We are trusted partners who utilize a collaborative design process to create efficient, award-winning environments that help our clients achieve their strategic goals. By combining our experience and knowledge of industry trends and benchmarks with our ability to understand our client’s culture, goals, and vision, SLAM produces custom-tailored, financially-responsible design solutions.
"Millennials" (those born after 1984, also known as "Generation Y") are becoming a larger demographic in today’s workplace, but many work environments still represent design ideas aimed towards baby boomers (1946-1960’s) and Gen X’ers (1960’s to early 1980’s).

Collaborative, open office environments, hot-desking, and a "Google-ized" workplace are a new demand of this generation. These demands are not based on a sense of entitlement, but rather on a model that helps increase productivity by creating a more comfortable "normal" work environment. With colleges creating team-based learning (TBL) lecture halls and labs, as well as collaborative break-out space, millennials joining the workforce are often stifled by the old concepts of high-wall cubicles, private offices and an overall lack of creativity-inducing environments.

The millennial generation is becoming more technologically advanced and has taken part in a new initiative called the "Mobile Workplace". When deciding whether to accept job offers, millennials are often influenced by how innovative a company is. For them, innovation means companies that allow them to work not just remotely, but on their mobile devices - their core work tool. A recent survey of the #GenMobile tribe by Aruba Networks suggests that nearly half preferred non-traditional working hours, that is, outside the usual 9:00 am to 6:00 pm.
Enabled by technology, we have continuously evolved into a new lifestyle approach that now calls for an "always-on" mentality. From the moment we wake up, the first thing we do is check our phones for calls, text messages, emails, news, and social media. These new habits are creating a lifestyle where distraction is prominent, and as we try to focus on many tasks at once, it creates a work setting where employees work through lunch breaks, multi-task through meetings, and put stress upon themselves until burnout occurs. However, that’s simply not how the human brain functions—we try so hard to multi-task on many different things, focus throughout the entire workday without breaks and sit in one place without any source of energy fueling our minds.

The truth is, multi-tasking attention isn’t efficient and people today are not aware of how much their mental processes are degraded as they attempt to multi-task throughout their workdays. Research from Dr. Torkel Klingberg of the Cognitive Neuroscience Karolinska Institute outlines two types of human attention: Controlled attention and Stimuli-driven attention. Controlled attention is the attention we use to focus on a single task or topic, where all other distractions are ignored.

Most workplaces are focusing their environments on the idea that focus is the pathway to productivity and efficiency and thus, the goal is to get employees to focus as much as they can throughout their eight- or nine-hour workday—no breaks, no time-outs, no distractions—no excuses. With an increasingly globalized economy, organizations are demanding more dedication and productivity from their employees, more than ever before. The "always-on" lifestyle is now changing work ethic in which the workday doesn’t end at 5:00 p.m. anymore. Now we have employees working afterhours, telecommuting from home, bosses e-mailing or texting their workers at 10:00 at night demanding tasks to be finished or a quick follow-up with a client. So, how do we get workplaces ready for the interconnected world?

With that said, baby boomers and Gen X’ers are still in charge serving in executive decision-making leadership positions, and must position their firms for future success by designing for the needs of future employees. This presents a real balancing act, ensuring both current and future employees have spaces where everyone can be comfortable and productive. Companies that have created these blended environments, such as Pfizer and The Hartford, have positioned themselves for success in attracting and retaining the best and brightest talent—today and tomorrow.
Workplaces need to have areas where the brain is activated, changing and creating new ideas, rather than focusing on one mindset of a certain project or task. When we need to activate our minds for new work, moving around is key. Numerous studies have shown that movement boosts attention greatly by pumping oxygen and fresh blood through the brain triggering the release of enhancing hormones and cognition. Designing for activation may include workspaces that promote physical activity to stimulate the brain with easily accessible settings that encourage workers to move throughout the workday to activate their minds as well as take care of their bodies. Areas within the workplace that incorporate and enforce opportunities for standing and moving, whether it be stand-up brainstorming sessions, or moving around during conference calls, can be the new evolution of workspace design in order to enhance cognitive functions and promote productivity. Several recent studies have shown the use of “standing meetings” have led to a 25 to 35 percent reduction in meeting time length. Coupled with the added health benefits standing provides, encouraging such meetings can have a big impact on your operations as well as employee well-being.

Our brains need to regenerate and be inspired with distractions and external surroundings influencing and sparking new thoughts and concepts. Designing for regeneration and inspiration may include workspaces that grant easy access to colleagues, nourishment and places to rest the mind to help cognitively-overwhelmed workers gain new perspectives.

