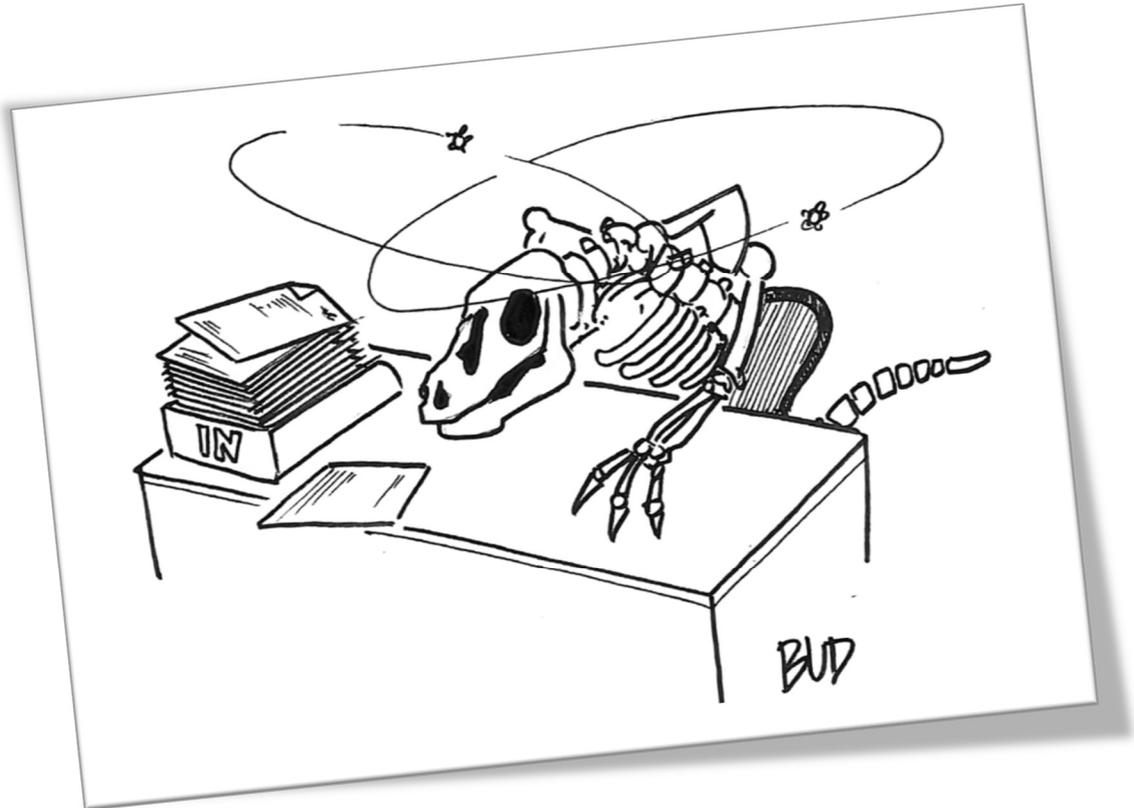


# Why has office design not kept pace with the modern work force?

By Colin Stuart



The design of offices and the way they are utilised has not fundamentally changed for over 120 years. Recent technological advances have been used to squeeze more efficiency out of our office space but that will only give increasingly smaller returns and eventually impact on morale and productivity. To adapt to the pressures and drivers the business world faces and to stay competitive in the global market, we need a paradigm shift in the way we work and the way we interact with each other at work. We must connect up our two most important and costly assets, our staff and our real estate to add value to, and enhance, each other. But why are our offices no longer relevant to modern business needs?

## 1. Offices are Designed on a Traditional Model

The principles of the modern workplace were established by Fredrick W. Taylor (1856 - 1915). He applied scientific measurement of productivity in the workplace to improve efficiency. Tasks were analysed and split into repetitive acts. This led to a production line arrangement which Architects such as Frank and Lillian Gilbreth and the Bauhaus school saw could be applied equally to the office as well as the factory floor. This laid the foundations of the modern commercial office which, with the modern implementation of hot desking and other measures has increased efficiency further. With the notable exception of the the Burolandschaft ("office landscape") movement in the 1950s and modern proponents of new ways of working like Frank Duffy, Jeremy Myerson and others offices are still designed on this "Taylorist" model.

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## 2. Our Workforce is Evolving

The global workforce is also changing. Here in the UK almost 50% of our workforce can be classed as knowledge workers. But are workplaces designed on Taylorist principles developed 120 years ago relevant for the modern knowledge worker, enabled as they are with all the latest mobile technology? We also need to factor in the changing demographics of the workplace. Generation Y (often also called the "Millennials", the generation born from the 1980s to the millennium) have entered the workplace and Generation Z (those born since the millennium - the "iGeneration") are not far behind. They are very highly IT literate, having grown up in a world of Facebook®, Flickr® and instant messaging, even e-mail seems archaic to them.

## 3. Offices Are Not Designed for People

To maximise their potential and productivity knowledge workers need to collaborate, to share knowledge and spark innovation. It is often in the chance encounter rather than the formal meeting that new ideas are created and new products developed. Rows upon rows of desks whether shared or not do not empower staff by providing the most appropriate work setting to suit the task at hand. Additionally modern open plan offices are often noisy environments and, although to a certain extent encouraging more collaboration and interaction, are not conducive to more quiet contemplative work – vital for the development of knowledge.

## Conclusion

We have seen that the modern workplace was created during the technological advances of the industrial revolution, but, that it has remained largely unchanged for over 120 years. We are now facing another period of significant change in technology, one that could lead to a similar change in society and the way we work. It is time the workplace took another step forward. As such we are at a cross roads in terms of the workplace. A perfect storm is building, driven by new and emerging technologies and whipped up further by changing workplace demographics and the different attitudes and inherent skills of the new generation entering them workforce. The office as we know it is in danger of being swept away.

We need to harness the energy, flexibility and enthusiasm of the new generation by providing a working environment that truly empowers and supports them. We need to provide work settings and a working environment that supports knowledge workers and allows for the both the development and sharing of knowledge.

We will be expanding on the drivers, the benefits and how this can be achieved in further articles – please visit our website at [www.bakerstuart.com/](http://www.bakerstuart.com/) and subscribe to receive future articles or follow us on twitter [@bakerstuartltd](https://twitter.com/bakerstuartltd) or LinkedIn <http://www.linkedin.com/company/bakerstuart>

### About Baker Stuart

**Baker Stuart** are a specialist consultancy provide a personal, bespoke and comprehensive service to occupiers. Being focused solely on the workplace this has allowed us to develop expertise in depth in the analysis of our Clients' businesses, the creation and delivery of effective real estate strategies and corresponding office environments.

We provide a range of consultancy services including workplace analysis, workplace consultancy, real estate strategies, project & programme management, project procurement, furniture consultancy, contract administration, design management, change management, facilities management, CAD/CFM and relocation consultancy.

We have an award winning track record and have helped businesses both public and private sector, from SMEs to multinationals to use the working environment as a catalyst to drive positive behavioural change.

### About the author



**Colin Stuart** is a specialist in workplace and occupational strategy. He has an award winning track record in the design and delivery of workplace transformation projects. A published author and speaker with an intrinsic knowledge of the drivers of corporate clients both in the public and private sector and how property can respond to those drivers in order to deliver maximum benefit to the business he has delivered major change programmes and real estate projects in both the public and private sector

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## Further reading:

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