

SHAPING LONDON'S WORKSPACE: USER CULTURE

ZZA founder director *Ziona Strelitz* argues that workers today want six Cs: choice, convenience, community, control, connection and character

What profound change! When I started, building owners determined not just terms, but the design of office buildings. Then the market shifted to occupiers, a prospectus I wrote – ‘Operating your Business at Stockley Park’ – was a step-change focused on tenants’ needs, viewed by organisational leaders who determined premises choice. So the current *www* – ‘what workers want’ – represents a real transfer of influence, nowhere more evident than in London, with its wealth of opportunity competing for talent.

The driver of worker empowerment is of course disseminated IT. Now footloose and autonomous, workers want Choice. And high in factors shaping this are other key Cs – Convenience and Community. Both are demonstrated in ZZA’s international study of where people who are free to choose, choose to work. ‘Why Place Still Matters in the Digital Age’ shows the widespread preference of organisationally and technologically agile people to work in collective settings, in easy reach of – but away from – home. Their cultural impetus is community – motivation by the buzz of others working.

Epidemiological research underpins the fourth C – Control – as significant to workplace wellbeing – physically and socially. Happily, ZZA’s repertoire of Post-Occupancy Evaluations across buildings and business sectors shows notable strides in internal environmental experience, with better performance of thermal, lighting and acoustic conditions from building users’ perspective. In part this arises from improved product design and more intelligent,



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What workers want – a home from home? The original Second Home offices at Hanbury Street, Shoreditch

responsive systems, giving facilities management teams enhanced control. But it also comes from devolved environmental control: workers like more granular lighting control – at least in smaller zones – and they like being able to open windows.

The social aspect of control relates to work and work-life. Agile work and informality are now well established in affording flexibility to how work is done. Indeed, many workplaces now provide a very wide menu of work settings – sometimes excessive to workers’ requirements, albeit a dream ticket for designers. There are also questions about provisions for work-life. No matter how passionate and engaged, people have a life outside work. You don’t benefit from a change of scene or ethos by doing stuff in the office, even if it’s presented as fun. Control of work-life means your choice – of activity, company, timing and locale. An arms race for

non-work amenity in the workplace misses the point.

Which brings us to Connection. This is pivotal – workers want on-demand IT, fluid building entry, intuitive navigation, no fuss access to outside, ease of interaction, organisational belonging, engagement with the world out there. ZZA’s research shows these wants as trumping palatial office amenity, especially if it comes with too much space – a deadened sense of the *Marie Celeste*. Connection points to porosity – accessible workplaces and user mix.

Collectively, these Cs favour smaller buildings. And with London’s rich built heritage, this offers great scope for the sixth C – Character. The Shoreditch appeal is about footprint and facade, volume and vitality. The challenge for big organisations is to echo smaller-scale characteristics in their provision. This is integral to their and London’s interests – emergent signs are promising. ●