or service will fit neatly into their world and make it a better place. Before committing to it, they need to feel some personal connection to it and trust that it will deliver on its promise.

And that's where brand comes into play. When the customer sees the business as a good friend who they can trust and appreciate, emotional attachment occurs more naturally. But for that friendship to form, your business needs to have a unique and visible personality, just like flesh-and-blood friends do, with your own interests, values, attitudes, passions, opinions, etc. As Tim Reid, host of *The Small Business Big Marketing Show*, says: 'People can copy what you do, but not who you are. And the *who you are* is all about that emotional connection you make with your prospects and customers. It's your BRAND.'

The brand needs to be communicated consistently across all platforms, including the subliminal messages sent by the physical environment, otherwise it's not believable.

Branding in the workplace

The same principles apply to workplaces; if your environment embodies the personality of your business, it's easier for your prospects, clients and team members to develop a close relationship with it. In the past, this design philosophy was rarely pursued beyond the retail and hospitality sectors. But today, leaders in many industries see their workspace as a part of their brand, a tool for deepening relationships with anyone who comes in the door.

Enticing customers – building greater engagement and loyalty, generating more sales – is just one part of the benefits. A workplace that reflects the brand also speaks to team members: 'This is who we are.' It reminds them of the experience the organisation aims to deliver to its customers, and reinforces the work ethic, attitudes and behaviours expected from them.

Misguided attempts

Before looking at how to translate your brand into interior design features such as room layouts, furniture and decor, let's make it clear how not to.

Companies often use their corporate colours as feature colours of their workplaces and leave it at that. Furniture and wall colours tell little about the essence of the organisation, and can even have adverse psychological effects. For example, a red logo or a green font type have completely different meanings and trigger different emotions compared to a red carpet or a green wall. The business owners who decorate their walls with marketing imagery, in the name of creating brand presence, are also missing the point.



The man in the hard hat

Once I worked at a building engineering firm that went through a merger with a large multidisciplinary group which also serviced several other industry sectors (including road building, mining and water management). As a result, our organisation went through a re-branding process. To remind us of our new identity, a set of banners, each representing an industry sector that the group worked with, were placed strategically in the boardroom. From that day, every time I attended a meeting in that room and saw those banners I noticed my mind wandering with thoughts like: 'I am an architect and consultant, employed to help create green buildings. And here is this man in a hard hat helping to put an enormous concrete ring into the ground. He represents the organisation! I must be in the wrong place!' Such self-talk is often not logical, but is powerful nevertheless.

Your space as a person

A much better approach is to capture the essence of your brand in the design, focusing on the experience you want to provide for your people and the impression you want to give about your company.

One excellent strategy is to treat the space as if it was a person. As a starting point, create a detailed picture of who your company would be (or should be) if it was an individual. What would they be like? What would be their

unique attributes? What would set them apart from your competitors? What impression would they make on those coming in contact with them?

Let this picture guide your design decisions. It might be hard to envisage how to give your workplace a personality, but let me assure you, this is not rocket science once you've got your message right. And it can be real fun. (It's a bit like shopping for clothes that highlight your personality, or for artwork for your home.)



'This is who we are – design around this'

A great example of a workplace that has been designed around the brand is the South Melbourne office of CO2, an Australian environmental services company. Andrew Grant, managing director at the time, explained the revolutionary process they had followed to create an environment that's just the right fit for the organisation.

At first, they worked with Tim Reid, marketing expert, to develop a solid brand identity for the company. As a part of this process, they did an exercise to imagine what CO2 Australia would be like if it was a person. They described 'his' core values, personality traits, and the people he would associate with. They also identified the type of car he would have, and his favourite music, food, colour, etc.

As another exercise, their team also explored other products and brands they admire (e.g. Apple, Rip Curl, Macquarie Bank), along with the qualities and benchmarks they set for themselves (e.g. the qualities embodied by WWF and by German engineering). Finally, they formulated what they do and how they make people feel special.

Then they gave this brief to the graphic designers who developed their marketing imagery, website, corporate stationery and other collateral. And when CO2 moved into their new location, they also gave this briefing document to the designers and said, 'This is who we are; design around this'. The designers loved working with such a meaningful brief, and created a work environment that deeply resonated with CO2 Australia's people.

