

WORKPLACE OBSERVATIONS DISCUSSION

Uncovering workplace issues and user needs

Sample Report

April 13, 2020

WORKSHOP DATE

April 1, 2020

WELCOME

How can observation help us understand behaviors in the workplace? During our recent workplace observation discussion, we discussed and prioritized a collection of research photos which highlight some common challenges and situations workers experience every day.

Within this document, we have summarized the situations which were identified as occurring “often”. Let’s review the discussion and consider opportunities to leverage the workplace to support workers in new ways.

CONTENT

01 “Often” Situations

02 Summary and next steps

INTENT

Observation Cards and Posters feature a collection of neutral photos that offer groups a means to discuss the workplace situations and challenges they experience. The photos capture common user patterns, behaviors, workarounds and unmet needs that have been studied by the Steelcase WorkSpace Futures research team. Each photo includes an observational need and is connected to a research insight.

During the workshop, participants identified which of the situations occur “often” within their environment. The subsequent conversation around each of the “often” photos provided valuable insight into ways the workplace can better support their needs.

Following are the photos and needs that a group of your end users chose as situations they see occurring “often” in their workplace.



Steelcase Observation Cards

01

“OFTEN” SITUATIONS

OBSERVATION CARDS

“Often” cards

These cards were selected as situations the participants experience “often” in their workplace.



OBSERVATION 5

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Traditional large video conference spaces are often used by only one person

- Large video conferencing spaces feel impersonal and inflexible for smaller groups
- Traditional, dedicated VC equipment is often complex and difficult to use
- Large groups get bumped from their ideal spaces because individuals and smaller groups have to use the same resources

INSIGHT

As the demand for high-quality, dedicated video conferencing increases, scaling spaces for individuals, small groups and large groups improves the user experience.



DISCUSSION

- Our HDVC equipment has been placed in large conference rooms that are often used by one person because of the technology. This causes problems for large groups who need the room and can't find another space to meet in.
- We're seeing an increase in video conferencing needs and our employees are telling us that they need more convenient access to small video conferencing set ups.

OBSERVATION 32

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Formal spaces designed for a singular purpose are frequently left empty and underutilized

- Assigned spaces seem unwelcoming to non-resident groups
- Formal conference rooms often have complex scheduling protocols and are empty much of the time
- It's not easy to re-arrange fixed spaces and complicated technologies for other uses

INSIGHT

Real estate needs to work harder and be more flexible to serve more than one purpose or audience.



DISCUSSION

- We have formal conference rooms in our executive area that are under used. These are large, formal rooms and we are careful to keep them in pristine condition for our leaders and important visitors.
- Many executives don't like the formality of these rooms. Several leaders have moved their meetings from their executive conference room to our less-formal conference rooms.
- Our leaders' meetings use more technology today than in the past, including multiple laptops, content that needs to be projected and compared, and more video conferencing needs. The technology is complex and they need to call our A/V team every time they need to use the technology.

OBSERVATION 17

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Sharing and comparing digital information disrupts collaboration and can be cumbersome

- Limited technology interfaces leave one person in control of the projector
- Multiple participants may want or need to share and compare content from multiple devices

INSIGHT

Spaces designed for collaboration should enhance interaction by allowing all participants to access and share digital information quickly, easily and seamlessly.



DISCUSSION

- Technology connections in our meeting spaces are inconsistent and confusing. Our IT team has projectors that can be checked out and set up by the group that needs it. While flexible, this approach isn't as reliable as we need it to be.
- Because our rooms are in high demand, the meeting host typically can't get into the room before the start time, so we all have to wait for him or her to set up.

OBSERVATION 15

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Project teams may take over shared meeting spaces for the duration of a project

- Project team members want a place to gather and work
- Re-assigning a shared meeting room to a dedicated project impacts other workers and teams
- Dedicated rooms are valuable for project teams, providing a common place to store and share information

INSIGHT

Projects benefit from having dedicated spaces which support collaborative thinking, idea generation and access to shared content, without taking over the conference room needed by the rest of the department.



DISCUSSION

- The teams working on the most involved projects have taken over a few conference rooms for months at a time. The request may start as a need for 2-3 days and then just expand without warning.
- Our department really relies on having our main conference room available. When it was taken over by a project team recently we had a hard time working on other projects and getting day to day work done.
- We need a better way to manage this.

OBSERVATION 26

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Teams use vertical surfaces to share work-in-process and inform others

- Groups are resourceful about where to share their content and metrics when there’s no designated place to do so
- Teams naturally cluster around displayed information to share and report on work-in-process
- Teams and leaders need persistent information to stay informed

INSIGHT

Transparency supports effectiveness and growth, fostering group work, individual learning and team alignment. Teams benefit from posting and sharing information in easily accessible spaces.



DISCUSSION

- Project teams are creative about finding places to meet and post their content. We like the results that our project work is generating, but see growing pains of having teams take over areas of the building over night (literally).
- When project teams move in they keep all their materials up, making that space unusable by others.
- We need a better way to support this for both the teams and the people around the area.

OBSERVATION 23

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Sharing ideas with colleagues is often spontaneous, causing disruptions to individuals working nearby

- Teams benefit from spontaneously working through ideas yet may disrupt others around them
- Brainstorming can be loud and take longer than expected
- Adjacent users often wear headphones to minimize the distraction

INSIGHT

Brainstorming sessions can inspire great ideas, learning and team alignment. Planful adjacencies and boundaries between collaborative areas can help neighbors stay focused.



DISCUSSION

- Our Lean teams need areas to post and discuss project information on a daily basis. Stand-up meetings are increasing and are an important way that our teams stay aligned.
- While we value opportunities for employee learning by hearing the work of others, we also need options for employees to signal when they need more privacy. A need for higher concentration is a common problem.

