Designing and delivering effective workplace experiences - a practical guide

Workplace experiences - the science series
Interserve is one of the world’s leading support services companies. Our 80,000 people operate across a range of workplaces and environments, helping to make these places better for those who use them. We understand what matters to businesses, their people and their customers - but we are always looking for ways to do things better; to continue to question, learn and improve. This research is crucial to our understanding of the working environment and its importance to businesses, and is just one way in which we are putting ingenuity to work for our customers.

The workplace experience - making it happen

The changing workplace and the design of that workplace are important topics for Interserve and, we hope, the wider corporate world. By understanding employees’ functional and emotional responses to their working environment, we believe companies can design and deliver positive experiences that support better organisational performance. It is our belief that buildings matter but people and their performance matter more.

One of our core themes is that the delivery of the workplace is no longer simply about economic and functional considerations such as cost and maintenance. When we focus solely on these aspects, we lose sight of the human performance issues which are what really deliver organisational value.

We are now half way through our two-year research project which, in partnership with leading workplace change experts Advanced Workplace Associates, aims to define, understand and apply the science behind designing workplaces that support superior business performance. Having previously taken a comprehensive look at the research and data associated with the workplace experience, in this latest report our attention turns to helping organisations actually create the kind of environments that will support employee engagement and satisfaction as well as delivering better productivity and performance overall.

Executive summary

This is the third report in a series commissioned by Interserve that explores the science behind the workplace experience and the way in which the working environment can influence the performance of an organisation.

The latest report moves in to practical guidance. It sets out a step-by-step process for defining and creating workplace experiences that align with an organisation’s strategic business drivers, encapsulate its personality and culture and meet its functional needs. By doing all these things together we believe the workplace can become a powerful competitive business tool.

The report builds on our workplace experience - the science series that has so far defined the concept of the workplace experience and presented the best available science on knowledge worker productivity, cognitive performance and consumer experience design.

Now we look at process and management of workplace experience design. The objective is to provide a logical route map for those wishing to design and manage workplace experiences that align with business drivers. The report sets out to:

- Define the various considerations in the workplace experience brief.
- Provide a step-by-step process to design an effective workplace experience.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of those involved in the process.
- Combine the creativity and innovative design alongside functional needs.
In many organisations around the world, the workplace is viewed as an inflexible costly resource, that adds limited value. At the extreme end of the spectrum, it can be seen by some as a ‘cost of doing business’ that requires functional, hard management.

We can, of course, quantify the cost of the workplace with relative ease, but what about its value?

Millions of people all over the world spend most of their waking hours at work. Every second of every working day there is an opportunity for the workplace to enhance or diminish people’s performance; to reinforce or dilute messages about brand and culture; to create or destroy morale; and to articulate the truth around how the organisation feels about its people.

In a world where attracting, retaining and getting the most from the best people in the market are key success criteria, the experience your people, partners and stakeholders have in the workplace can be a powerful strategic resource. That experience should be something thoughtfully evolved and painstakingly designed to align with the business goals and needs of the organisation. It must be carefully crafted and managed with the ultimate aim of creating a workplace that people actually love.

The process below sets out clear steps for designing workplace experiences which align with organisational objectives in such a way that the value of the experience is clear and tangible to all.

### Understanding what experience means

Part of being able to deliver a positive workplace experience is to look forensically at the nature of that experience.

An experience is an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone. Our previous report Decoding the workplace experience identified nine factors that impact on that experience from emotions, to love, sensory inputs, expectation, consistency and memory, among others.

We found that this impression is generated by an individual’s five senses and, as well as delivering functional value, it triggers emotional responses within the brain. An experience is sensory (associated with colour, texture, noise, smell, behaviour), functional, emotional, cognitive and social. It is important to note that an experience is also very personal. Every individual will have a potentially different response to the same experience based on their values, culture and history.

The aim should be to consider and ideally respond to as many of these emotional triggers as possible in the development of the workplace.
A six-stage process

Our workplace experience process involves six distinct stages (see below). In this report we cover the first five stages, moving from rational analysis and the articulation of a workplace experience brief in stage one; through to synthesising and innovating the workplace experience brief in stage two; designing the detail of each journey and destination in stage three; specifying solutions, processes and behaviours in stage four; and delivering a joined-up experience in stage five.

