



ACTIVITY-BASED WORKING



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Successful businesses never stop evolving. They adapt their business plan, products, means of communicating – whatever it takes succeed in a rapidly changing world. So it only makes sense that the spaces they operate their advancing businesses in be adaptable as well.

Traditionally, a company's place of business is made up of assigned workspaces: cubicles, offices and for the lucky few, a corner suite with a view. But not much about this design provides flexibility or room for growth. A building is only so big, and as an organization expands, space will eventually run out. Traditional thinking can only accommodate a finite amount of growth.

This understanding leads progressive organizations around the world to the concept of activity-based working (ABW). Not just a passing trend, ABW has been gaining popularity and attention since the late nineties, when Erik Veldhoen, a Dutch consultant, initiated a new way of working.

Veldhoen + Company explain that ABW is "about organizing your work in a more productive and enjoyable way. Creating the best circumstances for each activity, whether it is developing ideas, delivering content or sharing knowledge." Simply put, activity-based working enables companies to operate as efficiently as possible.

What is activity-based working?

At the core, activity based working is about providing people with choices while reducing unused space. Studies show that at any given time, approximately 30% of desks are sitting empty. To eliminate this vacancy and wasted space, activity-based workplaces reject the idea of assigned desks. Each workspace is shared and serves multiple purposes throughout the day.

Since one setting is rarely ideal or appropriate for each of the tasks a person is expected to complete, the idea of utilizing several areas makes sense. Businesses must determine what tasks use most of their staff's time and the space required to complete them.

And while employees don't have an assigned office, they are not displaced or unsettled. Rather, they enjoy the luxury of choosing how, where and when they work, resulting in increased productivity and workplace satisfaction.

guiding principles

Activity based working is dynamic; it isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. The methodology can be tailored to each business, its staff and clients. But at the core, activity based workplaces:

- Think outside the box. Whenever possible, walls and closed doors are be eliminated.
- Provide flexibility and freedom. Skilled employees deserve trust and the responsibility to do their job without being micromanaged.
- Stimulate teamwork. Collaboration leads to progress.
- Attract the most qualified workers.
- Strive for sustainability. More compact spaces naturally make a smaller impact on the environment.
- Cut unnecessary expenditures.


What does an activity based workplace look like?

Activity based offices include a balance of comfort and style. An appealing design ensures people want to come to work, while ergonomic furniture ensures they want to stay.

ABW offices incorporate a range of workspaces, typically including:


- Team desks
- Quiet rooms to allow for phone calls, one-on-one conversations and private work
- Stand-up tables
- Brainstorming areas
- Lounge
- Meeting rooms
- Conference rooms equipped with multimedia equipment

In addition to the physical requirements of a successful ABW space, a fast wireless network and quality technology is necessary to allow for a mobile workspace. Without the technology, activity based working isn't possible.



Who is best served by an activity-based workspace?

When this methodology was born in the nineties, it attracted companies focused in the financial, marketing and technology sectors. However, ABW is no longer a novel concept intended only for information-based businesses; it's the way of the future.



Stats Canada recently showed that baby boomers make up 27% of our population. This means that a massive shift in the workforce has already begun to take place. Traditional-minded employees are retiring en masse, making way for Gen X and Y, and eventually, the Millennials.

This shift is great news for corporations considering a change in how they operate. The younger demographic is ideally suited to activity based working. Constantly advancing technology, collaborative work environments and transparency aren't new ideologies these generations needs to adopt; this way of life comes naturally to them.

That being said, age is just a number. Companies with creative, adaptable staff and management experience success in activity based work environments, regardless of the demographic of its employees.

Advantages of ABW

Activity based working provides benefits to every facet of an organization: the employees, clients, environment and the business itself.

for the company

Companies enjoy financial savings after implementing ABW. Smaller spaces mean reduced operational costs thanks to lower utility bills, reduced paper waste and less furniture. Employers also see a reduction in sick leave and worker's compensation claims.

Activity based workplaces attract and retain high quality staff. Innovative and resourceful people seek work environments that respect and value their skills.

A mobile work environment increases productivity. Regular movement stimulates innovation and out-of-the box thinking among employees.

