

// Tailored spaces used for meeting or working privately.

**Macquarie Group – Sydney**

**Design Team:** Macquarie Group Limited, Clive Wilkinson Architects and Woods Bagot. **Photographer:** Shannon McGrath courtesy of Clive Wilkinson Architects.



# Changing the way we work

**Technology, the environment, and the collapsing of hierarchies and silos have all resulted in radical and dramatic changes to how and where we work. For small businesses, adaptation is easy. For larger businesses, the process requires significant investment in ideas and execution. Barry Jenkins reports.**

**B**efore the Industrial Revolution, most people worked from home. They were autonomous, collaborative, and tended to specialise in a particular artisanal skill. Then along came the age of industry, demanding ranks of unskilled or semi-skilled workers to work in factories. Hierarchies were defined and so repetitive were the processes that the worker was as replaceable as the objects they made.

// Open atrium becomes a 'permeable space' with the refectory being given a more public setting.

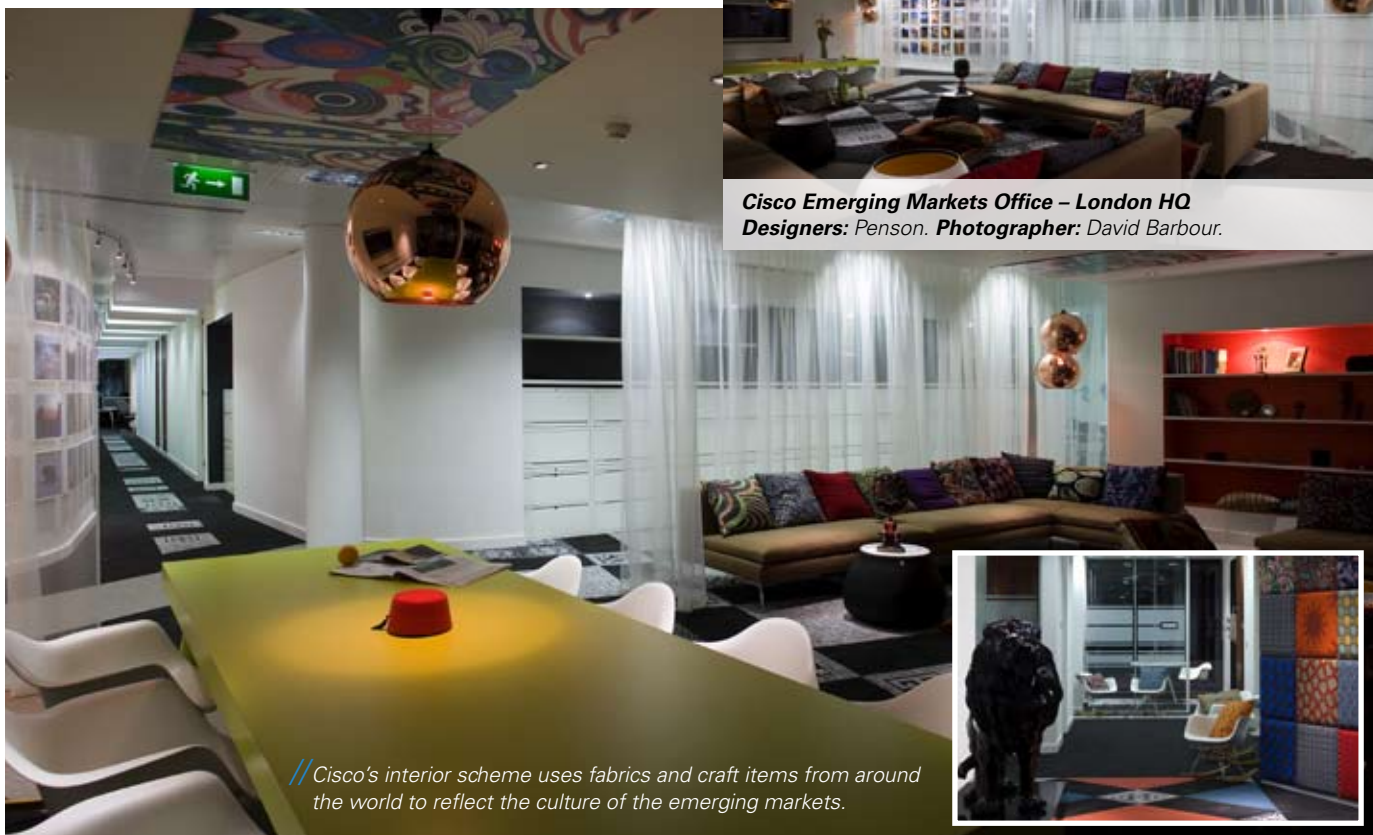
This approach gave rise to the principles of scientific management and efficiency developed by the American intellectual engineer Frederick Taylor. In turn, these principles were applied to the growing numbers of offices that began to develop from the late 19th century. With male-dominated hierarchical structures, and with women being allocated very defined and limited roles such as typing or book keeping, these were far from the 'agile', activity centred workplaces we see emerging today. These were offices whose shape and layout reflected workplace hierarchies, and little changed for close to a hundred years.

