

“The Power of the Workplace”

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Today's Facility Manager Magazine covers the latest in innovative workplace strategies with this overview of GSA's Integrated Workplace (IW) Program and two IW-Related Projects.

Read on!

To Attract The Next Generation Of Government Employees, GSA Focuses On Productive Space.

A visit to the headquarters of the General Services Administration (GSA) in Washington, DC is a little like playing the game "Let's Make A Deal" -- it's always a surprise to learn what lies behind Door Number One, Two, or Three.

Indeed, the facade depicts a mammoth historic building in an "E" shape. (It was constructed in 1917 as the second largest office facility in DC at the time.) But the interior tells another story; behind the doors to various departments are environments -- all different -- that mirror the work GSA (often called the "government's landlord") is doing in workplace design.

It is the physical manifestation of an agency in transition -- one moving from the sort of static bureaucracy often associated with "government" to one whose goal is to be at the forefront of office planning -- and naturally it involves a little bit of experimentation. Concepts such as the Integrated Workplace (IW) and the Adaptable Workplace Laboratory (AWL) are just some of the ideas waiting behind the doors of the GSA headquarters today.

Door 1: The Office of Real Property

Behind Door Number One we find the office of David Bibb, Deputy Associate Administrator of the Office of Real Property within the Office of Governmentwide Policy (OGP), a division of the GSA. We find a reception/waiting room that leads into a large private office with windows. Within the private office, a roundtable in the corner creates an ideal teaming space. It is here that Bibb talks about the exciting new programs introduced by his office in the past year -- the IW and the AWL. (Editor's note: The AWL was actually introduced by GSA's Public Buildings Service).

The Integrated Workplace. The result of a collaborative process, the

IW is, in essence, a "game plan" for Federal agencies in developing and providing work space that is cost effective, flexible, and efficient. It is not, however, a "one size fits all" prescription. There are no dictates on how much square footage a Federal employee's cubicle should encompass; there are no guidelines on panel heights; there are no requirements for furniture purchases. Rather, the IW focuses on a key essential principle: uniting an organization's strategic real property with its strategic business goals.

"It's a process, as much as anything, of trying to understand the business strategy...where it's going...and how your infrastructure can support it," comments Bibb.

With this departure from standards, the 167-page IW study warns it's not a "cookbook." It states, "This report cannot define the specific combination of work alternatives, space configuration, and technology that will guarantee the best work environments for each organization or employee. It does identify concepts and methods your organization should consider when thinking about how new work environments can best support your needs. The concepts discussed here are a reaffirmation of sound design principles that often get lost in the fray of budgets, schedules, and politics." (The basic principles of the IW are listed below.)

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Principles of the IW

There are three basic elements that must be considered together to provide integrated solutions to workplace needs. They are: **people, space, and technology.**

Overall, the general findings of the Integrated Workplace are:

- The quality and suitability of work space greatly affects the productivity and well being of those who use it. (This shouldn't be news to fms.)
- A clear definition of an organization's mission and goals and the work practices used to achieve them are prerequisites to developing the best workspace.
- Since people are the most important resource and greatest expense of any organization, the long-term cost benefits of a properly designed, user-friendly work environment should be factored into any initial cost considerations.
- Strategic organizational planning must include real property consideration and have participation from facilities professionals. (A crucial point for fms.)
- As...organizations continually reinvent themselves to remain competitive and stay ahead of rapid changes in business and technology, providing work spaces with flexibility to adapt to change is the most critical factor in support of new work processes and technology.
- Support from senior management is essential for successful implementation of an IW.
- The IW development process is a reiteration of good design practice that is comprehensive and primarily focused on the needs of the people and work processes rather than on space standards and furniture requirements.

Robert Obenreder, AIA, the author of the study, comments, "Everyone says, Show me the Integrated Workplace. (But I) can't...it's a process, not a product."

GSA's AWL Teaming Area

Photo: Hoachlander-Davis

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The Adaptable Workplace

Laboratory. While the IW may be more of a work space philosophy, the AWL, on the other hand is a quite tangible 11,000 square foot work space on the top floor of the GSA headquarters. First conceptualized in early 1998, the

AWL is a partner to

Carnegie Mellon University's (CMU) renowned Intelligent Workplace, profiled in TFM's July 1998 article, "This Perfect World."

In that article, TFM wrote about CMU's "office of the future" that was conducting experiments in office design--especially the idea of a plug and play infrastructure. While CMU's workspace was built from scratch, its creators, at that time, were looking forward to seeing their ideas translated into a retrofit space at GSA. Well, that time has now come.