One Harvard professor stated that, "when the body starts moving, the brain 'lights up' in almost all areas, and the result is improved cognition, creativity and problem-solving."*

Employers and their staff benefit from a strong work culture. The combination of respect between management and their staff and between coworkers improves morale in the workplace.

for staff

Activity based working promotes openness and collaboration. Instead of the closed-door mentality that stifles creativity and teamwork, ABW promotes free flow of ideas that come from staff diversity and open-mindedness.

Staff experience higher perceived value within the workplace. The traditional hierarchical structure is eliminated and instead management empowers and trusts their employees.

Flexibility results in a more satisfying work/life balance. Employees can choose where and when to work, which reduces stress. Less stress results in better health overall, which translates to higher quality work output.

Employees enjoy more movement throughout the day. Regular movement stimulates the mind and reduces pain and injuries resulting from extensive sitting.

for clients

Clients enjoy a higher quality product. When a team works together on a client's behalf, the quality of the product will undoubtedly be higher than if one person was solely responsible.

Customer service improves. Faster response times result from having an entire team available.

for the environment

Activity based working uses less energy and consumables. Since the offices are smaller and don't contain wasted space, less power and energy is needed to operate the business. Furthermore, thanks to improved technology and communication, unnecessary printing is eliminated and waste decreased.

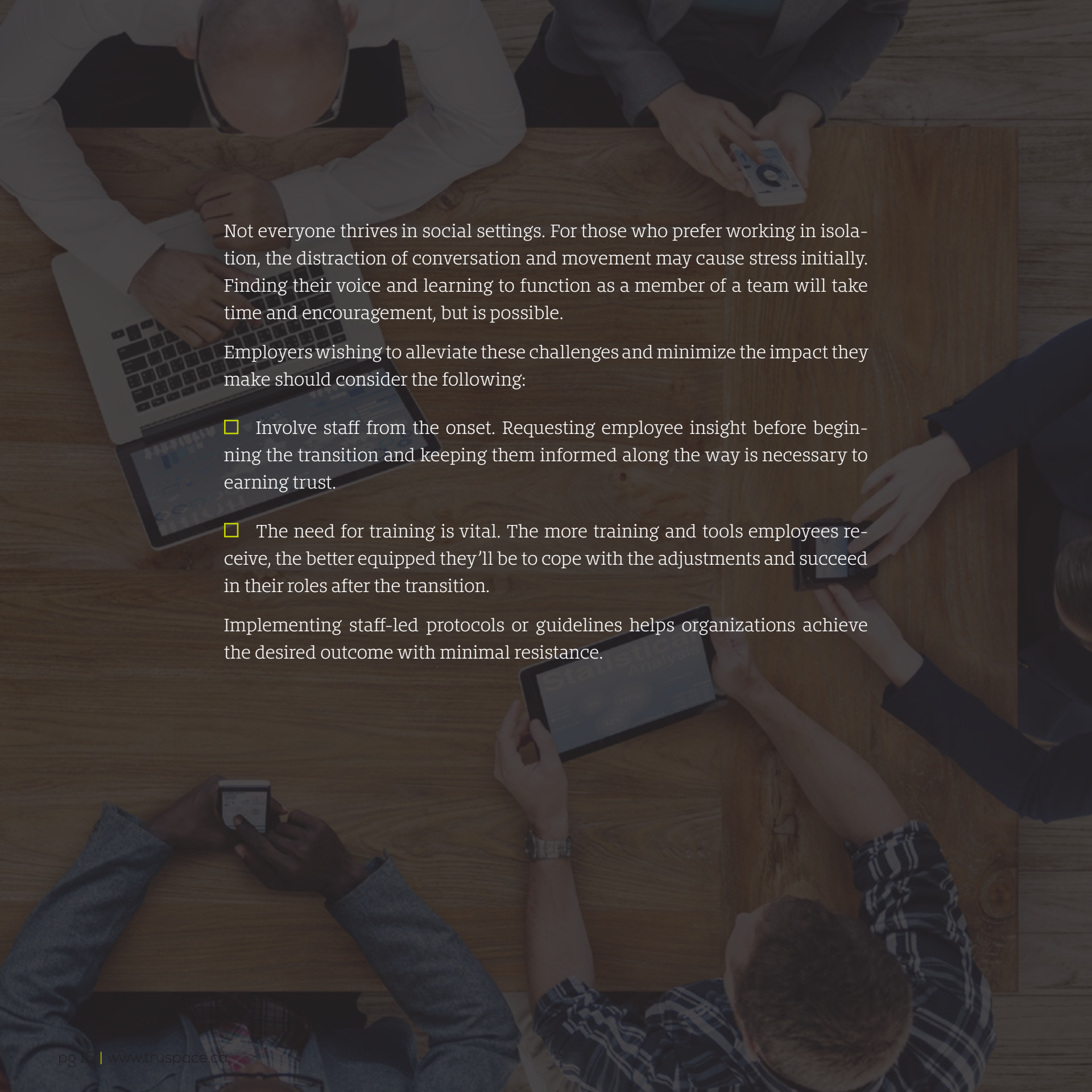
Employees at activity based workplaces commute less frequently. Since employees are given a choice to work from home, the number of cars polluting the environment drops.

