

History of the office

How we used to work and how we are going to work tomorrow.



 Windows 10 Pro

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The tasks we perform at the office, the way in which we work, the technology we can call on – everything is changing. The ground plan and structure of the office itself are following these developments. But this change is not driven by rational considerations alone.

Social trends are exerting influence on the design of the work environment more than ever before. For instance, the office was a real male bastion in the distant past. Today, there is more gender equality. We also work longer, so different generations have to be able to cooperate with everyone on their needs, wishes and habits. These are just a few examples. To gain a grasp of and insight into where we are headed, we must take a look at where we come from.

1880-1975

Cellular office

1975-1995

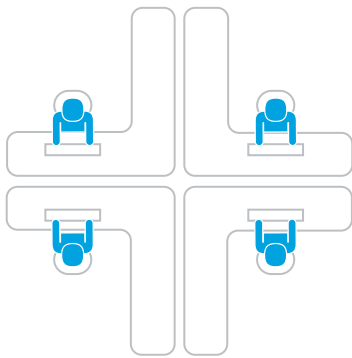
Cubicle farm

1995-2010

Flex desks

2010-...

Activity Based
Workplace



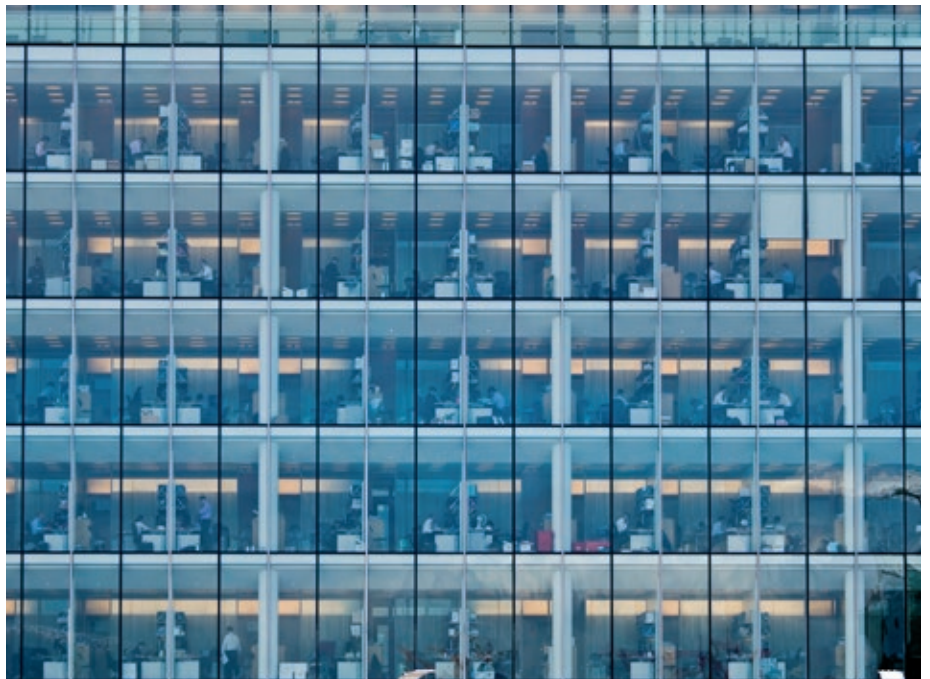
The cellular office was the norm between 1880 and 1975.

From 1880 to 1975, the office was divided into different small rooms. Everyone withdrew (alone or in pairs) into such a cell every morning. The size of your cell depended on your status in the organization. The great advantage of this isolation was focus. You could work and focus on the job the whole day without distraction and without being disturbed. However, there was far less cooperation. You had to make appointments beforehand to go see someone and exchange ideas. Needless to say, the lack of spontaneity stood in the way of unbiased plans and fresh concepts.

Halfway in the 1970s, the walls disappeared and the cellular office made room for the open plan office. The desks were often grouped by four with a low little wall as the only separation. These cubicle farms enabled companies to spare considerable space and the related costs. There was far more visual contact between the employees of course. Consultation could take place in a more spontaneous and more natural manner. The threshold for asking for a colleague's opinion was far lower. This progress on the human level had a disadvantage, however. There was more ambient noise in such an open floor office which could be detrimental to the focus. This type of office layout was the norm until ca. 1995.

Everyone has a fixed place in the “cubicle farms”.

Not everyone had his own computer before the 1990s. The largest part of the work was simply on the desk. A calendar was hung, contacts were classified in a rolodex, files and letters were piled up. Overtime, everyone got a PC and the work moved gradually from desk to desktop. The calendar and letters became Outlook, the project went to Excel or PowerPoint, the telephone became Skype. As a result, there was increasingly less of a need for a assigned desk per employee. Open desks were the rage between 1995 and 2010. This was a new form of open space offices, where no one had a fixed seat any longer. The laptop replaced the office. Working in such a flexible structure would also bring the employees closer together. Thanks to flex desks, contacts between employees would get a boost. The new design with flex desks was also often used as a lever to spare space and costs. The concept fell partly short of its goal because many workers had difficulty – or did not want – to adapt, and would go sit at their own fixed place in the morning. The expected increase in spontaneous cooperation did not materialize. Instead of communicating more with each other, employees shut themselves up in their own little world with a headset.





Flex desk was the hype until 2010.

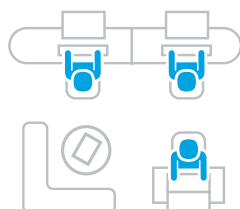
The challenge was therefore to develop an office that met the needs of the modern employee, who has an increasingly more complex job that comprises increasingly more varying activities. Consider, for instance, the preparation for a presentation, a one-to-one meeting, a videoconference with someone abroad, a team meeting, emails, etc. You need a different environment for each of these tasks – an environment that facilitates the specific task of the moment in optimal fashion. This new work environment had to strike a perfect balance between co-creation and focus.



This led to the concept of the Activity Based Workplace (ABW). This is an office environment where several zones are created to enable employees to perform specific tasks in optimal fashion. The different spaces are adapted to the work of the moment. You move several times through the office every day and choose the environment that supports the current tasks best. A balance is thus struck between focus and cooperation. The layout of such an ABW is scientifically underpinned by a thorough profiling of the employees and their tasks beforehand.



For the ABW to succeed, you must make sure that it is not only the workplace that undergoes a makeover. The work culture and the technology on the work floor too must support the new way of working. In addition, you must make sure that all the individuals are trained to make a success of it.



We are on the eve of a new era in which we are going to work in a different way.

HP has built The Office of the Future: an Activity Based Workplace where we present not only the different zones but also a home office or on-the-road office. We thus describe 6 different workplaces and their possible technological configuration.

The Office of the Future will go on tour in Belgium and Luxembourg in 2019. Check the dates and locations, read more and sign up for an inspiration session at www.hp.be/officeofthefuture.

