



The Organic Workspace

White Paper

HAWORTH®

WORKPLACE KNOWLEDGE –
A JOURNEY THROUGH
ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The process by which Haworth has arrived at its Organic Workspace concept has been dependent from the outset on the company's accumulated understanding of the way workspaces work and the way people work in them. Our 'Ideation' group has been researching, analysing, testing and reporting for many years on every aspect of the work environment, coming up with off-the-wall experimental proposals on the one hand or adding the dispassionate voice of reason to an overheated product development programme on the other. It is the brains, the Haworth spirit of inquiry, which informs the entire company. Now that Haworth, with the introduction of the Organic Workspace, is achieving a maturity in its understanding of sustainability and working on a transformation of its own corporate culture, the value of Ideation has never been more pronounced. The Organic Workspace approach is characterised not just by an intelligent array of products and services to make sustainable, productive, easily reconfigurable working environments, but by an emphasis on people at work. People are always at the centre of the Organic Workspace, which is why it has no specific set of design rules. Plain common sense says that people are different, doing different tasks in the same company, some of which demand one type of space, some of which demand another.

Ideation and the architects of One Haworth Center, Perkins + Will, taking the celebrated organisational culture theorists Cameron and Quinn's 'Competing Values Framework' model, have extended and applied its reach

to our own exemplar headquarters, and to an overall understanding of the way modern companies operate. The framework was devised to provide a profile of a given organizational culture, but Haworth's theory and practice, especially as enshrined in one Haworth Center, put all four elements of the idea into one company.

The Cameron & Quinn model proposes four organizational types: 'Clan' or Collaboration, 'Adhocracy' or Creative, 'Hierarchy' or Control and 'Market' or Compete. One Haworth Center, performing its function both as an exemplar and as an Organic Workspace for our members, is arranged so that all four types of culture are expressed, with the different workspace layouts, in one interior. In fact it makes perfect sense in the context of most companies with a variety of types of worker – the marketing or creative types, the controlled and controlling accounts people, and the competitive, market driven sales people all have their own areas and their own workspace layouts. The Collaborative type describes a group that is mostly team oriented and it too has a specific layout to support that behaviour.

But the underlying pull of this organizational philosophy, as expressed through the Organic Workspace, pays overriding attention to the individual. Haworth research publications, backed up by the vast body of workplace theory, continually return to the sense that it is the individual that drives the future of the workplace. 'If you want to innovate more, reduce "control" – in other words,

make the space freer and less restrictive. Lift the constraints on individual behaviour. Theorists such as the renowned and respected Franklin Becker talk about the eco diversity of the workplace, which to succeed has to be a place where employees are trusted and empowered, given the opportunity to 'be themselves'. A Haworth White Paper on Physical Space and Productivity by Jay Brand and Manek Dustoor talks about the move towards more flexibility and individualization, not only as relevant to the configuration of physical space but also a company's incentive systems. Another report on Green Design and Organizational Sustainability, by Haworth's David Fik, maintains that: 'Capitalizing on the strengths of individuals is the key to instilling the same diversity that allows the model in nature to flourish. These strengths promote organizational sustainability... Franklin Becker uses the term "organizational ecology" to describe the workplace as a designed strategy of physical settings and social process that are managed through time.'

Again, Brand and Dustoor claim that: '...the most successful theories of work motivation and job performance make predictions based on individual needs, values and interests.'

Unless we are mistaken, and allowing of course for the wackier 'creative only' workspaces of the Googles or Chiat Days of this world, a workspace design and delivery concept has never enshrined and supported as much individual self-determination as does the Organic Workspace. Brand and Dustoor are convinced that this crucial re-interpretation of conventional workplace theory, by focusing on the individual, also protects a company's overall culture and gives it longevity – or, if you like, sustainability: 'Workers of tomorrow will experience the tangible advantages of their entire organization. Their workspaces will express their own personal values in addition to the benefits of their corporate culture and environment.' Without the Organic Workspace, that prediction would remain in cloud cuckoo land.