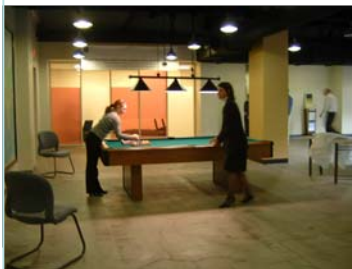




Local break areas and focus rooms are just two of the new types of spaces created.



The skylight café encourages impromptu collaboration



The anti-stress space – the Pit– has an exercise room, pool table, and Lounge furnishings.

“I’m totally amazed by the transformation of the space and its impact on our people” Paul Prouty

The Workplace Environment as a Catalyst For Social Change

We know workplace design can influence functional behaviors, but can it be a catalyst for social change? Can organizations use the environment to improve sense of community, increase morale, reduce stress, and develop cross group relationships?

This seems like a pretty stiff challenge. But a small leadership group at the U.S. General Service Administration’s Regional Office in Denver made it happen. They began with an environmental upgrade, and ended with a new office environment that dramatically changed not only the appearance of the space, but also the attitudes and behaviors of the workforce.

The project, lead by the Public Buildings Service team, was responding initially to GSA’s Worldclass Workplace program to provide a better work environment for associates and to ultimately attract and retain new workers. However, as their commitment to the project developed, so did their desire to understand better how their own organization worked –especially how to improve internal working relationships in order to serve their clients better. They wanted to use the office as a showcase that would reflect the values and innovations that GSA wanted to offer its customers. What better way than to begin by reflecting on your own organization?

Project Goals:

Through numerous internal workshops and site visits to other organizations, the PBS team developed the following goals for the workplace renovation.

- Improve internal working relationships, especially cross group communication and collaboration.
- Reduce workplace stress and increase the overall quality of life for GSA associates.
- Use the workplace as a way to show that PBS is a thought leader, rather than a follower, in workplace design.

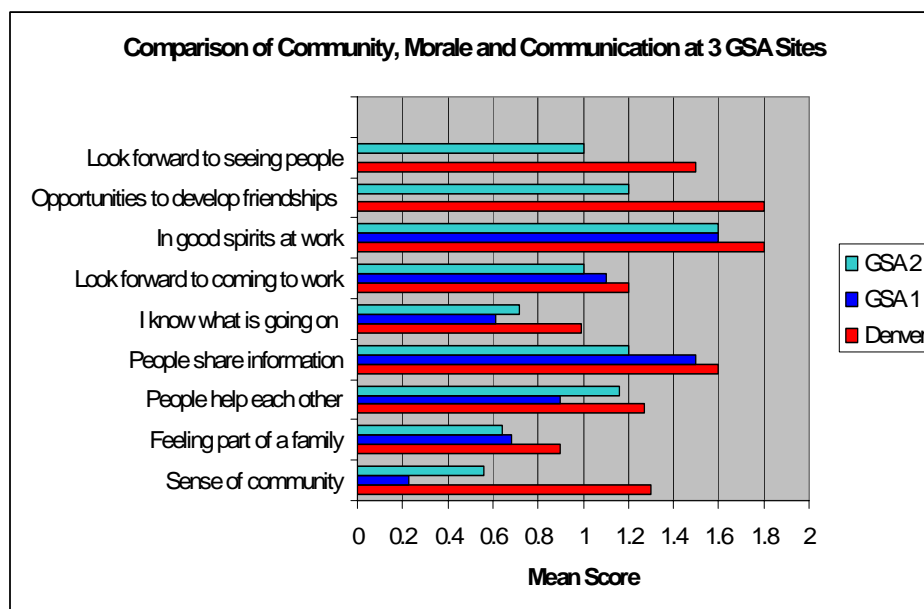
Workplace Solutions:

- Open spaces at central nodes for spontaneous meeting
- More meeting spaces of a greater variety
- A centrally located café
- A new daylight entry space
- A “de-stress” space with pool table, ping pong, exercise room and lounge furnishings

Project Research Measures

The success of the project is being evaluated in several ways:

Environmental Quality and Workplace Experiences Survey. This web-based survey administered by the University of California, Berkeley, Center for the Built Environment, incorporates measures of sense of community, morale and communication that are being used to assess the social outcomes. The graph below shows that the Denver project has higher scores for these social measures than two other GSA sites.



Social Network Analysis.

The network analysis conducted by scientists at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory shows:

- High connectedness between groups located in different parts of the building
- Higher levels of face to face interactions than virtual interactions – a highly surprising and unusual result for work environments.
- The most distantly located individuals are less integrated with the network than those more centrally located, a result which has been found in other studies also suggesting that special attention needs to be paid to the potential for isolation.

Stress Testing:

A team of physicians and psychologists at the National Institutes of Health is conducting a unique study to assess the relationship between the workplace and stress outcomes. Volunteers from the Denver site are fitted with special instrumentation to assess physiological indicators of stress over a 24 hour period. While they are at work, they also carry hand held computers that gather subjective information on their psychological and emotional state on a random basis over the course of the day. This “behavioral sampling” methodology also asks questions about what people are doing and where they are located in the office space. The study will provide information on stress levels related to space and activity at work.