

# Your workplace can attract, engage and retain knowledge workers



**With unemployment at a 25-year high, one might think that attracting, engaging, and retaining talent could justifiably be last on the list of an organization's priorities. However, that is far from the reality. Now that nearly every business is operating lean, rapid innovation is more important than ever to differentiate and stay competitive.**

New skills needed for knowledge jobs place a premium on having, not finding, the right workers. The global economy has created higher demand for advanced skills, which increased the pressure even more. All of this means that, especially today, finding and keeping the right talent is critical for assuring an organization's survival — and its ability to thrive when the economy begins to recover again.

But even with the brightest and the best on staff, a successful talent management strategy can't stop there. More than ever, attracting and retaining talent is about securing engagement and mindshare. Simply having people on the payroll doesn't guarantee that goal. Engaging and motivating workers is an especially tough task today. Following widespread downsizing and restructuring, 75% of layoff survivors acknowl-

edge that their productivity has declined. On any given day, as much as 76% of the workforce is looking for other employment opportunities.

The workplace has a significant impact on these talent challenges. According to research by global architecture and design firm Gensler, "Top-performing companies — those with higher profits, better employee engagement and stronger market and brand position— have significantly higher-performing work environments than average companies. "Yet a big gap remains between what many offices provide and what workers need. The Steelcase Workplace Satisfaction Survey, a global research tool designers have used with over 133 clients and nearly 23,000 respondents to understand a variety of workplace issues that impact employee satisfaction, shows that a work environment that helps attract and retain employees is important to workers, but it's also the single biggest issue not being met. In fact, it's been the most frequently cited unmet need each year since the survey began in 2004.

The reasons so many workplaces are a hindrance in the talent challenge are complex, but all fundamentally trace to significant but still often-overlooked shifts in how work is being done today. Understanding these changes is essential to planning high-performance work environments that attract, retain and help knowledge

workers be productive and innovate. Employee needs and behaviors have changed in the past few years. New research conducted by Steelcase documents these shifts in worker attitudes and how these are, in turn, affecting the workplace. In particular, we explore the permeating influence of the youngest generation, Generation Y, whose ways of working and expectations of the workplace are now being adopted by workers of all ages, thereby influencing the workplace faster than any other generation (and the talent challenge as a whole). Finally, we offer new strategies for planning workplaces to attract, engage, and retain knowledge workers who can continuously grow their capabilities and help carry their organizations forward.

**Knowledge workers are charged with creating and evaluating knowledge, thinking creatively, analyzing and solving business problems, and helping the company innovate and grow.**

Every organization has knowledge workers — people charged with creating and evaluating knowledge, thinking creatively, analyzing and solving business problems, and helping the company innovate and grow. These workers, dubbed the "creative

class" by author Richard Florida, total some 40 million workers, more than a third of the national workforce. They account for nearly half of all wage and salary income, almost as much as the manufacturing and service sectors combined, and their numbers are growing.

As the ranks of the creative class grow, so do the number and diversity of the places where they work. Teams are distributed across time zones and routinely work together via phone, email, videoconference, shared files, and other technology. Team work dominates knowledge work today because collaboration is the basis for getting to new ideas faster, as well as innovating, and staying ahead of the competition.

The workplace, as a result, is changing—or needs to—for an organization to attract and retain talent. Individual workspaces are shrinking and the freed-up space is being used for more shared spaces that people can adapt to the work at hand, whether it's individual task work or collaborating with others both in person or via technology. The best workplaces easily adapt to these new ways of working. When workers can adapt their environment to their work, it saves money and time in reconfiguration and allows the organization to use space more efficiently. When the workplace better supports workers, business results improve, as does worker attraction, engagement, satisfaction, and retention. Planning and managing this new workplace begins with understanding the types of knowledge work and the different kinds of knowledge that result from them.

**OFFICE ATTRACTION**

The workplace has long been employed as a tool to attract, engage, and retain talent, but how it does that continues to change.

- 1950x & 60s  
The chance for a private office, maybe even in a corner location, helps attract and motivate the man in the gray flannel suit.
- 1970x & 80s  
Signature buildings with big atriums, dramatic lobbies, and assigned cubicles for everyone are icons of successful, desirable employers.
- 1990x & 00s  
Dot-com companies popularize foosball and pool tables, casual dress codes, and more informal work environments.
- 2009 -  
Workers seek flexible, anywhere/ anytime workspace, technology and customization.



*Veronika Kollarovits  
Market Manager  
Slovakia, Steelcase*