Challenges of Activity Based Working

Change is difficult - it brings with it a fear of the unknown. Not surprisingly, resistance to widespread change during a transition to activity-based working is common.

Removing personal office space can leave staff feeling undervalued and displaced. This is especially true of long standing employees who value a private office and the status they feel goes along with it.

Activity based workplaces require trust. Depending on the structure of a company, the transition away from a culture of micro-management can prove difficult. Some people require more direction from management and may struggle with the freedom provided in activity-based working.

An overhead, top-down view of several people sitting around a light-colored wooden table. They are engaged in work, with some using laptops and others using tablets or smartphones. The scene is dimly lit, with a dark overlay across the entire image. The people are seen from above, showing their heads and hands as they interact with their devices.

Not everyone thrives in social settings. For those who prefer working in isolation, the distraction of conversation and movement may cause stress initially. Finding their voice and learning to function as a member of a team will take time and encouragement, but is possible.

Employers wishing to alleviate these challenges and minimize the impact they make should consider the following:

- Involve staff from the onset. Requesting employee insight before beginning the transition and keeping them informed along the way is necessary to earning trust.
- The need for training is vital. The more training and tools employees receive, the better equipped they'll be to cope with the adjustments and succeed in their roles after the transition.

Implementing staff-led protocols or guidelines helps organizations achieve the desired outcome with minimal resistance.

The Right Furniture For The Job

Activity based working is all about empowering people to work as efficiently as possible in a captivating space. Handing over control and allowing employees to choose the best location to complete each task is a central component of ABW.

Choosing the best furniture and design for an activity-based workspace is crucial to ensuring success:

- ❑ Each piece of furniture will be used more often than in a traditional office, so sturdy furniture is best
- ❑ Incorporate furniture that creates privacy, instead of enclosed offices
- ❑ Moveable furniture can be used in more than one location, thereby reducing costs
- ❑ Large tables that allow employees to spread out and brainstorm improve creativity
- ❑ Power outlets are spaced appropriately to allow people to connect their devices as they move throughout the workplace.
- ❑ High or adjustable tables allow for quick, stand-up meetings and enable staff to stretch their bodies to reduce discomfort

Employees can seamlessly transition from focused, private work to a stimulating, group brainstorming session to a demonstrative meeting with clients.

*"Organizations transitioning into an activity based work environment can rest assured that their investment won't go to waste. Studies have shown that employees actively seek out opportunities to "collaborate, change postures and focus on their work" and when given "access to these alternative work areas, an overwhelming majority (87%) took advantage of them"**.*

*Spark: the Revolutionary new Science of Exercise and the Brain, Dr. John Ratey, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard University

**The Importance of Movement in the Workplace, Dr. Lauren Gant, Ph.D., CPE, Ergonomics Group at Allsteel,

Activity-based workplaces grow with you

The beauty of this approach is that an ABW office continues to grow with the business, rather than creating barriers to its growth. The design is intended to accommodate more staff, new ideas and changing technologies – without complication or increasing the bottom line.

Transitioning into an activity based work environment requires extensive planning and expertise. The process involves staff training, interior design and construction. Failure to incorporate each of these aspects undermines the end goal. A skilled design and build firm works with its clients to create the most effective space needed to achieve the desired outcome.

Truspace

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