(See the full case study in Principle 5: Caring.)



Case study: JobAdder

JobAdder is a Sydney-based software company with the brand and slogan: simplicity. In our interview, CEO Brett Iredale talked about how their brand values directly tied into the design of the office:

‘We design recruitment software that’s easy to use, clean and simple. The user interface is white, spacious and clean, because people like to use products like that. And our office also looks like that. Our competitors’ offices, processes, sales – the whole experience – are cluttered and confusing. So we distinguish ourselves in the market just by being simple, easy, clean.’

Software and infrastructure were also set up in the spirit of simplicity. They decided to use only cloud-based software as well as file-sharing and phone systems. There is no server or network, which is really unusual in a software company. This has not only defined the way they work, but also made an amazing difference to the look and character of the office. Without server rooms, network cables, desk phones and piles of papers, the space is kept free of clutter.

The office space has essentially become a marketing tool.

‘Before moving here, we used to go out to our clients, but now we insist that they come to us. Our office tells them a story about who we are, and the philosophy of the company.’

The responses are overwhelmingly positive; when customers come in, they want to be associated with JobAdder, partly because of the space. Put simply, the space helps them acquire new customers.

And the space also helps recruit the right staff. It’s a very nice office which people generally find an attractive place to be in. But most importantly:

‘When people come in for an interview, and our office has a huge impact on them, I know straightaway that they are on the same page. I don’t need to tell them how to fit in. And they can see what we have here, and ask for a job.’

(See the second part of JobAdder’s case study in Principle 6: Engaging.)

Strategy 4: Stay in harmony with the environment

For many companies, their take on environmental issues is an important aspect of their purpose and identity. Now, I'm not here to tell you how green your workplace should be. But I encourage you to review the environmental objectives of your business, and to set up your workspace in alignment with that.

'Sustainable', 'green', 'conscious', 'responsible', 'small footprint', 'efficient' – these are just a few of the many common phrases referring to roughly similar concepts. Unfortunately, these words are often misused, and their exact meanings are debated. In this book, I use these words for describing products, activities and mindsets which support our most harmonious relationship with nature.

Mixed emotions

The topic of sustainability triggers negative associations in many of us. It is often mentioned in relation to global warming, pollution, depletion of natural resources, endangered wildlife, and a grim future for the whole of humanity. Many of us feel pressure and guilt, knowing that the changes we are currently making to minimise the negative impact of our activities and to restore nature's balance are not sufficient.

Most of us are also unsure of the way forward. We are regularly bombarded by token advice that promotes models of good behaviour, such as 'Use recyclable shopping bags!' or 'Take four minute showers!', through various media. We hear endless debate, much of it people arguing why they should *not* consider the environment in their actions. We see some sort of a 'green' label attached to almost every product and service we come across. These experiences only create a distance between us and the environment, and suggest that all it takes to live with a small footprint is to tick some boxes and follow what others tell us to do.

In this culture, it's probably no surprise that many people expect the solution to come from governments and environmental authorities. They can provide rules and guidance, but cannot make us act with conviction.

What is your motivation?

When it comes to creating a green workplace, many organisations only want to do what they have to: complying with legislative requirements and meeting the expectations of the market. Others pursue green practices due to ethical reasons as they feel a sense of responsibility. And some believe that creating a work environment which is respectful of nature can lead to a win-win-win situation that benefits the business, the people and the planet. For them, going green is an attractive opportunity. Not surprisingly, this third group has the best results.

To create an environmentally efficient workplace that excels on all fronts, you need to:

1. Consider both environmental and human interests
2. Follow the right frameworks
3. Adopt smart design solutions
4. Create an environmentally aware culture

1. Consider both environmental and human interests

A building's environmental performance has a strong influence on how the organisation and its people think and perform, and vice versa. Ample research shows that green buildings increase the productivity of workers (while saving on operational costs), and also, that highly engaged, environmentally minded workers make their buildings operate more efficiently.

