

WORKLIFE

THIS YEAR'S INDESIGN WORKLIFE SEMINAR SERIES HIGHLIGHTED OUR THIRST FOR DISCUSSION AND DEBATE AROUND THE FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE AND THE ROLE DESIGN PLAYS WITHIN THIS. THREE DESIGNERS FROM LEADING ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE, DAVENPORT CAMPBELL, SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS ON THE SERIES.

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THIS PAGE Worklife: Make Light work discussion hosted at Gazzi

OPPOSITE Audiences listen in to Workplace Workshop seminar in Indesign Forum

At Davenport Campbell we are observing a strong appetite for continued learning, and knowledge sharing among our industry colleagues is strong. Co-creation on projects between two or three practices is delivering unique results for clients, and the emphasis on collaboration and cross-disciplinary education impels us to participate in industry discussion.

For the Indesign WorkLife discussions, debate around Activity Based Working (ABW) and what lies beyond underpinned many of the seminars and was the subject of most questions. In fact, considering this approach has been active in Australia for seven years, and in Europe for the past 15, it was surprising to observe just how unfamiliar this way of working remains for many people.

In particular, the two 'What's Beyond ABW?' seminars revealed several major shifts in our local industry's approach to workplace design. One major theme was isolated by Herman Miller's Samantha Giam, who recounted how meeting space is no longer just a room, but any place where people gather. Giam went on to point out that many workplaces are simply being labelled as ABW, but that for an ABW workspace to really work, observational studies are required to understand specific work patterns and unique spatial needs.

This was echoed by Gjis Nooteboom, Managing Partner Australia New Zealand of Veldhoen + Company (who, incidentally, are credited with inventing ABW). Nooteboom castigated designers for only paying lip service to the principles of ABW. He also gave voice to perhaps the greatest quote of the seminars, responding to the question, 'What lies beyond ABW?' with: "That's like asking 'what's beyond Buddhism?'"

From a product perspective, the market continues to mature with furniture and technology designed specifically to support the increasing demand for collaborative working. Giam spoke of the need to get hold of real-time utilisation rates in ABW environments as a way to further unlock the value of agile working and of how Herman Miller is addressing this with its Living Office Passport software suite.

Whilst it's important to understand just how the workplace is performing, we also need to ensure we don't get too caught up in performance metrics and lose sight of the real prize – ensuring that people are healthy, productive and happy at work. Right now over 88 million days are lost in the Australian economy due to absenteeism, at a cost of \$27.5 billion per annum in sick leave and lost productivity, according to Direct Health Solutions.

Thus the role nutrition, movement, lighting and training can play in the workplace were also discussed across multiple seminar sessions.

The 'Workplace Workout' seminar reinforced just how important it is to encourage movement within the workplace, with David Smith of Alba Ergonomics making the counter-intuitive but illuminating observation that too much convenience can be detrimental to a person's sense of wellbeing. Nigel Hobbs from Welnis explored how human sustainability can be fostered in the workplace, and recounted how without inspired leadership and engagement, workers simply won't take advantage of the health benefits that a workplace can provide.

The seminar 'It Takes All Kinds' exploring diversity in the workplace addressed how physical, environment and intellectual environments need to support different generational needs. With the workplace occupied by five generations: the Lucky Generation,

Baby Boomers, Generations X and Y, and Generation Z joining the fray in the next two-to-three years, a multifaceted approach is required.

James Calder of Calder Consultants made the point that some of the workplaces we associate with having the most diverse range of spaces to support varying work styles are in fact the least diverse in terms of age and gender, citing technology companies with populations dominated by males, with 80 per cent under the age of 30.

Roy Green, Dean of the UTS Business School looked at diversity through quite different lenses. UTS are using new methods of thinking and education to draw out talent and innovation from students that sit across multiple generations. The school's aim is to have their graduates enter the workforce as Symbolic Analysts with boundary crossing skills and integrated thinking (the foundation of this is essentially design thinking). UTS has modelled their engagement spaces to support these new ways of thinking and learning. It's hard to imagine a more inspiring place to learn than a Frank Gehry designed building.

We all too often think about the workplace in terms of work settings and workpoints, however our understanding of the impact of lighting and acoustics on our sensory experience is steadily deepening. For instance, Megan Divett from Puzzle Partners spoke about how Ganglion cells at the front of the retina communicate to the brain and

help to synchronise circadian rhythms with the solar day. This contributes to light reflex and other behavioural and physiological responses to environmental illumination.

Knowing this, Divett said we should be developing lighting systems that can encourage the types of behaviour appropriate to, say, a focused or collaborative workspace and to help combat insomnia, obesity and depression.

Seminars and round table discussions are a must for our industry peers and colleagues to continue to discuss the issues that face us as a profession, generate ideas and evolve the future of workplace design, and the level of debate, knowledge sharing and innovation taking place within the industry at this year's Indesign WorkLife seminars will be remembered as a real watershed in workplace design.

After all, many of our clients today are using design thinking themselves to approach doing business differently.

Indesign WorkLife 2015 was sponsored by Dauphin, Herman Miller, Planex, SB Seating and Wilkhahn

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