As work has become more intensely collaborative, most workplaces now have an imbalance in their work environment. When workplaces are designed as a system of various different zones and settings, employees should be able to appropriately select spaces that match their brain modes and activities as they move through their day. A new workplace strategy is typically fueled by business needs. The needs topping today’s list include the desire to increase real-estate efficiency, reduce costs, integrate new technologies, better align with today’s multi-generational work styles, increase retention and attract new talent. Dictating change can prove to be costly, time consuming and counter productive. Carefully orchestrating a strategic approach to change can be much more effective, and ultimately result in better outcomes.
As work has become more intensely collaborative, most workplaces now have an imbalance in their work environment. When workplaces are designed as a system of various different zones and settings, employees should be able to appropriately select spaces that match their brain modes and activities as they move through their day. A new workplace, named “The Smartest Building in the World” is a corporate office building called “The Edge” located in Amsterdam. The office building is based on an app; it is able to do a number of things including finding workers their desks at each start of the day. Because at The Edge, you don’t have one. No one does. Workspaces are based on your schedule: sitting desk, standing desk, work booth, meeting room, balcony seat, or “concentration room.” Wherever you go, the app knows your preferences for light and temperature, and it tweaks the environment accordingly (Bloomberg Business, 2015).

Workplaces are shaping the office of the future by deconstructing relationships and reinventing them. Formalities between clients and companies have relaxed just as corporate hierarchies have, creating a more collaborative workplace.

This concept that workplaces are now investing in is called “hot-desking” where it’s supposed to encourage new relationships, chance interactions, and an efficient use of space. Desks are only used when they’re needed. The Edge fixes on a philosophy called het nieuwe werken philosophy where the idea is to break people away from their fixed locations and rigid ways of thinking—and embark on new ideas and innovations within the workplace. A work environment designed to support enhanced collaboration can help an organization create solutions for challenging business problems, build market share and stay competitive in their industries, creating an interconnected workplace designed for an interconnected world in which we now live in.

An interconnected workplace will optimize every square foot of space for efficient use, increase collaboration between employees, focus on health and wellbeing of their employees in order to create optimal performance, productivity and efficiency of work, build the brand, culture and values of the organization, and create an attractive place to work for new and potential employees.
The familiar concept of work-life balance popularized by Generation X managers has been recently evolving to a new term called "work-life blend" which is now surfacing due to millennial managers seeking a blend of both work and life. According to Chip Espinoza, an author of the recent book *Millennials Who Manage* and the 2010 book *Managing the Millennials*, "They don't mind accessing their work life during their personal life, but they also want to access their personal life during work," says Espinoza. Gone will be systems that lock employees out of their personal lives while they're at work, and in will come more flexible work-life arrangements that allow employees to work from home or work flex hours so they can spend more time with family or engaging in their personal activities.

Companies have increasingly bought into the benefits of flexible scheduling in order to achieve work-life balance. The concept of working remotely as a way to help employees maintain a stronger work-life balance has not only resulted in increased employee satisfaction – it can, and has, helped many businesses save money in leased space needs and energy consumption. Other benefits include reduced carbon emissions, reduced sick leave usage, and increased take-home income by allowing employees to save on transportation and childcare costs. These factors have helped companies offering work-from-home policies better attract and retain talent.

According to Fortune Magazine, nearly half of all US-based companies currently have employees working from home, or from an alternative location outside the office, for at least part of the time. Companies acknowledging these trends have been able to downsize their leasable space, saving money while still providing more than adequate space for employees in the office environment. In essence, these companies have been able to shift operational expense to their employees, who do so willingly because of the comforts they find working at home or elsewhere outside of the office.
This trend of remote work requires technology to support the needs of employees on the road. Cloud-based networking, telecommunications and virtual presence equipment have helped connect both office and non-office employees alike. The result is a work-life balance that increases employee satisfaction, productivity, and reduces corporate operational expense.

From a design perspective, it is imperative that companies who offer remote work options see their corporate workplace environment as a “hub” for employees.

While this message likely resonates with many employers, what about those whose operations require greater security and confidentiality? It’s true that not all employers are able to offer such remote working scenarios. Engineering, technology, and defense industry employers often require that their employees work only in the office, and only in the office. Work cannot be brought outside of the campus environment, as security over the materials being worked on is paramount to both the company’s and country’s proprietary data.

Many of these companies have struggled to attract or retain millennials and have typical employee satisfaction scores that do not measure up to other industries. However, concepts can, and have been introduced to increase personality and collaboration in the workplace – bringing a sense of “home” to the workplace. Breakout areas, café-style dining and relaxation areas, and even concepts like “nap pods”, “pet daycare” and on-site gyms and recreational opportunities have helped these environments bridge the gap between security and serenity.
All you have to do is say the word “change” and everyone goes into panic mode. Change takes people out of their comfort zone. It is the fear of the unknown, the feeling that something awful will happen and they will lose whatever control they have of their work and space. However, workplace change doesn’t have to be overwhelming.