The problem is that building and organisational matters are usually addressed separately. Engineers, whose job it is to design the 'guts' of the building, rarely look into what needs to happen inside the human body and mind for people to work well. On the other hand, managers rarely discuss the efficiency of building systems in the context of organisational performance. Creating an efficient ecosystem while dealing with these issues in isolation is not easy. So I encourage you to develop the environmental and business objectives for your new workplace in sync, with the involvement of all key members of your project team.

Finding balance – avoiding the pitfalls

Unfortunately, designers often perceive that serving the people, the business and the environment are conflicting goals, and feel they need to make major compromises. However, an abundance of case studies testify that with well-considered, intelligent design solutions it's possible to achieve great results in all three areas.

Of course, making small trade-offs is inevitable. Therefore, to get the best overall results, it's important to strike a good balance between the different objectives. This is not always easy.

In the past decades, we've seen many workplaces that were attractive-looking but wasteful, for example, using large amounts of materials that damage the environment in their production, and wasting power due to inadequate thermal insulation and inefficient air-conditioning systems. Thankfully, the environmental qualities of buildings, in general, have been steadily improving over recent years.

However, today we can also see workplaces that favour the environment at the cost of people's wellbeing and productivity. For example, some are so under-lit – with the aim of reducing lighting power consumption – that they feel like a gloomy cave and make you drowsy. Others have unfinished concrete walls and exposed service pipes all around, designed to save on finishing materials. While these features work well in certain situations, they can also make the space feel stark and unfriendly. And in some cases such a large part of the budget is allocated to environmental features and procedures that not much is left for enhancing users' work experience.

The way I see it, compromising human performance for environmental objectives can rarely be justified. People's entire existence relies on natural resources (such as power and materials that go into food, transport, clothing, accommodation, etc.), and in exchange, they bring value to this world through their efforts and talent, in part, in the workspaces provided for them. If a workspace wastes people's potential, no matter what its environmental credentials are, it cannot be called efficient. And it doesn't make financial sense either, if you do the maths.



‘One hit wonder’

I remember when I first visited one of Australia’s iconic green office buildings, which has rightfully earned much acknowledgment for its highly efficient and innovative engineering solutions. As one of the mastermind engineers guided our small group around, explaining the environmental features of the building, I was amazed at how intelligent the design was, and how each piece of the building worked together like clockwork to create the most effective, integrated system.

But once we were shown through the workstation areas, I was really disappointed to see how dull and lifeless the workspace was, with rows of identical workstations, grey surfaces all around, no unobstructed views to the street, and absolutely no eye-catching interior features. (I know I was not the only one left disappointed ... Later on I saw this building listed among the ‘world’s ugliest’.)

I’m not sure why, but this building – Australia’s most ‘sustainable’ building – remained unoccupied for many years.

Remember, the building is only a vehicle. It is only a tool to help people do what they need to do and be who they need to be.

2. Follow the right frameworks

Setting appropriate environmental targets (e.g. for power consumption, water consumption, qualities of materials used) and then ensuring that every element of the design supports these targets are challenging tasks, even for seasoned design professionals. However, pre-set design guidelines can help you set reasonable goals and can also offer a plan to follow.

Environmental rating schemes

To create a workplace with higher than average standards, it can be worthwhile to follow the design suggestions of one of the environmental rating

systems applicable for commercial buildings and interiors³. (In many cases, this is even mandatory.) Most organisations that administer such schemes also offer education and guidance for making environmentally informed design decisions, which can be helpful even if you don't pursue formal recognition.

Before choosing a scheme to follow – ideally before the start of the design, or even before the selection of the site or tenancy – you should carefully evaluate the pros and cons of the different options. Not all of them are suitable or beneficial for all building types or sizes⁴.

Also, they all have their own focus. Some will only help you minimise the power consumption of your new space. Others will assist you, for example, to install efficient water and waste management systems, to choose low-impact materials and products, and to provide facilities that encourage sustainable means of transport (such as bike riding). And the most holistic schemes also promote such human objectives as happiness, beauty, or supporting a fair world.

