

MOBILEAPOLIS

An open experiment in workplace mobility for architecture and design

In September 2014, Perkins+Will's Minneapolis office launched MOBILEAPOLIS, a workplace mobility pilot program that enables individuals to work freely within the office, provides the flexibility over when and where they work, and allows them to choose the space that best supports their needs at any given time. It was our intent that lessons learned - the good and the bad - would drive the evolution of our mobility program and inform the design of our future workplace.



How do we create a workplace that accommodates our flurry of activity, our streams of creativity, is respectful of our need for focus work and collaboration, and maximizes productivity?

WHY WE CONSIDERED IT

PEOPLE

Our designers work collaboratively with their project teams and are often working with more than one team at a time. Workplace mobility allows employees to choose where and how they want to work.

PLACE

Our workplace has the potential to communicate our mission, values and culture. It can promote well-being, support intellectual growth, inspire and motivate, and serve as a model for the workplace of the future.

PLANET

To live on our planet sustainably, we have to learn how to do more with less. Occupying a smaller real estate footprint and utilizing our space more effectively will help minimize our impact on the environment.

TECHNOLOGY

Recent technological innovations have allowed the workplace to become more fluid. You don't have to be at your desk to get work done. Mobility programs fully embrace a shift toward flexible work practices.

LEADERS

There aren't many case studies of workplace mobility programs in design firms. As thought leaders, it is imperative that we experience and understand life in a mobile work environment just as many of our clients do.

WHAT WE WERE WORKING WITH

RIGHT MENTALITY, WRONG CONDITIONS

Our current workplace was designed 15 years ago without the variety of worksettings and advanced technology to support workplace mobility.

124

Average weekly hours office sits almost or completely empty (74%)

20%

Approximate staff out of the office on any given day

391

Existing square footage per individual in our office

THE CHANCE FOR A FRESH START

We had the opportunity to test a mobility program in our current space while simultaneously designing our new space, which we did not want to miss! We knew we could design a space to support the way we work and maintain the flexibility to grow and change over time.

We will be moving into our new home
JANUARY 2016

HOW WE STARTED

- 1 REMOVED THE CLUTTER**
We knew we had way too much stuff so we salvaged what we could and purged or recycled the rest. We even made a shrine to honor all the weird items we unearthed.
- 2 INTRODUCED UNIVERSAL TECHNOLOGY**
A strong mobility program hinges on its technological foundation. We made sure to take time to understand what we needed (like universal docking stations) to be successful.
- 3 NAMED THE PILOT**
Part of the foundation to a great mobility program is a name employees can rally behind. An internal call for entries led to the winning submission MOBILEAPOLIS.
- 4 RECRUITED VOLUNTEERS**
We needed people willing and excited to be part of this pilot. Incentives to join included the chance to work closely with various project teams, foster new relationships, and help pave the way for implementing workplace mobility in our future office.

WHAT HAPPENED

Every participant was asked to clear their desk and storage pedestal and was assigned 1-2 wide file drawers for their personal belongings. We added wayfinding to designate mobile workstations and were ready to go!

MONTH 1: JOINING THE RANKS

Getting off the ground was trickier than we thought. In an industry with frequent deadlines, our fast-paced environment doesn't always allow much time to clean your desk and organize your work life.

ORIGINAL GROUP: 22 volunteers of 58 staff

REVISED GROUP: 16 volunteers of the original 22 stayed

FINAL GROUP: Varied levels of mobility and commitment across a small group of staff

MONTH 2: INITIAL SURVEY

After letting everyone get settled in, we sent out a survey to participants to see what was and was not working, where priorities were, and what, if anything, was still missing. Select results from that survey are below.

PRIORITIES

What are the top factors involved in workstation selection?

1

TEAM

2

TECHNOLOGY

3

QUIET

4

WINDOWS

5

SIT/STAND DESK

LUGGAGE

What things are people carrying with them around the office?

TECHNOLOGY

- Laptop
- Cell Phone
- Mouse
- Soft Phone/Headset
- Headphones
- Tablet
- Other

NON-TECHNOLOGY

- Pen/Pencil
- Notebook
- Bag/Purse/Wallet
- Beverage
- Drawings
- Files/Papers
- Jackie/Coat
- Lunch/ Snacks
- Sweater/Additional Clothing

CHALLENGES

What are the main issues employees are encountering in the pilot?

