

FREE ADDRESS, WORK FROM ANYWHERE, AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN:

Lessons learned from the flexible new workplace design and policies of Perkins Eastman's Pittsburgh Office



ERKINS — EASTMAN SUSTAINABILITY



Introduction

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed the adoption of remote work for many companies, including the global design firm Perkins Eastman. At that time, leaders of Perkins Eastman's Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, office had just begun designing and planning a move to a new location for their workplace. When the world shut down, pausing construction plans, they took the opportunity to rethink their workplace strategy. The new office's design and operational policies were modified to create an even more flexible and resilient work environment—continuing the firm's goal to create the workplace of the future while addressing a postpandemic world.

The new Perkins Eastman Pittsburgh office opened in May 2021. The space, and the accompanying office policies,

provided the structure for employees to thrive. Perkins Eastman's Pittsburgh office offers valuable insight into the question on so many minds: **How can we create a workplace that fosters productivity and cultivates a positive culture?**

A post-occupancy evaluation of the Perkins Eastman Pittsburgh office—comprising surveys, interviews, behavior observations, and indoor environmental quality data collection—demonstrates that the spatial design and policies that foster news ways for working supports employees' physical health, professional growth, and social connection. The recipe for its success includes three main ingredients: 1) A **"Work from Anywhere**" policy; 2) A **"free address**" unassigned seating model; and 3) A variety of work points within the office.



Free address, work from anywhere, and everything in between

Work From Anywhere (WFA) is a policy that Perkins Eastman established to allow employees to work in a location that is best suited to the nature of their task, whether that is in the office, in a neighborhood coffee shop, "on the road," or at home. WFA is intended to provide flexibility and freedom, with the expectation that employees select a location that is appropriate and conducive to working productively.

In a **free address office**, seats and workstations are available in order of an employee's arrival to the office rather than predetermined assigned seating. Employees can choose from a variety of work points (e.g., open workstation, counter seating along windows, booth seating, lounge areas) located throughout the office. Free address allows employees to choose the work setting that is best suited to their task and personal comfort preferences, aligning goals with the WFA policy. Free address maximizes flexibility by considering the elements of: individual behavior, community integration, workstation ergonomics, technological support, spatial variety and adaptability, and clear and transformative workplace policies.

A highlight of the new office in Pittsburgh is the variety of work points that allow employees to tailor their environment, using the office itself as a tool to support their productivity. There is a mix of focus and collaboration spaces, including traditional work points (e.g., a height-adjustable desk with two monitors), counter seating by a window, a small focus room to take a virtual call, a conference room for larger team meetings, or an open workshop area for team collaboration. Providing alternative work points in addition to traditional desks increases the ratio of seats-to-employees so that there are always plenty of options to choose from.





Our Pittsburgh Office

Meeting basic needs: Providing a healthy workplace

Every employee deserves a healthy workplace—a physical environment that is safe, comfortable, and supports employees' abilities to complete their tasks. Perkins Eastman's Pittsburgh office expands on these principles by adopting systems that maintain excellent indoor environmental quality and by providing a variety of comfortable and ergonomic workstations that accommodate employees' unique roles and needs.



Healthy indoor environmental quality

Daylight: A large expanse of perimeter windows allows daylight to penetrate deep into the space. Research points to myriad benefits of daylight exposure, including better sleep quality, increased activity levels, and enhanced quality of life.¹ In the Pittsburgh office, employees are empowered to adjust hand-operable window blinds as needed to filter light and minimize glare, increasing their visual comfort.



Noise: The Pittsburgh office is equipped with a white-noise system to mask disruptive noises, decrease distraction, and increase concentration and focus. Research on open-plan offices has shown that noise from surrounding conversations is more disruptive to employees' focus than other noise sources, such as ventilation, office equipment, and footsteps.² With the white-noise system, the Pittsburgh office's occupied noise level achieves the industry standards for office environments.³

Temperature: The temperature in the office stays between 68°F–75°F, as recommended by the industry standard for office environments.⁴ Most employees felt comfortable with the temperature, although many noted that the temperature felt cool. Variability in perceived thermal comfort is expected, however, as it is influenced by factors beyond just the air temperature, such as radiation, air speed, and individuals' metabolic rates and clothing.