Construction on the AWL space began in

June 1999 and as of November, 29 of the planned 47 workstations were completed and occupied. The space will also eventually include a multimedia conference room, several small team rooms, a service pub, and a business center. The most immediate benefit of the project is that it will give GSA the experience it needs to offer guidance and design services to other Federal agencies wishing to retrofit older buildings to meet the needs of the modern workplace.

A Common Goal. Just as GSA partnered

AWL Ergonomic Workstations

Integrated Workplace

with CMU in creating the AWL, it also reached out to industry professionals and organizations, such as the International Development Research Council (IDRC) for ideas and input in its IW study. "We knew the 40 of us didn't know everything," says Bibb.

As a result, the document, entitled "The Integrated Workplace: A Comprehensive Approach to Developing Workspace," has been gaining attention well beyond the realm of government ever since its publication last May. Bibb says, "The whole idea is to pull

together ideas and best practices and blast those ideas out...it's growing by word of mouth."

Janis R. Evink, research and communications specialist with the Ideation Group of Holland, MI-based Haworth Furniture, comments, "The scope...is astonishing. I've been in the industry for 10 years and have never seen a document...that is so thorough in its understanding and reach of the physical environment."

Why would the GSA undertake such efforts with its IW study and the AWL? Because the government, like any

employer, is finding it will soon have to compete for quality employees. And, clearly, the workplace will play a critical role. "It is certainly a major, major consideration," says Bibb. He explains that the

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Photo: Hoachlander-Davis

"Plug and Play" Receptacle

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government has an aging workforce and has not attracted many young people in the last five to six years. With low-pay and a less-than-glamorous image, "it's a tough sell to get someone to work for the government...if you add on top of it

dummy facilities, who's going to come here?" asks one GSA representative.

Thus GSA is taking a proactive approach in tapping into how young people work by providing them with "a full range of work tools and options." This does not mean, however, GSA supports running out and buying all the latest gadgets,

gizmos, and furniture options. In contrast, the IW report recognizes that the "organization must work smarter with fewer resources."

"Corporations are struggling with this too," says Bibb. "[We think many people don't know] how to ask the right questions of the employees and the organization."

Door Number Two: The IW In Action

Although, as mentioned before, the IW is a process, not a product, the outcome of its application is, indeed, a physical workspace.

So we open Door Number Two--the Aircraft Management Policy Division. (Yes, transportation is also part of the GSA.) Here, we enter an open plan environment of 15 workstations and 2,500 square feet. And here we meet Peter Zuidema, director of the division, who explains he already had a redesign of his office ready to go when he heard

Bibb talk about the IW at a review. He then decided to "stop the presses."

In order to combat problems of poor airflow and little daylight (caused by private offices located around the perimeter of the space), Zuidema says they had originally decided on a less than revolutionary plan. "We were going to use existing furniture and just move it around."

After learning about the IW, they took a different approach. According to the IW study, "developing an IW is

a continuous process that flows through three basic development phases: planning, implementation, and post-occupancy management." It continues, "Critical to the entire process is developing a multidisciplinary project team comprised of both an in-house steering committee that represents all facets of the organization and talented professional consultants...."

So the division had a group workshop, and employees drew up a "wish list." At the same time, employees knew there was a budget to be considered. Together, everyone jointly came up with a new design and recommendations.

Today, there are several improvements to the space, including new recycled Milliken carpet (approximately 60% less expensive than brand new) and Haworth furniture. Panel heights are lower to allow more natural light and air flow; mobile furniture is incorporated in some workspaces. A conference area that was once located in the far corner (which meant visitors had to walk by employee workstations, interrupting work) is now near the office entrance. And a teaming area was created so people no longer have to gather in cubicles for informal discussion.

Suidema says, "It's a huge improvement." He feels the IW concept

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AWL exposed ceiling

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really uses common sense to lead a group through a thought process.

Elizabeth Allison, who helped in the redesign, comments, "The idea of the IW has given more light to the center of the office." Judith Lortz, who works in the space, concurs.

"It's really nice and light. I like the airiness....At first I was skeptical, but I'm really pleased with the way it turned out."

This is not to say that visitors to the space will immediately be "wowed." There's nothing flashy about the office to a visitor. It is simply a space that works for its occupants.

Which goes back to Obenreder's difficulty in "showing" someone an IW. Because it is a process dependent on determining the individual needs of employees and the strategic goals of the organization, it will naturally have as many different end results as organizations that try it.

Door Number Three: The Adaptable Workplace Lab

After we leave the Aircraft Management Policy Division, we walk down several long hallways. The exposed bunches of colorful cable in the ceiling corners testify to the less than graceful updates sometimes required to perform 21st century work in a 1917 building. We hop into an elevator and find ourselves on the seventh floor, opening Door Number Three -- the home of the AWL.