You might also consider obtaining a formal third-party recognition for creating a green workplace. Beyond the improved environmental, human and financial outcomes resulting from this process, obtaining a prestigious certification has multiple benefits: It communicates the building's environmental credentials to the building users and the public in a credible way. It demonstrates the business's integrity and improves its reputation. It raises the profile of the development and may increase the value of the real estate. And it attracts people who want to be associated with green thinking.

Be prepared, though, as obtaining formal certification can be a complex, time consuming and expensive process. You will need to include a set of environmental features in line with the given guideline, ensure that all

3 Some of these schemes are: National Australian Built Environment Rating System (NABERS) administered by the NSW Government, Green Star Office and Green Star Office Interiors administered by the Green Building Council Australia, Living Building Challenge administered by the Living Future Institute, One Planet Living administered by Bioregional, and Sustainable Design Scorecard (SDS) administered by the City of Port Phillip.

4 If your project is small, the costs of pursuing a prestigious certification scheme could take up a significant part of your budget. Instead of spending on administrative and consulting fees, it might make more sense to use that money on features that directly benefit your teams – for example, to enhance the functionality and appeal of the interiors.

building consultants support you in this goal, and deal with sometimes excessive amounts of paperwork. (Specialist environmental consultants can guide you through the process, help you make the right decisions, and do much of this work for you.)

Best practice standards

Alternatively, you may consider pursuing best practice environmental standards such as ‘carbon neutral’, ‘closed loop waste management’, ‘zero energy balance’, ‘zero water balance’, ‘low environmental footprint’, ‘passive house’, or ‘cradle to cradle design’. These are widely recognised standards and design frameworks – each with a different focus, as their names suggest.

Just like pursuing third-party certification, creating a building or a fitout that meets any of these standards usually requires the involvement of specialist consultants.

Going your own way

While following a suitable framework will certainly improve the environmental qualities of your workspace, none of the pre-set guidelines can give you all the answers you need for creating an environmentally efficient workplace that’s just right for your business⁵. To get the best results, you will always need to pursue some objectives not addressed by any guidelines.

So whether you follow a framework, or choose to create a green workplace your own way, you and your team will need to be prepared to make your own informed choices.

⁵ Most design frameworks only focus on design attributes that are easy to measure and quantify, such as the amount of energy and water used in the building, the amount of construction waste produced that goes into landfill, or the toxin content of materials. Only very few consider such ‘abstract’ qualities as how inspiring and functional the space is, and how it influences people’s thinking and behaviour – even though these also have major environmental implications. Designing a building to an environmental rating scheme or best practice standard is very often a numbers game.

3. Adopt smart design solutions

A few rules of thumb to consider

For the best overall results, your design team will need to work through the different aspects of your workspace in the right order. Each step will reduce the amount of resources your building will consume in operation, and at the same time, will make it easier and more cost-effective to implement the subsequent steps:

1. Start with the **layout and orientation**. Make sure that the floor space is used efficiently so that there are no ‘dead’ areas, and that the sun works for you, not against you (i.e. you have warmth and daylight in the right places, at the right times).
2. The **building fabric** should be highly weatherproof, which includes well-insulated facades, roofs and floors, as well as high quality, appropriately shaded windows. Ideally, the building should allow for the harvesting of renewable resources (such as solar power and rainwater).
3. The building’s systems (air-conditioning, water heating, equipment, water fittings, etc.) should all **operate efficiently**.
4. Promote and expect environmentally **conscious behaviour** from building users (such as switching off lights and air-conditioning in empty rooms, recycling waste, etc.), and design the building around that.
5. Supply as much of the building’s resources as possible from **renewable sources** (solar power, wind power, rainwater, sustainably sourced timber, etc.).

Consider the whole life cycle of the building in every design decision you make. Ask questions like:

- Where are the materials **sourced** from? How were they manufactured and transported?
- What resources are used for **construction**, and what are the impacts (e.g. waste, pollution)?

- What impact does the building create during **operation** (e.g. power used, water used, waste produced, wastewater produced, etc.)?
- What is involved in the **maintenance** of the interiors? How, and how often, are the various elements going to be cleaned and replaced?
- What is the estimated **lifespan** of the building, the fitout, and its components? What will happen to all of these at the **end of their lives** (e.g. will they be disposed of, reused or recycled)?