Stage six, the process of managing and evolving the workplace experience, will be covered in detail in a fifth and final report in the series.

It looks like a long and involved process and in many ways it is. But the rigour of the process will pay dividends in the end.

The workplace experience design process

1. Workplace experience brief
   Internal and external research to define the requirements for the workplace experience

2. Synthesis and innovation
   Synthesising all inputs to establish a series of goals for the workplace experience

3. Journey design
   Breaking the workplace experience into a series of journeys and considering how goals generated in stage two can be represented and translated for each sense

4. Specification
   Translating journey designs into a series of deliverable specifications

5. Delivery
   Working with the project team to deliver joined-up experiences

6. Workplace management
   Holistically managing and evolving the workplace experience

Before embarking on any of the six stages, it is recommended that a small group of professionals (three-four people) are assembled to own, guide and steer the design and management of the workplace experience.

Their role, effectively as workplace experience guardians, is to organise the process, understand the results of early phases, communicate them to a design team, rationalise and value engineer the experience and, ultimately, help in the creation of the workplace management regime needed to successfully deliver and evolve the workplace experience.

The group should consist of thoughtful and open-minded professionals with experience in facilities management, design, business analysis and technology. They can be from within the organisation or augmented by outside specialists.
Like all serious undertakings, the starting point is a good brief.

Before designing a workplace experience and harnessing the creativity and brainpower of a wide variety of workplace specialists (designers, leaders, artists, technologists, acoustics experts, lighting experts, psychologists and facilities professionals) it is critical to define what the workplace experience is seeking to achieve in tangible terms.

It is a fundamental question and too often designers, facilities managers and technologists start to work on design before any thought has been given to aims and objectives. In today's world, organisations need to squeeze value from every resource so an objective-led approach is vital.

It is worth remembering that the workplace experience should be considered as each and every stage of a building’s lifecycle. It is not confined to the physical design stage; in fact it is our belief that it will have a greater impact when considered alongside the day-to-day operations of the building and how it evolves as the business and its employees’ needs change.

The diagram below sets out the topics that should be researched and explored to inform the brief. At the top are business-driven topics and at the bottom are underpinning capabilities. For each of these there are a series of questions that need to be addressed.

The workplace experience design

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The brief

**Purpose:**

To define the requirements that the workplace experience is designed to meet.

**Who:**

The workplace experience guardians, consultants, senior leaders, and a cross section of people within the organisation.

Components of the brief - business-driven topics

**Function**

Every organisation is different. To get maximum effectiveness from space and people, the mix of spaces needs to be aligned with the needs of the organisation but also flexible enough to allow for rapid change in use or organisational profile. The mix also needs to recognise and pre-empt structural and technological change in the future.

The purpose here is to ensure that we understand what the organisation is in business to deliver, the way it currently goes about organising itself and how work gets done today but also in the future.

The key questions are:

- How might this change in the future and what workplace needs do they have?
- How do they work now?
- How do they want to work?
- How does the organisation need them to work now and in the future?
- What do they need to be as effective as possible?

Armed with the answers to these questions, the workplace experience design team will determine how to use the available space and tools within a chosen building to enable maximum fit with business needs.

**Brand and personality**

The workplace experience is an often untapped resource that can be used to transmit an organisation’s personality and values to its employees. To generate maximum value from the workplace experience, we need it to constantly remind people of the organisation’s personality in subtle and creative ways that touch both senses and emotions. An organisation’s personality is the truth about the way its employees, partners, shareholders and clients see it. Brand is a much more conscious articulation of the organisation, designed to make it attractive to the stakeholders it wishes to impress. It is derived from people’s dealings with an organisation and is as much about what is not said as that which is.

The key questions are:

- What is the personality of the organisation?
- What are the brand values and messages the organisation needs to convey to its audiences?
- Does the organisation’s personality and its brand values align?

