

THE SHRINKING WORKSTATION

Office workers are noticing a trend in the size of their workstation...it is getting smaller.

A typical workstation in the 1970s measured 12' x 12'. By 1995, it had shrunk to 10' x 10'. Today, workstations have been reduced to an average size of 6' x 8' and space planners believe that future workspaces can be cut by an additional 21 percent without reducing productivity (Langhoff 2007).

The annual benchmarking studies administered by the International Facility Management Association (IFMA) support this prediction. In 2007, 1,032 IFMA member surveys were completed, and the results indicated that office spaces are indeed continuing to shrink. In fact, their survey research indicated that from 1997 to 2006, workspace size had shrunk an average of 18 square feet – or 12% - across all job functions. (IFMA Benchmarks #30) (See following table).

Job Function	1997 - Space per employee (square feet)	2006 - Space per employee (square feet)	Reduction in square feet	Percentage of decrease
Upper/Executive Management	280	241	39	14%
Senior Management	193	170	23	12%
Middle Management	142	121	21	15%
Senior Professional	114	98	16	14%
Technical/Professional	92	79	13	14%
Senior Clerical	84	78	6	7%
Generic Clerical	73	68	5	7%
Average:	140	122	18	12%

United States Trends – According to IFMA, to increase the availability of collaborative areas many of the individual workspaces are shrinking. From 1997 to 2006, offices in the United States have shrunk an average of 18 square feet while some offices have shrunk as much as 39 square feet.

Many forces may be influencing this trend

Individual achievements are becoming secondary to what a team can accomplish together; therefore, the size allocated to the individual workspace is decreasing at the expense of creating more collaborative workspaces. Since 2002, the amount of space devoted to conference, training and break out areas has increased more than 17 percent (IFMA #28, 2007). The increased proximity of coworkers and collaborative spaces encourages more interaction and faster communication, subsequently increasing productivity. Also, more collaborative space - both formal and informal - generates greater and more spontaneous dialogue and brainstorming opportunities for teams.

The layout of the departmental and individual workspace influences the opportunity for social interaction. Proximity, ease and availability of social exchange can be affected by the workplace environment. Open spaces in particular can facilitate

and enhance the communication so necessary for efficient collaboration within the office (Brand 2009).

Configurations that allow open, essentially face-to-face orientations with every other member of the group encourage social interaction more than those that do not. Efficient communication within teams and coordination/collaboration between teams can be enhanced by a properly configured environment (Brand 2009).

Another reason for the shrinking office trend is that technology equipment is getting smaller. Computers that used to take up an entire corner of a work surface now fit into the space of a laptop. With shrinking computer monitors and greater use of laptops, less space is needed for technology, so the work surface depth and office footprint can be reduced (Madsen 2006).

At the risk of trying to predict the future, the shrinking workstation trend is likely to continue. If technology continues to advance and collaborative spaces continue to take precedence over the individual, there will be less need for the individual workstation to occupy as much floorspace as previously.

References:

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