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## Design for the Changing Workplace

by the WBDG Productive Committee

[http://www.wbdg.org/design/design\\_change.php](http://www.wbdg.org/design/design_change.php)

### Overview

In this electronic/information age, work teams form and reform to meet organizational needs, technological innovations, and changing business relationships. Buildings and interior spaces need to be flexible to anticipate and support this [changing nature of work](#). Within the past few years, designers have sought to create a new generation of "flexible" buildings and workplace environments within buildings that have infrastructures and structures that fully support change while [sustaining new technologies](#), and multi-capable individuals and teams.

The changing nature of work means greater mobility for workers, a multiplicity of workspaces within and external to buildings, greater use of geographically dispersed groups, increased dependence on social networks—and greater pressure to provide for all of these needs and behaviors in a leaner and more agile way. Workplaces have responded with many new options, including more teaming and informal interaction spaces, more supports for virtual individual and group work, more attention to integrating learning into everyday work experience, greater flexibility in work locations, and more focus on fitting the workplace to the work rather than vice versa. Many workplaces are also incorporating spaces that encourage relaxed engagement with colleagues to reduce stress and promote a sense of community.

Left: GSA's Public Buildings Service (PBS) workplace renovation incorporates a space for relaxation that includes an exercise room, lounge area with TV and a pool table. The space is used for group social events as well as breaks. And Right: The PBS space also has a daylit café where workers gather at lunch time or for meetings throughout the day.

## Recommendations

### Design for Flexibility

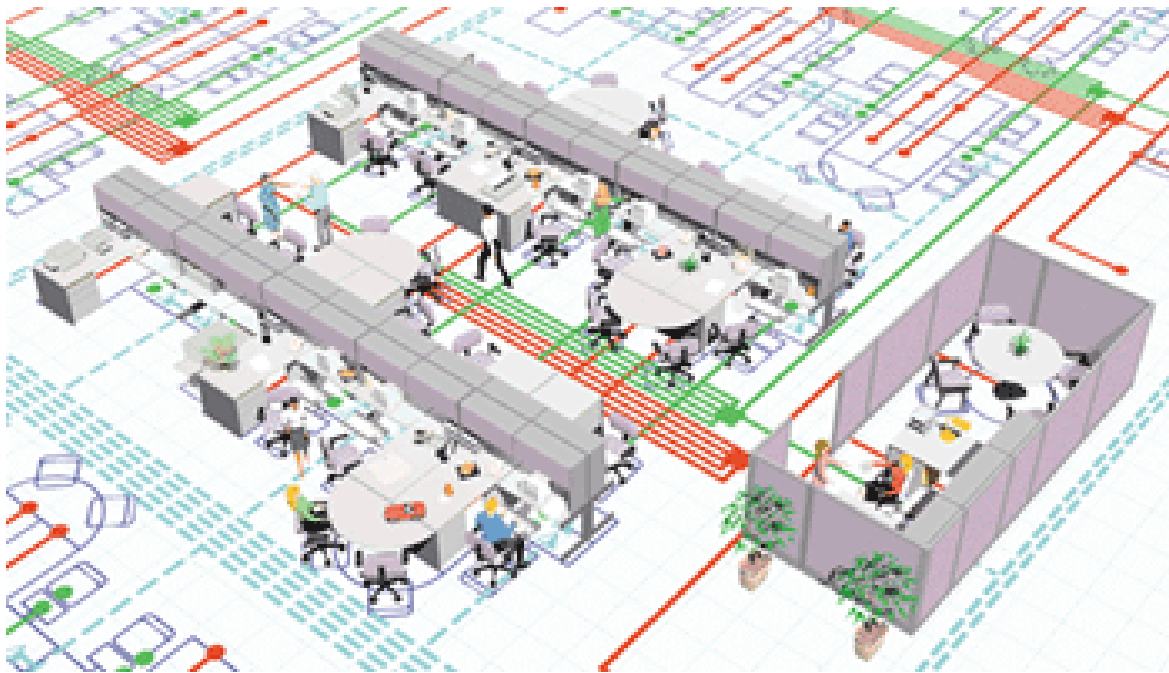
- Provide flexibility for delivering power, voice, and data.
- Provide distributed, vertical cores, satellite closets, and generous horizontal plenum spaces with relocatable, user-based services to ensure technical, spatial, and environmental quality in the rapidly changing electronic office. See also WBDG [Productive—Integrate Technological Tools](#).
- Provide systems that are controllable and adjustable by the users without burdensome reliance on outside contractors.
- Incorporate [sustainable design principles](#), which can help achieve flexible spaces.

## Support Mobility

- Consider wireless technology and mobile phones to enable workers to move effortlessly among spaces as their needs change.
- Provide a multiplicity of spaces for individual and group work.
- Provide connections to internal networks and to the Internet throughout the workplace. See also WBDG [Productive—Integrate Technological Tools](#).

## Enable Informal Social Interaction

- Provide multiple places to meet and greet.
- Consider providing informal workspaces in cafeterias.
- When designing cafes and coffee nooks, locate them centrally along well traveled pathways to encourage use and interaction.
- Design the circulation system with informal communication opportunities in mind.



Flexible spaces and services support multiple spatial configurations and densities, and allow for rapid and easy spatial change.

## Design for a Variety of Meeting Sizes and Types

- Provide enclosed rooms to support groups of different sizes.
- If open informal spaces are used, make sure that they are separated from individual quiet spaces.
- Consider sharing meeting spaces among [private offices](#).
- Provide visual display technologies and writing surfaces for group work.
- Consider the use of dedicated project rooms for some types of group work.

### **Support Individual Concentration**

- If open spaces such as pods or bull pens are used, provide attractive acoustically sound rooms for individual concentration as needed.
- Locate concentration booths close to work spaces.
- Zone space for range of quiet and interactive needs.

### **Support Stress Reduction and Relaxation**

- Consider spaces for relaxation and playfulness.

### **Emerging Issues**

Increasingly, compatible and packaged building components are available on the U.S. market that meet these goals. Several vendors market systems comprising raised floors, plug and play wire management components, and demountable wall systems as a single package.

Open controls protocols such as LonTalk and BACNet, which allow communication between different types of building systems (HVAC, lighting, security, fire alarm, and power), are being adapted to an increasing number of products. This will enable a wider range of [cost-effective](#) possibilities for user control over a common network.