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CXO INSIGHTS

DON'T GO TO OFFICE. GO HOME

By Sandeep Roy, COO, NCUBE

Sandeep has over 25 years of experience in design and project management of major landmark projects across India



The eternal debate on work-life balance will be moot in Decade 2020. While it was a matter of concern as we went across the millennium with work increasingly intruding into personal space, the trend is turning and offices are becoming the second home. This is not to mean that people are spending more time at offices but that the offices are becoming more personal, comfortable and casual – traits usually attributed to the home. “Feeling at home in your office” could be a tagline for some future offices.

Most innovation happening in the domain of workplace design now will ultimately lead to blurring of this line between home and office in Decade 2020. The end objectives though, remain same. What will a well-designed workplace strive to achieve? It will need to be productive, flexible, comfortable and economical. All this will be assisted through coordinated use of technology, advancement of building materials, furniture and equipment and last but not the least, company culture, policy, processes and systems. Admittedly, in the future, the workplace designer will no longer just be that-lonely-guy-with-an-aesthetic-sense. (S)he will have to team up closely with the Senior Management, Human Resources, IT specialists, Facility Managers and above all, every user group to deliver that perfect office.



Sandeep Roy

The Home, on the other hand, is perceived as a personal place. It usually offers certain freedom, comfort and familiarity of surroundings. Between this Home and that Office, is a Commute, which is the least personalised and practically impossible to alter. These are the three stages of existence that everyone faces every day and the marked variation in these conditions lead to conflict. That is exactly why the future offices will try to achieve uniformity of environment and make you feel at home when in the office. [Pic 01: Feel at Home: The Living and Dining Room comes to Office]

Decisions That Will Matter

How will the offices physically achieve this? What choices will the companies have to make in order to design and build their dream offices in Decade 2020?

Flexibility of Spatial Usage: The design brief in future will not be definitive about the number of cabins, work stations, hierarchy, meeting rooms etc. Instead, there will be a broad range of functions and number of people over a period of the expected life of the premise. This trend is already observed and designers are giving fancy names like “Agile Working” to the solutions. With prohibitive real estate costs, future spaces will be convertible and adaptable to multiple functions. [Pic 02: The Expanding Meeting Room, Small by default, Big when you need one]

Privacy vs Collaboration: A workplace has to cater to both Thinking Time and Collaboration Time for any user. Designers call it “Activity Based Settings” [Pic 03: Activity Based Setting] where a person is not tied to the same desk for everything they do throughout the day.

For different functions (Activities), there are different arrangements (Settings). There can be the comfort of a bean bag or a stand up meeting or simply the work-desk. The Thinking work needs a private setting, the Brainstorming Session needs a collaborative setting and in our future office, providing the right setting for the right work will achieve productivity and efficiency from every staff. [Pic 04: Just Get the Work Done:]



The Cubicle in the background or the Lounge in Front]

Density and Openness: Optimum Density (number of people per square foot of carpet area) is a matter of increasing debate will not cease in the Decade of 2020, primarily because there is no right or wrong answer. Real estate price will be the determining factor as companies will try to hit that optimum balance between financial viability and employee comfort. The challenge for the workplace designer is to make the workplace comfortable, flexible and personal and still achieve desired density.

Aesthetics, Colour and Materials: Comparatively, the office look & feel has been less susceptible to prevailing fashion and local influences than residential aesthetics. That is why, with the home invasion into office territory, we will see a more democratic and locally rooted aesthetics emerging. Companies will encourage thematic personalisation as per the taste of majority users to 'feel at home'. Lines between residential and commercial design vocabulary will merge further. The sofas and the lounge setting in offices are already looking more like a living room. Beanbags have entered the office along with garden swings. Indians love colours and we will see a shift to innovative use of it moving away from the dreary greys or blues that represented the anonymous global corporate of last millennium.

IT, Services, Facilities, Operations and Maintenance: Sustainability and energy efficiency will continue to be of highest priority. Selection of materials or systems will move from capex to "Life-Cycle Cost" with more vendor support. Remote maintenance and non-invasive (to an operational office) main-



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tenance will become more a norm than exception.

And The Future Goes To

The Technology Convergence: The key aspect of the Decade 2020 office will be that all the above trends will be coordinated with each other through technology application. The convergence dream of the past will be affordable, robust and simple to make every system, furniture; equipment and user interact with each other seamlessly.

Co-working and Co-living: Co-working is here to stay and will grow stronger in the next decade leading to further democratisation of office ecosystem. Compa-

nies of every scale will get access to facilities (for eg a creche in your premises) that only the large corporations could afford. There will be players who will eventually merge Co-living and Co-working facilities to remove Commuting entirely.

Anywhere Working: In our effort to eliminate Commute, we will see more of "Anywhere Working". Small offices are already being designed in mini-vans, SUVs or even tents pegged wherever the city authorities allow you. The office along with plug-and-play technology will reach the user before the user can reach the office.

Nature, Sustainability, Health & Happiness: Last but not the least; nature will come indoors, bringing with it the smell, sight, touch, health and happiness. The focus of Decade 2020 will be a healthy and happy workforce, which will lead to economic prosperity. To quote Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, "An educated and healthy workforce brings economic growth and for that we need a fundamental change". We will see that change happening to our workplaces in Decade 2020. 