1. CARRYING "STUFF"

2. FINDING PEOPLE

3. TECHNOLOGY

MONTH 6: WORKSHOP IN NEW SPACE

After we secured our future space, we held a workshop at the new site to give everyone a first impression and to spark dialogue around space needs. Mobility was given its own discussion session. Top responses are shown below.

WHAT WORKS

- Choice in mobility level
- Empowerment
- Freedom to work remotely
- Access to more people
- Recruit and retain talent

WHAT DOESN'T WORK

- Accountability for cleaning
- Lack of personalization
- Lack of space diversity
- Universal technology
- Difficulty reserving spaces

WHAT'S MISSING

- Better storage access
- Space for quiet work
- Personalization
- Reservation System
- Etiquettes

MONTH 8: INFORMAL INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF

Over several weeks, we took a few minutes to speak with employees about how MOBILEAPOLIS was doing.

"Being mobile works for me because I like to move around and have different areas to be inspired in."

KASEY

"The hindrance with mobility is there are only a few select spots near people I am working with. It is also hard to clean up and move every day."

MICHAEL

"Being mobile is great when I am on a variety of projects. It is nice to work by my team so I don't miss any impromptu meetings or any updates on a project."

JAMEY

MONTH 9: DESIGN FOR THE NEW WORKPLACE

As workplace consultants, we know that mobility programs thrive when flexibility is heavily integrated into the design from the beginning. We met with the design team of our new workplace to ensure that workplace mobility and lessons learned from MOBILEAPOLIS were being considered in the design.

MONTH 10: REPURPOSING MONTHLY ALL-STAFF MEETINGS

To keep everyone informed about design progress and notices regarding the move, information sessions were added to the agenda of existing monthly all-staff meetings. These were followed by informal brown bag lunch Q&A sessions with the design team.

MONTH 12: DECLUTTERING TO ESTABLISH GOOD HABITS

Employees were provided with a declutter map and were assigned to assist in organizing supplies, donating surplus materials, deadfiling old projects and recycling outdated sample materials around the entire office. Each employee was responsible for handling a specific item category. We established a new sharing economy.



MONTH 15: THE BIG MOVE

January 18 is coming up in just a few weeks! Leading up to the big move, we will be sending out communications to the entire office in the same fashion we would make for a client. We want to build excitement about the move and all the features of the new space!

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED SO FAR

WE ARE CONSISTENTLY INCONSISTENT

It is no surprise that the mobility strategies we deploy for many of our corporate clients do not fit the unique needs of designers, architects, and planners. However, we've learned from our clients that there is never one strategy that suits an entire organization, and that not all employees have the same ideal worksetting.



WE HAVE A LOT OF STUFF

Not only do we have construction documents, concept drawings, models, pin-up boards, code books, and other project-specific items that need to be referenced daily, but we physically carry a lot around with us on a daily basis.

4 TECH + 5 NON-TECH

Average number of items a mobile employee carries daily

WE HAVE SPECIAL INFRASTRUCTURAL NEEDS

From monitors and laptop docking stations to furniture samples and material palettes, our space needs to easily accommodate a plethora of demands.

WE HAVE A VARIETY OF WORKSTYLES

As a design firm, our workstyles vary greatly by person, practice, and project phase. Some of us need extra table space for model building or reviewing plan sets. Some people are glued to their computer screens. Certain project teams hold reviews on vertical pinup space while others require horizontal surfaces or digital displays.

WHAT'S NEXT

Reality.

Our office goes 100% mobile in our new space:
JANUARY 18, 2016

WE HAVE DESIGNED OUR SPACE TO

- Maximize flexibility
- Diversify space and furniture types
- Contain accessible individual and project storage
- Supply universal technology
- Implement a reliable communication system
- Provide organization without sacrificing our experimental studio culture
- Allow individuals to adopt different levels of mobility as needed
- Evolve with us

AND WE CAN ALWAYS CHANGE IT!