Air quality: The office space is well ventilated and equipped with an air filtration system. The average CO_2 level is 352 ppm, substantially lower than the maximum recommended CO_2 level for offices (800 ppm).⁵ Working in an indoor environment with low CO_2 levels has been found to improve cognitive performance, especially for conducting complex tasks and making decisions.⁶



Physical comfort

The office provides a variety of ergonomic work points to cater to diverse body types, postures, and needs. Traditional workstations are fitted with height-adjustable desks, adjustable task chairs, and double monitors, providing a high level of adjustability and intuitive controls to accommodate employee preferences and create comfortable working positions. Non-traditional work points, such as couches and counter seating along the windows, provide a variety of working positions and configurations that can also accommodate individual or group work.



In a healthy workplace, employees are more likely to feel motivated and engaged, ultimately leading to increased productivity and better overall job satisfaction.⁷ Ensuring a healthy workplace is not just an ethical obligation; it is a strategic investment that benefits both the employees and the organization.





Providing an enhanced working experience: Maximizing personal and collective growth

Perkins Eastman's Pittsburgh office supports productivity and culture through a mix of policies and spatial features that maximize both personal and collective growth.

Flexibility in design and policy

The combination of the spatial design of the office and its operational policies offers substantial flexibility and supports productivity. The Work from Anywhere (WFA) policy accommodates employees' ever-changing needs by allowing them a choice of work points. Spatial features that support WFA include a mix of different workstation options, easily moveable furniture, technological supports, and lockers to store personal items. Reconfigurable space, such as a conference room with a foldaway wall create open space for larger events and a dedicated multipurpose innovation space that can be rearranged as needed, also augments adaptability.

While the office was designed to provide maximum flexibility, significant changes to physical infrastructure can be costly. Policies, on the other hand, can be modified at relatively little cost. At the Perkins Eastman Pittsburgh office, leadership regularly revisits and revises operational policies to improve work processes, productivity, and office culture.

Non-hierarchical seating arrangements

Free-address, non-hierarchical seating means more intermingling among junior and senior employees, which allows for more "eaves-learning," or the indirect learning of industry knowledge. Likewise, this arrangement provides more opportunities for spontaneous collaboration and informal mentorship (e.g., day-to-day coaching and knowledge sharing).



Spatial features as social catalysts

The office isn't *all* about work—many spatial features in the Pittsburgh office act as social catalysts to encourage relationship- and culture-building. Outside of the traditional work points, the most-loved space is the office's communal lunch table, a popular spot in the lounge area where people gather to eat meals together, fostering new and established connections. An adjacent photo-wall puts faces to names but also celebrates employees through a regularly rotating display of plaques to celebrate birthdays, work anniversaries, and other newsworthy and culture-building activities, encouraging employees to get to know each other better.



Creating an enhanced working experience that fosters productivity, well-being, and culture-building necessitates a strategic fusion of design and policy. Pre-design surveys, charettes, and interviews to understand the diverse needs of their employees provided the basis for the Pittsburgh office's spatial design and operational policies. This became the critical foundation that guided the creation of an inclusive and engaging workplace that can adapt to diverse needs while cultivating a sense of community.

Eaves-learning: Learning through osmosis

Eaves-learning is the process of acquiring knowledge and skills from eavesdropping, informal mentorship, and spontaneous collaboration that occur when working in close physical proximity to other people. As we absorb information from overhearing work-related conversations, learning happens through osmosis. Casually overhearing office conversations can be beneficial to employee productivity, performance, and career growth.

Physical proximity is key to eaves-learning. Being physically present in an office allows one to hear the conversations happening around them, without necessarily being a part of them. Eaves-learning is nearly impossible to replicate in a virtual environment, as discussions and conversations must be deliberately organized with specific virtual locations, time slots, and participants. Eaves-learning is nearly impossible to replicate in a virtual environment...





Open Workshop Area



Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic catalyzed many sudden yet lasting changes, including the ways in which we work. It also affirmed that workplaces should be planned-through both flexible spatial design and operational policies-to proactively address an ever-evolving future of work.

