What’s new?
Reflections on the past, present and future of the office

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“We should work independent of time and place [...] leaving the dogma’s of the industrial age behind us”
Director Microsoft NL concerning their new Dutch HQ
December 2008

“Your office is where you are”
“What is certain is that both the office and the factory are destined to be revolutionized”
Alvin Toffler, The Third Wave, 1981

Main/ recurring workplace themes:

Location
(The office versus elsewhere)

Territory
(Shared space versus personal space)

Layout
(With walls versus without walls)

salon offices, open plan offices, combi-offices, hotspots, hot desks, virtual offices, flexdesks, cockpits, cells, hives, dens, mobile work, club offices, lounge workplaces, cubes, e-offices, team offices, cocon offices, teleworkoffices, home offices, touch down workplaces, hotel offices, free address offices, work benches, non-territorial offices, pods, project places, e-spots, office landscapes, cocon offices, benches, think pods, …

Location (1/3)
The office or elsewhere?

“Messages and memos move silently and instantaneously. Terminals at every desk [...] flicker quietly as information flows through the system [...] to an office halfway around the world or to a terminal in an executive’s home.”
Alvin Toffler, Third Wave, 1981
8% of European workers works from home at least a quarter of their time
(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007)
Knowledge workers work at the office [...] 
They like flexibility, and they like to work at home occasionally. However, they know that to be constantly out of the office is to be "out of the loop"—unable to share gossip, exchange tacit knowledge, or build social capital. 
(Thomas Davenport, 2005)

"You cannot learn anything at home, you can learn about your dog, what you are cooking or what your wife is cooking." 
(Larry Prusak)

Trust?
54% of employers [US] are concerned about how they can monitor the teleworkers’ productivity 
[Mitel / SOM, 2007]
Telework versus Mobile work

at home    everywhere
desk top/landline mobile technology
workspace any space
organized just happens
formal informal
office hours all hours

Always on line
Always on duty?

Anywhere & anytime
Everywhere & always?

Territory (2/3)
Shared space versus personal space?
“In 1974 an engineering department at IBM implemented the idea of a ‘non-territorial’ or neighbourhood style office.

[...]
Not only were all office walls removed at IBM, but so were most desks and other permanent work stations.”
Franklin Becker, How to Create a Successful Office, 1981

76% of the workplaces is ‘fixed’ rather than flexible (NL)
NVB 2009 (n= 800, respondents: real estate/facility managers)
73% assigns dedicated workspace to workers (US)  
(Haworth/NewWOW, 2008)

Popularity?  
62-86% workers [NL] prefer assigned workplaces  
(The National Workplace Survey, 2007)

Satisfaction?  
In 5 out of 7 flexible projects, employees do not want to return to the old situation  
(Center for People & Buildings, 2008)

success factors  
involve management;  
be digital;  
invest in quality;  
change culture;  
(when necessary).
“If a cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind, of what, then, is an empty desk?”
Albert Einstein

Layout (3/3)
With walls versus without walls
Communication

59-77% is satisfied about the increased communication

(Van der Voordt, 2005)
Effect
65% of employees is frequently distracted in open plan offices
(Brill et al, 2001)

Effect
Restoring the ‘flow’ takes 10-30 min, depending on the type of work
(DeMarco en Lister, 2001)
Conclusions
The ‘new office’ is no longer new, but a mainstream phenomenon ... 

Why?
Technologies and management theories change fast, but human behavior and corporate cultures do not.

What’s next?
More of the same? Or are we, at last, reaching the tipping point?

Conclusions
The office is changing ...
slowly, in different directions, and with some difficulty [so far].

Diffusion of the ‘new office’
What do users want?
Freedom & flexibility in time and space
Advanced IT tools
Spaces for collaboration and concentration
Healthy and attractive design
Sustainable solutions

What do clients want?
Solutions that add value without costs

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