10 Strategies That Maximize Workspace Efficiency

Corporate leadership ranks "overall efficiency" as very high on their list of priorities. It's not always directly related to corporate real estate, but it should be. When you tour one of your company's facilities, it seems to be fairly efficient. What isn't fully apparent are the significant gaps in utilization rates & overall efficiency created by the way we work today vs. just a few years ago, and changes in our businesses that include: better technology, mergers & acquisitions, more mobile work forces, out of office travel, off-site meetings and the generally more fluid nature of business today. On average, corporate America's workspace utilization rate is actually less than 40%. This gap between space provided and space used is where significant dollars are lost.

Through careful data analysis, organizations can dramatically reduce excess real estate, reconfigure and repurpose existing real estate, and improve the density of the workspace – ensuring the organization maximizes efficient utilization of real estate and thereby, ROI.

Consider these 10 strategies that will help maximize the value of existing space and make organizations more efficient:

1. Define corporate goals that can be supported by real estate.

- How has your business changed since you first occupied the space(s)?
- Can you drive more collaboration between departments and teams?
- Is innovation a core concern?
- Which spaces do employees use most and more productively and why?
- How can workspace be designed and located to ensure talent attraction & retention?
- Engage department heads to achieve true alignment between corporate real estate & operations.
- Analyze both dynamic density (space per person), and static density (space allocated per workstation).

2. Understand desk utilization.

Gone are the days of providing one desk to each individual employee. Technology has made the modern workforce more mobile – capable of conducting business from almost anywhere. In order to know how much space is actually needed, corporations must first deeply understand how the existing space is being used. Start the process by identifying if, when, and for how long each desk, office and common/ collaborative space is used – preferably with an automated presence detection device such as a desk sensor. Once this data is analyzed, the team can determine actual workspace utilization rates. This is particularly helpful before and after any spatial reconfiguration or relocation projects.

3. Maximize the value of collaborative workspace.

The trend toward more open and collaborative space is prolific. However, these changes to date have been more about slashing square footage and cost reduction. The next frontier (and by far the more impactful) is to have space that truly supports and enhances your business plan and strategies. Getting there will transform CRE from a cost center to a real value proposition! Start by delineating the company's goals and business plan clearly to all stake holders. Once established, measure the effectiveness of your current common and collaborative spaces in delivering support and enhancement to those initiatives.

4. Analyze space utilization with skepticism.

Innovative occupancy software is a great way to manage space utilization including shared desks and meeting rooms. However, just because a room or desk was reserved doesn't mean it was actually used.

Corporations need to use multiple sources of data to determine the delta between planned and actual use of the workspace. For example, combining data from room booking software and utilization data from image and desk sensors helps determine space use, thereby helping to save significant dollars by preventing unnecessary expansion. Rather than increasing office space just because employees say they "can never find any meeting space," corporate leaders can obtain accurate space utilization rates and implement policies to prevent "squatting" or "place holding". And remember: Analyzing workspace use is an evolutionary process. Repeat the process with regularity to keep the organization ahead of the curve and create the most value from occupied real estate.

5. Hibernate underutilized space.

Using room scheduling software to "hibernate" (disable) reservable workspace that is not used on a frequent basis each day practically guarantees immediate cost savings. When organizations turn off large areas of underutilized space, the energy (and related costs) required to heat and cool that space is significantly reduced. In addition, real estate managers find that through hibernation efforts, they are able to maximize the use of available space more effectively. Try creating and enforcing space use policies to ensure hibernated workspace stays off limits unless the rest of the facility is completely occupied.

6. Develop interactive reports that offer high value intel.

Understanding workspace utilization isn't about collecting data, it's about analyzing it. Instead of producing narrative reports that generate little attention, create informative, graphics-based dashboard summaries to help better understand real-estate utilization rates and trends. Today's business intelligence systems provide real-time, interactive dashboards allowing companies to drill down into the details and identify space utilization trends and inefficiencies. This will keep executives informed and innovating about ongoing potential cost savings and efficiency gains.

7. Mergers & Acquisitions- Opportunities & Pitfalls.

As organizations grow, especially through acquisition, they often don't rationalize existing space. Now is a great time to eliminate under-used real estate and adopt variable workspace policies and synergies to reduce costs.

8. Integrate workspace applications with the IT group.

The in-house information technology team should be in lock step with any effort to maximize workspace utilization. As companies invest in workspace technologies and software, the IT pros in the organization can offer expertise that will help eliminate duplicate databases, integrate data from multiple systems, and ultimately get the reports and information needed to make meaningful change while helping reduce the total cost of technology ownership. Integrated workspace management tools are just one example where the IT group can assist in both deploying the hardware and software to maximize effectiveness and make the tools easier to use, share and manage.

9. Consider the mobile workforce.

Modern technology has enabled the mobile work force to work whenever and wherever they choose. It takes less space today to accommodate the workspace needs of 100 employees than it did just two years ago and the pace of this change continues to advance. As employees adopt technologies, and employers adopt flexible work policies, the number of people occupying a typical workspace on a daily basis will continue to decline, and the way that they do use it will continue to evolve.

10. Communicate with employees.

As with any major corporate change, your CRE team will want to work with Human Resources to implement a change management plan to ease the transition. Corporate culture will only adopt and accept workspace utilization policy changes, open environments, and shared space if they understand the need for change and how a more collaborative, productive workplace will emerge. Communicate with employees about the need to make this transformation. Help employees embrace the change by including them in the process, getting their feedback before and after implementing changes, and showing them how the organization is implementing their recommendations. Only then will facility workspace adapt to become more efficient and productive.

To learn more about the Acclaim Advantage call Mike for a free consultation.

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