Wherever possible, choose durable, long-life products and materials which have been produced with low impact, e.g. derived from sustainable sources, or fully or partly recycled. There are several credible green product certification schemes to help you make the right choices.⁶

Remember, you don't need to have a brand new building to make a great difference; refurbished buildings also have huge potential. (Many of the greenest buildings in Australia are refurbishments.)

Designing, building and operating a green workplace is a huge topic, so this list of advice is far from comprehensive. However, the design strategies in this book all support efficiency and stand on ethical foundations.

Costs and benefits

Serving the business, the people and the environment go hand in hand beautifully. The vast majority of the most sustainable workplaces are also exceptionally attractive and healthy environments that house thriving businesses. Case studies show that there is clearly a business case for sustainability. Beyond having a smaller footprint, green workplaces enhance the organisation's profile, provide a healthier and more pleasant environment for work, substantially enhance work performance, and have lower operating costs, thus yielding higher returns on investment.

It's a common misconception that creating an efficient workplace must be expensive. Some green products and systems are now either the same price or even cheaper than other alternatives. Research shows that a good level of

⁶ These include: Good Environmental Choice Australia (GECA), Green Tag, Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), and Australian Forestry Standard (AFS)

environmental performance can be achieved at no increased cost compared to constructing a building with average environmental standards, and that a significant improvement can be achieved at an average 5-10% increase in construction costs.

However, it is essential to make critical decisions early. Integrating environmentally efficient solutions into the design is significantly cheaper and more effective than attaching 'green' features as add-ons later on.

4. Create an environmentally aware culture

Ideally, sustainability should not be an added layer of design but a way of thinking. When we honour our intricate connection with the broader environment, we have better awareness of the consequences of our decisions, set better priorities, and think more creatively about doing things efficiently and with low impact, both as members of the project team, and as building users.

A building cannot perform independently of its users. If they don't care, even the most brilliantly designed building won't perform. But if they do care, they will make the most of the opportunities in any workplace.

Perhaps many would disagree, but in my experience, real change starts with people who find personal fulfilment in connecting with nature, restoring its balance, and contributing to the well-being of this planet's citizens. They make conscious choices each day to achieve this through their work and lifestyle.

Workplaces with the highest environmental standards tend to attract and inspire these sorts of change-makers, and to support them in their commitment to make a difference far beyond the boundaries of work and the workplace.



Case study: Bullitt Center

The Bullitt Foundation is a non-profit group with a mission 'to safeguard the natural environment by promoting responsible human activities and sustainable communities'. The foundation's new office building in Seattle (opened in 2013), the Bullitt Center, is the result of a visionary effort.

It has been designed to be the greenest commercial building in the world, and to receive a Living Building Status by meeting the requirements of the Living Building Challenge – the most ambitious environmental certification system in the world.

Vision

The Bullitt Foundation advocates that built environments should be designed to be healthy, useful and beautiful, without excessively burdening the planet. Further to that, they ‘should also be a source of joy, well-being and inspiration’. Denis Hayes, President of The Bullitt Foundation, states:

‘... architects should never have to choose among aesthetics, functionality and performance. If faced with such a trade-off, architects need to probe more deeply into their designs to solve for all three ends simultaneously.’

Hayes suggests that nature is a rich resource of knowledge, since it has been solving similar problems for billions of years through optimising the use of limited resources. Studying nature can help us find breakthrough ideas in design, and also teach us about creating beauty. He states:

‘Buildings that seamlessly blend beauty, efficiency and functionality are almost always inspired by something Mother Nature invented millions of years ago.’

Building

The six-storey building is pushing the boundaries of environmental performance in all possible ways, and aims to advance what a green building can achieve by a quantum leap. Here are some of the building’s credentials:

- It was designed for a 250-year lifespan.
- It was designed to be energy- and carbon-neutral. (This was achieved through the combination of using efficient solar panels and implementing energy conservation measures that cut the building’s energy consumption to less than one fourth of a typical office building of similar size.)