A sharp contrast to the jumble of exposed cabling we just left behind, the AWL is a workspace obviously pushing the envelope in design and functionality. Light streams in from the many windows, and stackable panels designate workstations containing the latest ergonomic furniture; however, half the space is still in the disarray of construction.

Mike Atkinson, an architect with the National Capital Region of GSA, is one of the project leaders. His enthusiasm for the AWL is apparent. Pointing to the raised flooring which contains the power, voice, and data cables -- and even a distribution channel for the ventilation system, he comments, "[We] took a traditional office and turned it upside down."

Besides the raised flooring, the AWL is defined by its other features akin to CMU's space. These include:

- Plug and play technology allows computers, telephones, heat

pumps, and other components to be easily moved, added to, or removed from the basic grid of service---with no rewiring. Essentially this means that to relocate employees, fms only 1) unplug computers, telephones, and other equipment from the outlet box at each workstation, 2) move the outlet boxes and their corresponding floor tiles to the new location, and 3) plug the equipment into the outlet boxes again.

- Individual controls at the

workstations allow employees to customize their work environment.

- The lighting system includes ambient, task, and natural lighting.

Atkinson says the space was designed not so much as an office, but as a living lab. "[There's] lots of experimental and redundant systems...[we're] purposely looking at multiple solutions."

They're also observing the workers --

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AWL stackable verticle panel system

Photo: Hoachlander-Davis

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- from GSA's Portfolio Group --- though their workers aren't yet aware of their "guinea pig" status. Having provided the employees with highly mobile furniture components and stackable walls, the idea is to create a "kit of parts" and see where the employees take it.

"They've never had that chance before," comments Atkinson; but so far, nothing too outrageous has arisen. "They're not quite out of their comfort range yet," he says, but adds, "People are monkeying around with [their space] and we want them to monkey around."

Although workstations by several manufacturers are being tested in the AWL, they share some common features:

- Workstation surfaces are designed to absorb sound and reflect light.
- Stackable vertical panels provide each employee with seated privacy, yet allow easy visual and verbal access.

- Each workstation provides 72 square feet for each person, with approximately 13 linear feet of work surface, 10 feet of storage, and 10 linear feet of personal tack/display space.
- As mentioned before, furniture components can be added, removed, or rearranged. All stackable work station panels can support doors -- and some can support ceilings -- should more privacy be needed in the future.
- Ergonomic chairs and computer tables have been provided at each station.
- All materials and assemblies were selected to ensure low emissions of chemical pollutants, as well as low absorption of any indoor pollutants.

Ultimately, the AWL may help generate new guidelines for the construction and renovation of Federal buildings. Although renovating the AWL was more expensive in the short term than traditional renovation would have

been, it is expected to be less expensive in the long run, based on life cycle costs.

Renovation of the space -- involving removal of the ceiling, asbestos, terra cotta block corridor walls, and private office partitions; and installation of raised flooring, new air handlers, and the grids for the various systems -- cost \$107 per square foot. Traditional renovation -- involving construction of drywall offices and drop-in ceilings; and installing static electric, voice, and data wiring -- would have cost at least \$65 per square foot.

However, GSA expects to recover the cost difference in less than eight years, or after only one or two reconfigurations because of energy saving, increased productivity, and reduced churn costs.

Atkinson is optimistic about the future of the workspace and its implications for GSA. "We've given them a new example of what policy

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New Company Becomes Largest Virtual and Physical Workplace Solutions Provider

(Summarized with permission from The Site Selection Online Insider, 2/4/2000, Snapshot from the Field section, article "HQ-Vantas Merger: A Seismic Shift in the Executive Suites Market.")

HQ Global Workplaces merged with Vantas Inc. and kept its name in this \$1 billion deal. The new company will become the world's largest virtual and physical workplace solutions provider, serving 43,000 customers in 463 owned, managed or franchised centers in 17 countries.

E-Business Big Part of Merger. Frontline Capital Group engineered the merger and is a prominent developer of business-to-business

(B2B) Internet companies. The transaction provides B2B e-commerce partner companies with unparalleled access to a global distribution network.

Many analysts consider the merger a major shift in the traditional executive office suite industry. Combining the resources of HQ Global Workplaces, VANTAS and Frontline, say many industry insiders, will create a brand broadly recognized for both alternative

workspace and business-to-business e-commerce.

A Revolution in How People Work. The new company will be able to provide high-speed Internet-access and broadband connectivity, information technology consulting and support, videoconferencing, high-tech offices and meeting facilities, and team rooms. The merger will create a single source provider and the new HQ will revolutionize the way people work.