With answers to these questions, the workplace design team will seek to translate the organisation's personality into the day-to-day experiences employees will enjoy.
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Stage 1

The brief

Components of the brief - underpinning capability

Workplace productivity science

In our second report we identified three areas of science which need to be given consideration when designing the workplace experience. Nine factors from the customer world that have a significant impact on a person’s experience were identified, including:

1. Emotions - consider how the space makes the user feel.
2. Love - demonstrate the importance you place on the employee.
3. Sensory inputs - consider the impact of all the senses on the experience.
4. Retention - think how the experience can engender loyalty.
5. Expectation - understand and meet the expectations of your user.
6. Evolution - consider how you evolve the experience on a regular basis.
7. Memory - consider how you remind people of positive encounters.
8. Consistency - ensure a standard and consistent service.
9. Economy - be aware of how expectations change with the company’s performance.

To support these nine factors, a further six environmental factors were outlined that affect a person’s cognitive performance. They include: noise, light, scent, temperature, nutrition and hydration. There is much to be considered in the design of a workplace in respect of these areas. For instance, how you enable hydration through easy access to water, how restaurants can encourage healthy eating and regular meals, how the office is designed around ensuring the noise, light, scent and temperature vary depending on the usage and needs of each space.

Culture and behaviour

Culture is often defined as ‘the way we do things around here’. It is an articulation of practices and behaviours within a given community. Organisations often have multiple cultures which have developed in different parts of a business. The workplace experience must be oriented to support cultural and behavioural aspirations.

The key questions are:

- What behaviours do we see that we’d like to get rid of in the future?
- What behaviours don’t we see that we need in the future?

From here, the workplace experience design team will be in a position to use its combined creativity to reinforce and signal the desired behaviours in messaging, relevant symbolism and space design.

Business drivers

Different businesses at different points in time have different drivers. But workplaces are expensive fixed-cost commitments, so it’s important to consider the financial and market pressures the organisation is under before determining the most appropriate workplace experience and commercial commitment.

An appropriate workplace experience is one that is affordable now and into the future which enables change as conditions and technologies develop.

Some fundamental questions are:

Markets

- What is happening in the organisation’s marketplace; how competitive is it; how much more competitive will it become; what are profit margins now and how will they be impacted by competition; and what workplace costs per head can we afford now and in the future?
- What new developments are coming forward; and what impact will they have on the organisation, its costs, its need for people, technology and markets?
- How volatile is the market; how much uncertainty is there; and how much should we reflect these uncertainties in the design of our workplace experience and in the flexibility we build into our workplace commitments?

People

- To what degree does the business rely on the recruitment, retention and productivity of expert people?
- Who are the people we want to recruit and retain?
- Where are these people currently located and what is the best location to attract and retain their skills and energy?
- Who are we competing with for these people and what workplace experience are these organisations providing?

Commercial

- Is headcount likely to increase or decrease?
- What are the organisational priorities now and in the future - is it looking to improve productivity, team effectiveness, reduce costs, be more attractive to new recruits, improve sustainability?

Technology

- What changes in technology can we foresee within the next five years?
- How will changes in technology affect our competitiveness, processes, skills and headcount?
- How will these changes impact on the type and volume of people we need?

Components of the brief - underpinning capability

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Agility

At an organisational level, agility is about the degree to which an organisation can change and re-shape itself to continue to be cost effective in the markets it chooses to play. It’s also about the variety of employment arrangements that it can provide to meet the changing needs of its workforce.

Topics to be considered are:

- The building and its systems need to be designed so that they can be configured to support different occupancy and letting arrangements.
- Consideration should be given to the way in which the building could be converted for a different use.
- Spaces and systems within the workplace should underpin the principle of lift and shift, enabling the physical workplace to be easily reconfigured to support different work and business needs.
- Environmental systems should be designed to support reconfiguration of space without loss of environmental performance.
- Technology infrastructure must be designed first and foremost to enable workers and teams to be at their most effective.

Finally, a person’s performance is impacted by a broader range of factors which include:

1. Social cohesion
2. Perceived supervisory support
3. Vision and goal clarity
4. Information sharing
5. External communications
6. Trust

These factors are largely about relationships and how they are sustained and supported. For them to flourish, the right working environment is essential.