OBSERVATION 21

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Private conversations frequently occur in the open environment and can unintentionally feed the rumor mill

- In open plan spaces, private matters can be exposed beyond the intended audience
- Workers have a desire to protect information shared with a trusted colleague
- Overheard information can be misunderstood and taken out of context

INSIGHT

Individuals seek control over who hears their conversations and look for content to be held in confidence. Open plan environments should provide workers options for private conversations and focused work.



DISCUSSION

- Private conversations happen everywhere and many people don't think enough about who can overhear. We need options for where these conversations can happen.
- Our newer open areas are so open! When a conference room isn't available, we tend to go near the windows and hope no one can hear us.

OBSERVATION 29

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Piles appear to be messy yet are often quite organized

- People use piles to keep track of work-in-process
- Some individuals layer materials for current projects, future work, past assignments and reference
- Collectors have their own organizational rules and know what specific piles contain

INSIGHT

Resident workers benefit from areas within their primary workspace to see active, anticipated and archive content.



DISCUSSION

- Most of the employees tend to archive antiquated stuff in their workstations. They pile things on tables, the floor and tops of cabinets but seldom use the content.
- There are a few “extreme” pilers. They are the ones who always know exactly where everything is!
- It’s likely that many people have the same materials. When a new project starts, everyone on the team has a copy of the content, which can mean 4-5 duplicate copies in every workstation.

OBSERVATION 9

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Workers struggle to easily access power for their mobile devices in training and shared spaces

- Increases in mobile devices have created new demands for power and data access
- Workers lose time and create unsafe situations and tripping hazards as they connect extension cords
- Wall outlets in training areas, meeting rooms and hallways were never intended for workers' power connections

INSIGHT

Workers expect quick and easy access to power and data to support their technology devices wherever they work.



DISCUSSION

- When power is hard to access it distracts our employees allowing for the loss of time. This happens especially while trying to share our team's content. Technology is important to the function of our every day work and power is essential.
- Trying to find spots to access power is often difficult when few outlets are available. Sometimes outlets are based in the hallway which makes working difficult during meetings and transition periods. Such positioning also creates hazards for technology and our safety.

OBSERVATION 10

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Personal privacy is found in unlikely places, such as restrooms, hallways, empty conference rooms and outdoors

- Individuals make calls from unlikely places, like restrooms, hallways, empty conference rooms and outdoors
- Workers have a desire to protect personal information and avoid interruptions
- People don't want to bother others

INSIGHT

Privacy is a basic human need. Separating oneself from others in a private space allows individuals to concentrate and keep personal information confidential.



DISCUSSION

- Spaces for private phone conversations are difficult to find. Often times even spaces deemed private still allow conversations and information to become public to all employees. We need places to go where conversations can be private.
- As personal privacy is limited in the building, it allows us to hear everything being said on the phone. Even though they are trying to be quiet and courteous, it is still bothering to know that their personal privacy is not respected as much as my own.

OBSERVATION 11

“Often” situations

OBSERVATIONAL NEED

Fixed monitors and workstation orientation can leave workers with limited personal and screen privacy

- Individuals feel uneasy when they don't know who is nearby
- Workers desire privacy for their digital content
- Blocking out distractions can unintentionally leave workers vulnerable to interruptions

INSIGHT

Users seek control to manage their personal environment, including approachability, screen visibility, seating, lighting, acoustics and temperature control.



DISCUSSION

- Confidential information is not easy to protect when you are stationed in one place. While we may know the people we work with, it does not help we are, unable to move around.
- Our employees tend to put their headphones in to try to focus and block out the noise and distractions. This can lead to uneasy feelings towards co-workers who may be prone to looking over another's shoulder.

02

SUMMARY

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

During our discussion, several themes emerged:

- An increased need exists for video conferencing, especially in rooms for 1-3 people to connect distributed teams.
- There are a limited number of small meeting spaces to facilitate informal collaboration.
- Updated technology is lacking in collaborative spaces, making meetings less effective and efficient.
- The open space has caused more distractions for employees and an increased the need for private spaces.
- Workstations and private offices are not providing the storage needs that employees need, causing clutter.



Photo from our Observation Cards discussion

SPACE IMPLICATIONS

Leverage the physical environment

Uncovering behaviors patterns can be challenging and our discussion of workplace observations offered a forum for conversation. Based on these conversations, we believe there are opportunities for your workplace to support the needs identified in new ways. Please consider the following space implications:

SPACE IMPLICATIONS

1. Provide project teams with dedicated spaces that allow them to share and access information and promote collaborative thinking.
 2. Establish a baseline technology and HDVC standard for shared spaces.
 3. Consider small HDVC rooms for 1-3 people.
 4. Distribute shared private spaces throughout neighborhoods in anticipation of private conversations, deep focus work and rejuvenation.
 5. Provide opportunities to organize active, anticipated and archived content within work stations and private offices.
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NEXT STEPS

Extending the workshop

We now have a stronger understanding of the needs and issues impacting your workers. Let's discuss ways that this information can be used to fine tune the workplace.

May we suggest:

1. Review this summary document with the participants from the workshop
2. Initiate a Workplace Snapshot: Satisfaction survey to reach your full employee population
3. Visit our showroom to further explore the identified issues and how they might be solved for
4. What would you like to see next?



Photo from our Observation Cards discussion

THANK YOU

Participants

A special thank you to the participants in the Observation Cards discussion.

Valuable input was provided by:

- Tanya White
- Julie Mead
- Brian Sokey
- Phil Sanders
- John Hill



Photo from our Observation Cards discussion



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