

Book Review

Office Space Planning: Designing for Tomorrow's Workplace

Lila Waldman

Book Review of Office Space Planning: Designing for Tomorrow's Workplace

Written by Alexi Marmot and Joanna Eley

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In my search for a textbook that could be used for the office environment portion of my Information and Office Environment Management course, I encountered *Office Space Planning: Designing for Tomorrow's Workplace* by Alexi Marmot and Joanna Eley. Although I was unsuccessful in locating an appropriate textbook for my course, this book has proved to be a valuable resource as I supplement this topic with handouts and web resources.

The authors are internationally known architects based in England. Although they incorporate information about the United States when appropriate, the context is definitely European. In the acknowledgements section, the authors state that they have expanded and updated their earlier book for North American and international readership. The authors have written the book for office designers and managers, so that, unlike many facilities management books, the vocabulary is appropriately geared to the non-architect. This is true even though McGraw-Hill has classified the book into its Professional Architecture category.

The first chapter, Office Work without Office Buildings, gives an excellent overview of the virtual office. It also addresses the issues involved with managing telecommuting, such as the payment of benefits and ergonomic requirements. Advice is given for alternate officing, also known as desk sharing or hot-desking. "In some organizations, desks may be unoccupied as much as 80 percent of the time" (p. 46). A good chart compares the typical percentage of office use of different types of employees. Another plots different job types on a

thermometer to indicate how hot that desk would be. As they do throughout the book, the authors also provide typical human reactions to changes in the office environment. For example, problems can result when hot-desking is implemented because "the office is more than a job, the desk more than a tool for the task, and people feel deeply threatened by their loss" (p. 40).

The second chapter stresses the importance of knowing the organization and the existing building. Space efficiency and the cost of space are considerations in building costs. A chart compares the cost per square foot of office space in U.S. dollars for several cities throughout the world. A short glossary, including terms specific for the U.S., of the main components used when measuring area is provided. In addition to the considerations of cost and meeting future needs, readers are encouraged to consider how building space can enhance an organization's image and encourage communication.

An interesting issue is addressed in a chapter entitled Reengineering Space Allocation. The authors question the traditional idea that the amount of space allocated to an individual reflects that person's worth to the organization. A space standard, if implemented in an organization, could have three options: allocation based on hierarchy, allocation based on function, and identical space allocation for each individual. The authors state, "The trend is toward fewer

Lila Waldman is Associate Professor, College of Business, Bloomsburg University, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania.

space standards, with smaller differential between the lowest and the highest” (p. 93). An interesting chart compares space per person in traditional and flatter organizational structures, with more space being allocated to those at the top of the traditional organization structure. Also addressed are ancillary spaces, such as team meeting areas. A formula is given for calculating rates of utilization of space.

One chapter provides a good background on and comparison of individual, or cellular, offices and open plan options. It addresses the human element, including reasons why employees resist the open office plan. The authors give practical suggestions for improving the open office situation in order to address employee concerns.

The chapter on furniture points out important ergonomic concerns and presents the concept of systems furniture in a positive way. A refreshing change from many textbooks that address this topic is the realistic suggestion that existing furniture may meet the organization’s needs. For example, not all employees work full time with computers. The authors list the health and safety regulations for VDT workers in Europe and state that the U.S. has only voluntary compliance standards. They present realistic and up-to-date costs.

In another section of the book, the authors discuss the various problems that can cause physical discomfort for office workers, including the sick building syndrome. Problems as severe as Legionnaire’s disease and asbestos are addressed, along with environmental issues such as smoking and dust mites. The authors acknowledge that the syndrome is real, but feel that it should be called tight-building syndrome, instead of sick building syndrome, because sealed buildings with windows that do not open are the real cause of the problems. This section also addresses lighting, air temperature, and

ventilation. The ability of individuals to control their environment can lead to worker satisfaction with the environment. Air conditioning is not recommended unless absolutely necessary.

Amenities, such as childcare facilities, cafeterias, and fitness centers, can aid in attracting and retaining workers, but can also bring additional burdens for management. The authors suggest outsourcing as one solution. They also give advice for meeting the needs of disabled workers. Marmot and Eley also present strategies for the use of color and plants in office décor. They also provide a brief definition of *feng shui*, “the ancient art of spatial design for business and home enhancement” (p. 229).

The authors write about technology in offices and the related concerns of more cables, more outlets, and the resulting increase in energy use. They also discuss intelligent buildings and their limitations. The last chapter of the book deals with office moves and changes. Marmot and Eley provide information that would help in deciding whether it is better to relocate, renovate, or simply rearrange existing office space. They give sound advice for dealing with the human issues involved in a change of this type.

Case histories are provided for 25 international businesses, 23 located in the United States. In each case, the authors provide information about the organization, background as to why changes were needed, black-and-white photos, and floor plan drawings. These would be excellent discussion topics for the classroom. Other features of the book include a bibliography and an attractive format with cartoons, interesting quotes, and mini-cases scattered throughout the chapters.

This book would be a good addition to the bookshelf of any instructor teaching courses that incorporate aspects of planning for the office environment.

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