Here are a few aspects of the workplace experience which will support and underpin these factors:

a. Provide a mobile technology infrastructure and positively encourage people to sit next to different colleagues every day which allow them to develop relationships and get to know people better. For this they need mobile technology and telephony, alongside non-territorial workplace environments so they feel welcome everywhere.

b. Make available a range of fully-equipped, easy to use and technologically-enabled spaces on the basis of need, not ownership or hierarchy. Establish clear protocols for their use.

c. Ensure leaders/managers can sit with their teams when this is appropriate and discourage the permanent use of offices which inhibit communication and put distance between a manager and their team.

d. Provide the ability to choose environments that suit the personal preferences of users, enabling them to be physically comfortable (e.g. heat, light, air, cleanliness) and, where possible, adjustable (e.g. lighting and heating levels, configurable furniture, a range of seating types for different comfort levels). If people are comfortable, they will be happier, more effective and better able to concentrate.

e. Use movable totems to indicate the team’s identity, goals and activities. Create a place for each team to belong that is also welcoming to others.

f. Use sensors to monitor the use of different sorts of space. By doing this you can work out which spaces are working hard and which may need to be modified or swapped out to make maximum use of available locations.

g. Design restaurants and other café spaces as meeting and working destinations for all-day use. This increases the number of work settings in the buildings and as well as providing an additional space for meetings / networking and social events which bring people together who wouldn’t normally meet.

Research methods to help create the right brief

There are a variety of formal and informal ways the fundamental questions set out above can be answered. It is important that the project team uses them as a vehicle for meaningful dialogue with senior leaders armed with as much data as possible. For some organisations, it may be the first time senior leaders have discussed many of these topics collectively.

What are the best ways to capture this information and who should do it?

Often the best approach is a multi-disciplinary team involving facilities leaders, service providers, technology specialists and senior business leaders with a workplace consultant acting as guide.
Purpose:
To share the workplace experience brief with the workplace experience design team and propose ideas and themes for the entire workplace experience.

Who:
The workplace experience guardians, the workplace experience design team, and a skilled facilitator.

In stage two we assemble a diverse group of technical, business and creative specialists to begin to share the results from stage one at a high level, synthesise and understand them and begin to think about themes for the entire workplace, before reflecting on how each of their specialisms could be deployed innovatively within the experience design.

The team should consist of a cross-section of representatives from the business along with specialists in design, lighting, technology (voice, video, desktop, social media, AV, workplace management), facilities management, human resources, learning and development, design, building services, acoustics and catering, etc. It’s important that for the purposes of this stage they step outside their functional role and take a more holistic view.

The time needed to deliver this stage will vary depending upon the number of people involved, however we’d suggest two three-hour sessions for the full team and some sub-team sessions for the experience design leader and project manager.

It is very important that the group feels comfortable to discuss, bounce ideas and constructively challenge each other. To aid this we would recommend a skilled facilitator who would also oversee team-building exercises to increase social cohesion and the free flow of ideas.
Stage three addresses the detail of how everyone’s specialist knowledge, ideas, technologies or skills can be applied to each journey and through each sense to meet the business and functional needs that have been articulated in stage one.

Each journey must be painstakingly and holistically designed considering every second, every sense, function and emotional response that we are seeking to generate. At this stage, and if relevant, it may be appropriate to reveal the practicalities of the particular site or building that has been chosen.

Again, the team should be assembled and overseen by the same facilitator from stage two. Continuity is important. The facilitator should set the scene by reminding everyone about the definition of a workplace experience, picking out agreed high-level themes and discussing the concept of destinations and journeys and how these can and should be designed.

Purpose:
To translate the workplace experience brief and the work undertaken in stage two into detailed ideas and requirements for each destination and journey within the workplace experience.

Who:
Workplace experience guardians and the workplace experience design team.

Mapping the journey and moments of truth
People’s experiences are shaped by key touch-points in the office environment. These so-called moments of truth, where people interact with both the building and the environment, shape their experience and their perception of your culture and your brand.

For this reason we typically divide the workplace experience into zones, to help guide the journey and the decisions that are made along the way: arrival, visitor management, working environment and social cohesion. Within these four zones, are a variety of destinations and journeys all of which need to be considered. The zonal approach considers property from a perspective other than the physical or functional: how it is experienced.

