

# It's not about Millennial vs. Boomer. It's not about Walls vs. Benches.

Dan Peterson | Technology Solutions

It's time to remove focus from the age of employees and redirect it to the tools we give them.

Most current discussions about the trends shaping modern office space define themselves in terms of age first, purpose second. Does the space bring in younger workers? Does the floor plan promote collaboration (a word that may have been overused to the point of losing its meaning)? The pendulum keeps swinging from one trend to another based on the perceived preferences of the largest group of recruits or furniture styles at trendy, hip offices.

## We are missing the big picture

In order to succeed, employees are dependent on interacting in both physical and digital spaces, regardless of age. We can learn to work in these environments so long as we acknowledge that to each-his-own and to his-own-each space. The workplace has expanded from one location to four. Because we now work in the office, in the home, on the go, and everywhere in the cloud, we better define ourselves by connections and access, not by age group and furniture design.

The connection economy we are now in depends on a transfer of labor and intellectual property among all generations. Many older workers provide business experience while the younger generation instinctively brings an adaptive acumen. People skills meet technology skills, patience meets urgency, and foundation meets fluidity.

## Supporting access to the knowledge transfer is where a company should be focused.

Organic collaboration is what many office designs attempt to create, but unfortunately the execution is oftentimes less than ideal. Efforts



focus on the extreme, and many companies either overshoot the concept or are too slow to adapt. Current office densification models should not be seen as the entire answer. A collaborative workplace is just one element, and its significance shouldn't be overstated. In fact, there is now evidence that a shared physical workplace environment can have a negative effect on human interactions. Headphones have replaced closed doors. Serendipitous productivity can be promoted at the modern water cooler and not by intruding the personal workspace. Boundaries erased are boundaries still desired. Collaboration can be more natural when options, not mandates (both physical space and technology tools), are given to the user.

Still, companies need to create a culture that promotes freedom and vibrant energy yet puts structure and accountability within the enterprise. The battle over which generation deserves the most attention in the workplace design should be a truce. The people we want working at our company will want the same things regardless of their age: aspiration, acknowledgment and autonomy. The right mix of real estate and technology will support the culture that ensures knowledge transfer, and inspiration will prevail.

What's the solution? Listen to what motivates and empowers your people. Anticipate and test methods that will make them successful. Design your environments to be adaptive and sustainable.

### Media Contact:

Carole Grinde | [cgrinde@welshco.com](mailto:cgrinde@welshco.com) | 952.897.7756