By contrast, **the design of offices today is less about the connections between physical resources and machines and more about connections between people and knowledge.** The trend for hierarchy and uniformity is being reversed in favour of a more horizontal pattern of autonomy and collaboration. We also no longer have to be in the same place, or even time zone, as our co-workers thanks to mobile communications and information technology. This atomisation of the workforce means new ways of interaction have had to develop based on trust, common purpose and citizenship.

That at least is the theory. The majority of large companies still adhere to the old conventions – think acres of office space interspersed with rows of cabinets for storing paper. But a flexible, more agile vision of the workplace is emerging in recent projects such as the new BBC Media City in Manchester by ID-SR (Sheppard Robson) or the Sydney HQ for the Macquarie Group by Clive Wilkinson and Woods

Bagot. Ironically, while the visions being expressed in these projects may appear revolutionary, for those who are engaged in the design of workplaces or the management of corporate change, many of the ideas that appear to be new are actually very familiar. It is just that they have taken decades to come to fruition. They originated in the theories of Peter Drucker, who coined the term 'knowledge worker' in the 1950s, and from works by the economist and writer Charles Handy in the 1980s and 1990s. But it is only in the past few years that we have begun to see many of the conventions and assumptions of the Industrial Age being challenged, and the concept of new ways of working finally becoming viable, thanks to a combination of social change, the economy and the ubiquity of IT and mobile communications.

We need look no further than the recent Arab Spring movement, fuelled by IT and social media, for evidence of what London Business School professor Lynda Gratton calls a 'global consciousness', with a powerful resource of networks and information at everyone's fingertips. This is not only potentially changing the world, but is directly changing our association with the concept of work and definition of the workplace. Existing (as we do) in both the virtual and real world, the knowledge economy is driving the need for



**Cisco Emerging Markets Office – London HQ**  
**Designers:** Penson. **Photographer:** David Barbour.

// Cisco's interior scheme uses fabrics and craft items from around the world to reflect the culture of the emerging markets.

spaces where we can meet and exchange tacit knowledge. Rows of desks and stacks of paper will not provide the flexibility today's knowledge workers need. Some of the world's leading companies like the BBC, Macquarie Group, Cisco and Eversheds LLP are taking the opportunity to apply a deeper understanding of how to best use the assets they have and to create the kind of environment that will either reveal the intrinsic culture of their business, or enable a more appropriate one to develop.

### Full circle

By 2020 it's claimed that five billion people will be able to connect with each other via the Internet and have access to the same information. This means **it will become increasingly important for those engaged in some kind of knowledge work to become supremely good at one or at least a very few things**, to demonstrate mastery in the same way that people did before the Industrial Revolution. That's quite an irony.

