Why good workplace programs fail

In response to economic uncertainty, layoffs and mounting cost pressures, more and more companies are introducing and expanding workplace programs. Unfortunately, not all programs succeed. If you are currently evaluating your workplace strategy, make sure you understand the key factors for success.

This paper outlines the top five reasons why workplace programs fail and explains how to design a program that delivers measurable results.

1. Focus is only on CRE cost savings or space design

While cost savings can be a key driver, in reality your workplace can and should drive a host of corporate objectives. With an effective strategy, you can ready your organization for economic volatility, improve productivity, attract and retain talent, support sustainability, mitigate risk and reinforce branding strategies. Partner with IT and HR to ensure an integrated solution and alignment with corporate strategy.

That said, the vast majority of programs will make significant contributions to CRE cost savings or avoidance. However, it's critical that you think beyond CRE savings and develop financial targets and strategic goals that are meaningful to the business. It is critical to include specific metrics related to enhancing company performance.

A workplace strategy needs support from the highest levels in your organization. To secure it, you will need to build a business case with a ROI that is in terms the business can understand. But don't stop there. Monitor your progress against the stated goals so that you can build credibility, commitment and refine your program.

Approaching a workplace program as merely a CRE cost savings initiative can prove disastrous in the long-run. A global technology firm learned this lesson when it launched a work-at-home program. While occupancy costs decreased, so did productivity and employee engagement. This company should have linked its program to corporate goals—not just CRE savings—and trained its employees in new ways of working.

Similarly, workplace programs will almost always fail when the focus is exclusively on workplace design. In some cases, companies get consumed with a desire to win awards and gain publicity. They forget that programs must ultimately enable the business.

The only way to realize needle-moving, bottom-line results is to develop a strategy that has a solid value proposition that links to business priorities.

2. Failure to re-think CRE service delivery and processes

Workplace programs inherently transform the CRE function into a business enabler. Service delivery models, processes and planning protocols will need to change to reflect this strategic positioning. The skill sets of your team may need to change as you seek to engage the business in conversations about their needs and goals. For example, financial acumen will become very important.

It is important not to overlook the execution of the program. The quality of the execution is a key variable in long-term success. The delivery team cannot view the program as "just another fit-out." Remember to apply change management principles (discussed below) as you manage your project delivery teams.

Organize the key functions within CRE, IT and HR, and make them part of the solution. Ensure everyone understands the strategy, why it is being pursued and acknowledge the significance of the change involved. By aligning facilities, occupancy planning and project management teams, you can ensure the right delivery model. This is especially true for global programs.

3. Poor change management

The introduction of a workplace program acknowledges a fundamental shift in how work gets done—it represents a business transformation. But even the most brilliant workplace strategy will fail if you don't proactively manage this transformation at both the organizational and individual levels.

You should develop and include a change management component as part of your strategy. By applying these core principles to all phases of the program, you can reduce your delivery timeframe by at least two months:

- Create shared need
- Shape a vision
- Mobilize commitment
- Monitor progress
- Make change last

4. Program meets global—but not local—needs

Your strategy will be as unique as your company. A one-size-fits-all approach does not exist. Make sure you understand the work requirements, business goals and employee work processes.

Surveys, focus groups, observations and interviews will help. You will then be in a position to develop a workplace that works for all stakeholders.

An effective workplace strategy must both align with the business and support the workers. This can be tricky when multiple worker-types and global operations are involved. However, it is critical that your strategy reflect various work styles and cultural differences.

When exporting your program from one region of the world to another, consider providing an option that allows locations to "localize" certain solutions.

A change management plan will serve you well when rolling out a global program. A global software company designed a program for a U.S. labor force, but failed to consider the differences between regions when expanding the program globally. Business unit leaders outside the United States were not engaged and program standards did not meet local needs.

In essence, manage and measure the program at a global level, but implement at the local level.

5. Thinking you're finished

It is important to recognize that your program is never really complete. Just as work behaviors and technology change, so, too, will your workplace strategy. Be sure to monitor work styles regularly and monitor your performance metrics so that you can develop action plans and proactively engage the business in strategic conversations.

You must actively manage your program and refine it constantly.

Jones Lang LaSalle's Workplace Solutions

No other firm has more experience in designing, implementing and managing successful workplace programs, than Jones Lang LaSalle. While some firms only offer a design solution, Jones Lang LaSalle provides the full range of services required to develop a program that realizes its full potential.

For more information on how to develop a successful workplace program, please contact:

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