Company leadership understands that work environments are valuable and necessary tools to support organizational and cultural changes. After all, a company’s work environment directly influences employee behavior, morale and productivity.

A new workplace strategy is typically fueled by business needs. The needs topping today’s list include the desire to increase real-estate efficiency, reduce costs, integrate new technologies, better align with today’s multi-generational work styles, increase retention and attract new talent. Dictating change can prove to be costly, time consuming and counter productive. Carefully orchestrating a strategic approach to change can be much more effective, and ultimately result in better outcomes.
Successful change management is heavily reliant on carefully crafted communication and engagement strategies. It begins with a vision and an implementation plan to drive the project’s process. An effective change management plan is essential to supporting a smooth transition to the desired result. It involves leadership, careful planning and close collaboration among Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities, and Real Estate departments.

It is important for companies to create the vision and design a “roadmap” everyone can understand and follow. Support from the top is vital. The success of a new workplace strategy depends on leadership support, management buy-in and strategically communicating a single, clear, consistent vision. The most successful transitions are when leadership openly supports the vision, remains visibly involved, sets the tone throughout the process, and ideally “walks the talk.”

People are a company’s most valuable resource; therefore, involving everybody affected by the change in the process, the easier and more successful the change will be. A successful change management team will invest employees in the process and promote the vision, inclusive of individuals who are enthusiastic, understand and support the need for change, and have enough power to influence others. Once the value of the change is recognized, others become more eager to own the process.

Communication with stakeholders should happen often and early. A common response to change is denial that the change is needed or will actually work, and a collective dread of the process. Everyone assumes that something will be taken away from them. Committee goals should include investing stakeholders by including them in the process. This ongoing inclusion and education will help them better understand the underlying need. Reinforcing the benefits using visual aids and discussion will help staff to see things from a different perspective, and help to shift attitudes and behaviors. An effective change-management team huddles regularly to ensure milestones are met. In this huddle, they will review plans together, share input and comments, and agree on how to address challenges.

Not everyone learns or engages in the same way. The best way to engage stakeholders is by using multiple communications methods and creating opportunities for feedback. This will help to develop the implementation strategies necessary to make it easier for people to accept and adapt to change.

Constantly building and reinforcing awareness helps staff to understand the impact, goals and benefits of the change, and is the path to acceptance. Be sure to include plenty of opportunities for questions and answers along the way. This is how people learn and regain that desired sense of control. A line at the door during the process is a whole lot more productive than a line at the end of the process.
Take a look around your office. Think about how you feel in your space. Do you have access to natural daylight? Are you engulfed in fluorescent lighting, blocked only by the high-wall partition separating you from your neighbor? What about the temperature? Are you comfortable? Do you have access to fresh drinking water or nourishment? Although we frequently answer these questions for ourselves in our daily lives, the workplace seems to be the one place where we can’t ask these questions. The temperature, lighting, and comfort is set by facility groups or building landlords, with limited opportunity for customization or personal preference.

However, a shift has occurred and continues to evolve in today’s office environment. Creature comforts have moved to the forefront of how to better create an environment that employees wish to work in, and even more important to the company’s bottom line, environments that increase productivity.

While water coolers, vending machines, and the trusty communal coffee pot remain in existence for most employers, improvements to these essential vices have emerged. Filtered water options located prominently throughout office environments, along with automatic beverage dispensers and healthier food choices all help to create a healthier workplace.

MEP systems featuring better air filtration to cut down on airborne illness, and allergies, as well as the use of antibacterial surfaces in common areas have also aided in creating a healthier work environment. New office furniture technology, from standing and walking work stations to stability balls and demarcated walking “paths” allow employees to stay fit while working. Additionally, employers are more frequently offering shower facilities for employees who wish to use on-site athletic centers, as well as for those employees who prefer a pedestrian mode of transportation to work.

Lighting has never been more important in the workplace, as research has shown the necessity of maintaining a healthy circadian rhythm. From changing LED systems to access to natural daylight by the relocation of perimeter offices, employees demand an environment with sufficient lighting. Equally important to employees is a work setting that matches their preferences for interactivity. It is essential that today’s workspace features a variety of huddle rooms, breakout spaces, “maker spaces”, and the traditional conference room to ensure all modes of employee engagement and temporary respite can be accommodated.

New advances in technology even allow for the tracking and configuration of employee preferences, from their internal core temperature and preferred room climate to an employee’s desired light level, color schemes, and noise level. With this much customization, you can be sure your office is able to offer the perfect level of comfort for your employees. And as the saying goes, happy employees = productive employees.

well being