- It was constructed from as many local and non-toxic building materials as was possible (hundreds of commonly used hazardous substances were replaced with healthier alternatives).
- It harvests all the water its residents use and processes all sewage on site (through the use of rainwater harvesting and an innovative wastewater management system).
- It handles all of its waste on site.
- It provides fresh air and daylight to each worker.
- It is a beautiful, healthy, human environment that is more pleasant and more supportive of productivity than most commercial buildings.

Approach

I've seen Jason McLennan – creator of the Living Building Challenge – explaining the thought process that set this project apart from common practice. Designers traditionally approach a building project by asking first, 'What amount of resources will the new building need to use?', and then, 'What amount of these resources can we source from the site we have?'. The Bullitt Center's design team did the opposite: they asked first, 'What amount of resources can the site provide?', and then, 'How can we meet our needs with what we have? How big a building can these resources sustain?'

Seattle is known for its gloomy weather, and is seen as a less than ideal place for harvesting solar energy, let alone providing enough energy for a whole commercial building. Overcoming seemingly impossible challenges like this, and creating a cutting edge design (with an unprecedented ecological performance) required a number of technical, legal, and social innovations. This could only have been achieved through the collaboration of the tenants, architects, engineers, contractors, university researchers and environmental certification bodies, all sharing the same vision.⁷

⁷ The process also involved negotiations with authorities and suppliers who, inspired by the project's vision, were ready to rethink their rules and practices in order to find common ground.

Putting things into practice



A non-traditional workplace: The Royal Children's Hospital

Melbourne's new Royal Children's Hospital opened in 2011 to replace its almost 50-year-old predecessor, a typical, institutional-looking hospital which belonged to a past era. The new building, designed by Billard Leece Partnership and Bates Smart Architects, provides a radically different, positive and engaging hospital experience to children.

Here you won't need to walk through plain corridors, sit in sterile-looking waiting rooms, stare at pale green walls, or smell the odours of chemicals. The building doesn't look or feel like a 'hospital'. **It doesn't communicate sickness – it's all about life.**

The designers took into account how an injured or sick child might feel, and expressed empowering messages through forms and textures, lights and sounds, furniture, artwork, internal layout, and signage for navigation. The building speaks children's language, **making them feel relaxed, happy and safe**, while also engaging everyone else involved in the care of a sick child, both families and staff.

'We are in nature'

Children are fascinated by nature, and this inspired the designers to create an environment in which nature is present everywhere you look. The building is airy and filled with natural light. There are views to a nearby park or to internal landscaped courtyards from most spaces in the building, from circulation areas and sitting bays to patient rooms and operating theatres.

Graphics, illustrating animals and landscapes of Victoria, are placed on almost every conceivable wall surface. Each floor has a theme. When you arrive at the basement car park, you see drawings of friendly earthworms, and as you're moving up, you encounter sea life, forest life, mountain life,

and birds in the sky. The names of inpatient units also follow these themes; for example, Dolphin Ward is ‘Underwater’ (Lower Ground), while Koala Ward is in ‘Tree Tops’ (Level 3).

‘Let’s have fun’

This hospital is a fun place to be; it offers plenty of opportunities for discovery, and for engaging, magical experiences for children. (And also for grown-ups. When visiting the hospital, I could feel my inner child waking up.)

In front of the entry you can’t miss the two-storey cylindrical fish tank. This makes taking the stairs to the emergency department a real adventure, giving you the opportunity to see the fish tank in its full height. The hospital is also famous for its meerkat enclosure.

The foyer has several large scale artworks, including a multi-coloured sculpture called ‘Creature’, and a series of floating leaf-like canopies called ‘Sky Garden’. The information counter is also an impressive piece of art. (My interpretation would be a UFO.) The seats don’t look like seats either; they have interesting shapes and textures, reminding you more of boulders, creatures and elements of a landscape.

In the context of hospital design for children, science calls these features ‘distractions’. However, their role is more than what this term suggests; they invite children to focus on what they enjoy, instead of leaving them alone with their health condition in an unstimulating environment. If the building could speak, it would say something like: ‘Let’s have fun, healing doesn’t need to be scary. We are here to help you enjoy life.’