We give a flavour of it below.

The arrival zone
From the moment you arrive, people’s experience is shaped by your property and the teams that support them. Your location needs to be flexible and your property should incorporate best value while meeting your needs at a minimum cost. From the car park to reception, or to a meeting room, the way your business is presented is essential.

Aim: leave your employees and visitors feeling safe and secure.

The visitor zone
You want your visitors to feel welcome and confident they know how the office works and how they can get around. Customer satisfaction is critical whether in a store or an office. Your premises are a touch-point for your brand, a visible identity that reflects everything you aspire to be.

Aim: a friendly, comfortable and positive welcome for visitors.

The working zone
Workplaces should encourage productivity and innovation - the support given to employees in this environment is essential. Your supporting infrastructure should enable flexible working while reducing costs and downtime. All services need to be delivered quickly and efficiently.

Aim: ensuring everything you need is in place and ready to go.

The social zone
It’s important not to forget the role that a sense of community can provide in increasing productivity and happiness at work. Workplaces should encourage productivity and innovation. They should be places where people meet, brainstorm and are inspired, where the environment is relaxing and well maintained and where you can focus on your core job.

Aim: helping create a sense of place where people feel inspired and engaged.
Destinations and journeys

Throughout these four environments we have identified up to 18 separate destinations and journeys that should be individually designed but which should also be seen as part of a single workplace experience. There are many ways to approach the task but we propose the following matrix format.

To get the whole team comfortable with the process, we’d suggest focusing on one destination and journey with the first one being from outside the building and into reception.

We recommend that regardless of their personal discipline, each person is asked to take a couple of minutes to come forward with ideas about what they would like to see, hear, smell, touch or experience at each second of the journey that would help the organisation achieve its functional, cultural, personality and business objectives captured in stages one and two.

The facilitator should walk through each second of the journey with members of the team contributing their ideas as the journey unfolds. These should then be captured against the agreed headings with ‘time slices’ recorded across the top of the sheet. Time slices could be ‘the journey to the front of the building’, ‘the entry to reception’, ‘walk to reception’, ‘wait for reception’, ‘interaction with reception’, ‘waiting for collection’, ‘collection’, ‘walk through security gates’ and so on.

Once all journeys have been mapped, there should be a huge number of ideas to consider, all of which will link to the workplace experience brief developed in stage one. At this point the workplace experience guardians will review all the ideas associated with the journeys and destinations, unifying and rationalising them by using the workplace experience brief as a guide.

When this rationalisation has been done, we suggest the ideas are presented in storyboards, animations or 3D fly-through to a cross section of people in the organisation. This allows you to test the experience and take people on the journey.

Against all of this, consideration should be given to the following overarching principles:

1. We need to touch the emotions. We want to create a workplace that people will love.
2. We need to consider how we develop features within the workplace experience to reflect our consumer research which told us that the experience should subtly evolve at regular intervals to maintain its novelty.
3. We should think about how in practical terms we deliver the workplace experience come rain or shine and how we measure whether we’re achieving what we set out to do.
The next stage in the process is to specify the workplace experience in detail so that it can be costed and ultimately delivered. Building on the experience storyboards, the workplace experience guardians should seek to define, as functionally as possible, what they require from each experience slice in terms of sights, sounds, smells, touch, interaction, behaviour, emotion etc. and translate it into something tangible.

Once again the workplace experience design team should be assembled and the storyboard and specifications shared. This time we want the members of the team to put on their specialist hats. Each one of them will help in the technical specification of every element so that it can be procured and costed. It is very important that at this stage a cost consultant is brought in to work with the team.

For each journey and destination, the team needs to develop a series of technical specifications. We’d suggest that the whole team works together as a group initially on the first few journeys and destinations before everyone goes away to work on the detailed specifications associated with their specific discipline.

Once the specifications have been developed, they should be submitted to the workplace experience guardians for their review and then handed over to the cost consultant for budgeting. This will be a difficult task with trade-offs made to accommodate the agreed financial resource.

