

WHO GOES WHERE

Space planning or planning for space – which do you do? asks Simon Willcox

Space planning has always been perceived as an art, or maybe as the art of the possible. Designers understand the requirements that an organisation may have of the space it uses, based on interviewing managers and staff and observing people working in the space. Although they may like to have more solid data to work from, the reality is that the ROI on data capture has never been particularly efficient.

During the late 90s furniture giant Steelcase's community-based planning research work was one of the most innovative approaches to data collection for new space solutions. A variety of techniques were employed, from shadowing employees to observation and creating complex relationship matrices as the basis for a space-planning solution that mirrored the way the organisation worked.

However, although those who engaged with the project were amazed by the positive impact the new space had on their organisation, the reality was that the cost of getting to the data was huge; in fact, for most organisations prohibitively expensive.

New approaches to space planning, from implementing hot-desking to different work settings to support different work modes, or simply increasing the amount of meeting space, have posed issues for the FM managing the space once the designers have left the building. Having this new type of space can be the best thing to drive necessary change in the business; however, FMs were finding that a bit like an unruly child, the space solution could create havoc if robust management systems weren't in place.

This was when they turned to space management software to help them.

SPACE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

The introduction of such systems, initially designed for a one-dimensional purpose (to remove paper-based systems), was largely

due to the fact that demand placed on meeting spaces had become critical and often resulted in double bookings. Since then, the software has evolved to include the management of hot-desking and the option to order 'extras' such as catering, projectors and any other support material that might be required for a meeting.

An additional sophistication is the mechanism for cross-charging. Mainly used to allocate catering costs, there is a trend to apportion the space itself. PeopleCube in conjunction with the company Building Sustainability have created an interface that allows for the carbon contribution for heating and lighting to also be allocated across the organisation.

As with any application, the set-up and time put into planning how the software works is directly proportionate to its effectiveness when launched across the organisation. Take the example of video-conferencing. If you fail to highlight that a room has videoconferencing facilities, you can't be surprised when there is a lack of uptake. If the implementation of the software is not given due consideration, the system often fails as people become frustrated and revert to a free-address system because they don't know which room to book or how to do it.

Organisations that use space management software do recognise that FMs are able to manage the space resources more effectively and efficiently. Users of the space have a clearer understanding of the availability

of resources as well as the bonus of greater control over their own bookings. And the system can, of course, be applied to other environments beyond office-based applications.

EVOLUTION OF SPACE MANAGEMENT

So do these developments signal a sea change in the evolution of space management systems? The shift that software developers are making is from a tool to manage a pre-existing space-planning solution to one that helps develop the future solution: planning for space rather than space planning.

PeopleCube has worked hard to create a space management system that sets it apart from traditional room-booking systems by monitoring not only the demand for space but also what is actually used. There may be a perceived lack of space, but the reality can turn out to be that people routinely fail to turn up, and that there's actually free space for much of the time.

It is all about measuring the reality, not the perception – and then using that to plan the amount of space that an organisation may need in the future.

As the wheels of recession grind on, facilities management has a major role to play in the cost-cutting and resource-efficiency programmes that every organisation is implementing. Tools that play a part in driving greater efficiencies should be welcomed with open arms.

At PeopleCube we regularly repeat 'if you can't measure it you can't manage it' to help us focus on what is important when we are creating the next version of our software. By creating a reporting and space analysis capability, PeopleCube and others in the space management software business aim to help FMs with accurate data to make decisions on the space requirements for their organisations **FMX**

FURTHER INFORMATION

Simon Willcox is product manager at PeopleCube, which provides intelligent on-demand workplace and resource management solutions to help customers run energy-efficient, cost-effective workplaces. With offices throughout Europe and North America, PeopleCube supports 7,500 customers in small, medium and large enterprises.

PeopleCube's Resource Scheduler helps organisations effectively utilise shared resources. Via a web client or Microsoft Outlook, users can identify and reserve any type of resource – workspaces, conference rooms, training facilities, AV equipment, fleet vehicles, even athletic fields and study rooms – based on specified criteria.

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Space planning software helps users determine space management needs and make best use of space available

CASE STUDY

One of PeopleCube's clients, a leading business school in the USA with over 5,500 students, wanted to tackle the issue of reserving study rooms. With 1,200 new students arriving each year, the system had to be intuitive with an interface that anybody could understand at a glance.

The system allows students to view the free/busy time grid to check room availability and make a reservation in advance from any laptop or desktop PC. However, while this self-service model certainly presented a number of benefits, configuring the system to enforce certain reservation rules has created more opportunities for other students to use the study rooms. The group study rooms are now being used more fairly, and by a larger number of students. This has been particularly beneficial for graduates and other students who live away from campus, as web access allows them to reserve study rooms in the same way as those who are on-campus.

Ease of use has also been a huge benefit to both the students and library staff. It has saved a tremendous amount of the library staff's time, eliminating the need for staff to spend their days booking 24 study rooms. With students taking care of their own room bookings, the library staff are free to focus on actually providing services. The university is now looking for the latest system upgrades so that room utilisation can be tracked automatically ensuring that groups, not individuals, are using group study rooms.