‘This is a safe place’

These striking features also assist with easy navigation through this enormous building, which is crucial for making children – and adults – feel relaxed and safe.⁸ In addition, the signage uses simple words that children

⁸ Richard Duerden, whose company, Diadem, was involved in implementing the wayfinding signage and environmental graphics for the hospital (for the builder), said something really interesting about wayfinding. It can often be really difficult to explain to a child how to get from point A

understand. (For example, instead of the intimidating medical term ‘Ophthalmology’, the sign says ‘Eye care’.)

Several other features contribute to making this hospital feel safe. There are no off-putting service roads around the building; the surrounding landscaped garden and the intriguing design of the main facade make entering the hospital a pleasant experience. Although the building is vast, it is broken down to human scale, so it’s not at all dominating. And there are soft edges all around; walls, furniture and ceiling edges are all rounded.

‘Our purpose is healing’

The Royal Children’s Hospital is a healthcare facility that actually looks and feels healthy. And by advocating for health in the right way, it achieves way more than just providing a pleasant experience. Directing children’s focus to the external world and away from their sickness, helping them connect with nature, making them feel safe and engaged – these are all design strategies that actually improve health outcomes in hospitals, as shown by science⁹. Design can heal people, and even save lives!

to point B in a huge complex. But when you can tell them something like, ‘Go straight ahead to the beach image, and then go up the stairs to the level with the forest’, they will get it. An environment like this not only helps children navigate more easily and makes them feel better; it assists with healing, and also takes a huge load off staff, since they need to deal with fewer queries.

9 These are all fundamental principles of evidence-based healthcare design, supported by a large body of research spanning several decades.

? Questions to consider

- What is the purpose of your business? What difference does it make?
- How do your services or products change people's lives?
- What gets you and your team members jumping out of bed each morning, full of enthusiasm for the work day ahead?
- What are your most important business goals?
- Once you have achieved these goals, what will the results look like? And what will be the rewards?
- What core values drive your organisation and its people?
- Who are your ideal team members? What inspires them? What is important to them?
- What sorts of clients would you like to attract?
- What impression do you want people to get when they come through your door?
- What messages do you aim to communicate to your teams and customers?
- If your business was a person, what would he or she be like?
- What is that common ground that holds your teams together?

About Anetta Pizag

Through a love of travel and architecture, and noticing her own response to different environments, Anetta has developed a deep interest in how our surroundings affect who we are and what we do. As a design consultant, she is dedicated to harnessing the power of the physical environment: to create workspaces where people can perform to their full potential without work feeling like *work*.

Anetta has wide experience and training in architecture, building engineering, and environmental sustainability. She has achieved formal accreditation in Evidence-Based Design (EBD), the scientific method for designing spaces that support specific human and organisational outcomes. She is a Master of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), which helps her understand how the environment influences people's emotions, thoughts and actions. She has studied the areas of healthy buildings and effective learning environments, and she is also trained in business leadership and marketing.

With this unique combination of skills and expertise, Anetta knows how to implement design strategies that support the best results for individuals and businesses. Simply put, she understands people, places and performance.

Before specialising in workplace strategy, Anetta worked as an architect and environmental consultant in Europe, New Zealand and Australia for over a decade. She has seen hundreds of different workplaces, some of which were brilliantly designed. However, she realised that the majority of workplaces are disengaging and unpleasant, and conform to an old idea of an 'office' that is no longer relevant today as business and technology evolve.

While researching workspace design, Anetta was astounded to find what a huge difference even a small design feature can make in people's work experience and performance, and how often even the simplest opportunities to enhance a workspace are overlooked. This motivated her to grow and share her knowledge about this subject, and to found her workplace strategy and design consultancy, PIZAG – www.pizag.com.au.

PIZAG services clients from a wide range of industries, but what unifies them is their commitment to industry leadership, their passion for making a positive impact through their businesses, and their genuine appreciation and care for their people. In her practice, Anetta works in close collaboration with business owners, managers and space users towards the mission of creating thriving workspaces where businesses and work communities flourish.

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