Surveys, data, and observation have demonstrated that the Perkins Eastman Pittsburgh office's spatial design and policies promote a healthy and enhanced workplace environment that caters to both individual and collective needs and productivity. At the core of this approach is the commitment to providing a healthy workplace that focuses on indoor environmental quality and physical comfort. Additionally, through policies such as Work from Anywhere

and a free-address model, the office enhances employees' working experience through opportunities to choose the most suitable work points for different tasks at any given time. Providing individual and collaborative spaces, with various work postures, in a free-address office creates everchanging seating variety-a massive opportunity for greater productivity, comfort, culture building, and eaves-learning among employees.

This combination of spatial design and operational policies supports employees' physical, mental, and cognitive wellbeing, thereby contributing to their productivity, work performance, and job satisfaction.

I want to go into the office now because it feels like a healthy, clean, bright place to be. I also value the non-hierarchical office environment, which fosters our mentorship culture. Our office does a good job supporting us and working with us. Now, the office is more like a tool we can use.

- Perkins Eastman Pittsburgh employee



References:

- Boubekri, Mohamed, Ivy N. Cheung, Kathryn J. Reid, Chia-Hui Wang, and Phyllis C. Zee, "Impact of Windows and Daylight Exposure on Overall Health and Sleep Quality of Office Workers: A Case-Control Pilot Study," *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine* 10, no. 6 (2014): 603–611, https://doi.org/10.5664/ jcsm.3780.
- Artan, Deniz, Esin Ergen, and Isilay Tekce, "Acoustical Comfort in Office Buildings," Proceedings of the Annual International Conference on Architecture and Civil Engineering; Global Science and Technology Forum: Singapore (2019): 145-149.
- 3. U.S. Green Building Council, "LEED v4.1 Building Design and Construction," 2023, https://build.usgbc.org/bd+c_guide.
- 4. ASHRAE, "ANSI/ASHRAE Standard 55-2013, Thermal Environmental Conditions for Human Occupancy," 2013.
- Comité Européen de Normalisation, "Energy performance of Buildings – Ventilation for Buildings – Part 1: Indoor Environmental Input Parameters for Design and Assessment of Energy Performance of Buildings Addressing Indoor Air Quality, Thermal Environment, Lighting and Acoustics Module M1-6," 2019, https://standards.iteh.ai/catalog/standards/cen/ b4f68755-2204-4796-854a-56643dfcfe89/en-16798-1-2019.
- Allen, Joseph G., Piers MacNaughton, Usha Satish, Suresh Santanam, Jose Vallarino, and John D. Spengler, "Associations of Cognitive Function Scores with Carbon Dioxide, Ventilation, and Volatile Organic Compound Exposures in Office Workers: A Controlled Exposure Study of Green and Conventional Office Environments," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 124, no. 6 (2016): 805–812, https://doi.org/10.1289/ehp.1510037.
- Abdou, Ossama A., G. M. El Kholy, and Amal A. Abdou, "Correlation Between Indoor Environmental Quality and Productivity in Buildings," *The 19th IAPS Conference, Alexanderia, Egypt*, (2006): 1–15, https://www.academia.edu/ download/6196667/env_quality_and_productivity.pdf; Al Horr, Yousef, Mohammed Arif, Amit Kaushik, Ahmed Mazroei, Martha Katafygiotou, and Esam Elsarrag, "Occupant Productivity and Office Indoor Environment Quality: A Review of the Literature," *Building and Environment* 105 (2016): 369–389, https://doi. org/10.1016/j.buildenv.2016.06.001.

Credits:

Primary Authors: Hanna Negami, Widya Ramadhani Secondary Authors: Jennifer Askey, Emily Chmielewski, Jennica Deely, Connor Glass, Katherine Gluckselig, Heather Jauregui, Kristina Koch, Rebecca Milne, Jeff Young Photography: Andrew Rugge/Courtesy Perkins Eastman Data Collection Assistant: Jenny Budka Appman Graphics: Catherine Page Images: Adobe Stock

PERKINS-

EASTMAN

SUSTAINABILITY

PERKINS

EASTMAN

Wesign Stretegy

Contact us for more information and to inquire about our services: Jeff Young, principal and co-leader of workplace (j.young@perkinseastman.com)

Connor Glass, principal and co-leader of workplace (c.glass@perkinseastman.com)

Jennifer Askey, associate principal (j.askey@perkinseastman.com)

Copyright © 2024 by Perkins Eastman. All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the authors have used their best efforts in preparing this report, they make no representations or warranties with the respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this report and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Neither the copyright holder nor the author shall be liable for damages arising here from.