At its core the workplace experience must enable people to do their best work individually and collectively so as a baseline the functionality of the workplace must have top priority. It is also important to have consistency running through the total experience so that as users move through the workplace they have a clear sense of cohesion.

As well as the specifications associated with the specific journeys and destinations, the team also needs to work with those responsible for the ongoing management of the workplace. At one level this may include technology solutions and information needed to monitor, control and manage the effectiveness of the workplace experience. On the other hand, it may apply to the design and materials that have been created by the workplace design team.

During this phase, it is important to undertake detailed cost modelling (as opposed to using general modelling). Traditionally, value engineering happens towards the end of the project when real costs are becoming clearer. The difficulty with this is that it often results in the elements that have a big impact on the workplace experience being traded out. It is therefore important for cost modelling to happen early and for all elements to be considered in the round.

It should be noted that the design life of a building is in the region of twenty-five years while the design life of a workplace is probably between seven and ten. So the ongoing cost and efficiency of the management of the building will swamp any up-front costs.

From this point onwards, the creation of the workplace experience can follow a normal project delivery process, being procured as seen fit by the project manager. It is important, however, to maintain the integrity of the original vision. Ensure, for example, there is no opportunity for a subcontractor to make functional trade-offs on things like desking, lighting and technology that compromise the core workplace experience values that have been so painstakingly established.
We will talk more about ongoing workplace management in a future report. However, its primary purpose is to deliver the designed workplace experience day in, day out regardless of the season, business pressures, changes to the economy or supply of utilities, at an economic cost. The job of workplace management is to continually deliver a workplace experience that people will love, that makes them want to come to work each day and which not only helps them deliver their best work but acts as an emotional magnet binding them to the organisation.

The other key role of workplace management is to collaborate with the workplace guardians and the workplace experience design team to identify aspects of the design that can evolve. What delights the client one day does not necessarily delight them the next.

Within this context, it is important to remember that designing and delivering great workplace experiences is not a one-off fix but, rather like the workplace experience itself, an ongoing corporate journey.

Having a workplace experience design process allows organisations to maximise the value of their workplace investment and to align that experience with clear business objectives and drivers.

In this report, we have outlined approaches and methodologies to help organisations create workplace experiences that people will love and which allow them to be their best individually and collectively. Done well, the workplace experience acts as a magnet, encouraging people to stay with the organisation and to go the extra mile.

The process we have described relies on bringing together a mix of ideas and experiences, fusing creativity and design with the technical and practical requirements of a workspace.

By building on the science of the workplace experience, with the additional factors of function, brand, culture, business drivers, and agility, companies can look at the wider impacts on their workplace and how to maximise its productivity.

The next report will delve further into the science of the workplace by looking at case studies from the consumer world and how experience is shaped and what can be learnt from this. The last report will study the most critical element of all, how the workplace experience is delivered every day, how it is measured and how it can be improved over time.

This is a two-year programme to undertake a scientific analysis of the true factors affecting workplace experiences. It will combine the best available science with best practice case studies from leading consumer organisations. The end result will be a systematic process for defining and delivering workplace experiences.

This will enable organisations to maximise individual and community productivity, reflect the personality of the organisation and help organisations achieve their business objectives.

If you would like to know more about the project or how it can support you – please get in contact with either Interserve or AWA to find out more.
About Interserve
Interserve is one of the world’s foremost support services and construction companies. Our vision is to redefine the future for people and places. Everything we do is shaped by our core values. We are a successful, growing, international business: a leader in innovative and sustainable outcomes for our clients and a great place to work for our people. We offer advice, design, construction, equipment, facilities management and frontline public services. Headquartered in the UK and FTSE listed, we have gross revenues of £3.6 billion and a workforce of circa 80,000 people worldwide.

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About Advanced Workplace Associates (AWA)
AWA are a group of great people from different disciplines who have a common outlook on the way work should be. We love to improve organisations through new ways of thinking and working. Our approach is a unique blend of scientific analysis, creativity and cultural change - we use all three to make a change at work. Since our birth in 1992 we’ve worked with organisations of all sizes in most sectors. The common denominator: people. All our clients are looking to optimise the use of their people and offices to improve business performance.

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