The technology that enables this has reached a point where we no longer have to fit ourselves around its needs; it has become so much more mobile and universal. Increasingly, how we leverage our own personal networks and what we do with the information we have will drive the shape of the workplace. What matters is human contact and the creation of spaces for us to engage. So, to be effective, new activity-based workplaces need to balance the needs of the worker and employer, but essentially allow the worker to work when, where and how they choose.

But the definition of 'agile' or activity based workplaces goes far deeper than a token lounge area or a scattering of beanbags. It is about understanding the organisation,

its activities and its workforce. These workplaces require an ability to peel away the assumptions about an office, and need an appreciation from everyone involved that change is beneficial. Some aspects of change management therefore must overcome entrenched traditional values and habits.

### Shifting time

So why should any of us embrace new ways of working? **The driving imperative should be how to express the value of the social capital unique to your company, and not decisions about property costs.** The pattern of work today is more nomadic and less defined by location, so conventional offices are inappropriate and will be increasingly underused.

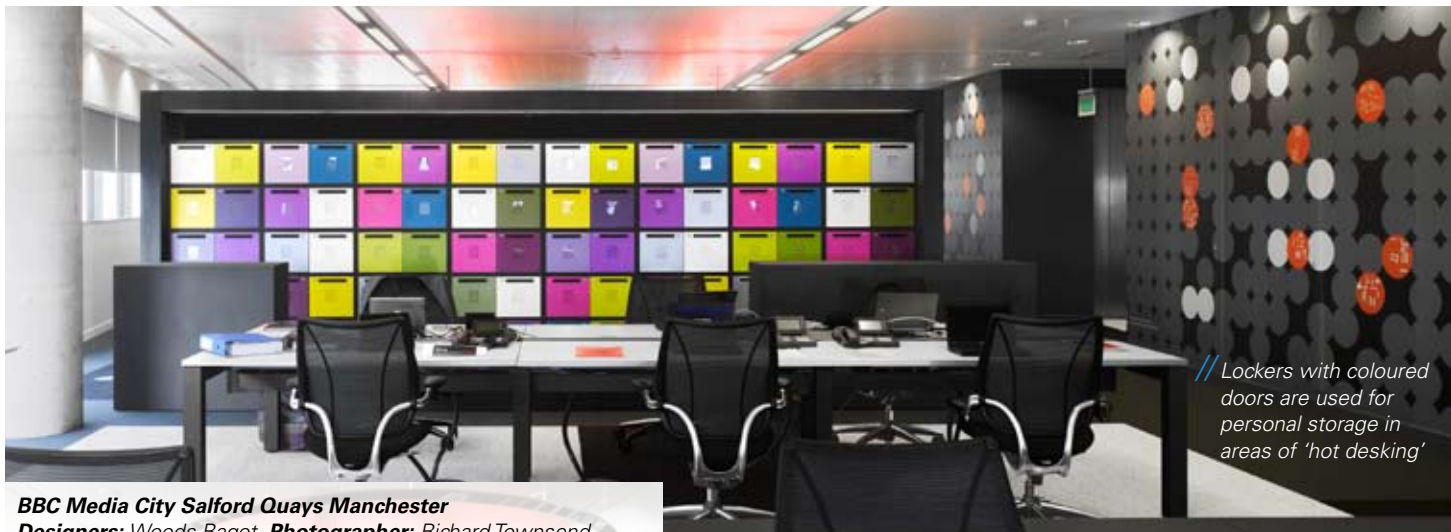
A study by Woods Bagot called 'The Fourteen Hour City' looked at the limitations of the 9 to 5 day and the burden placed on urban infrastructure by creating rush hours and peak times. It also considered the sustainability of this model, given that buildings contribute more than 30% of greenhouse emissions. By moving to a pattern of two shifts across fourteen hours, the rush hour would be alleviated and the utilisation of the building would increase.

But the study then revealed that desk space is only utilised 9% of the time anyway, suggesting plenty of scope to find better ways to match activity with space. The report goes on to say that increasing the utilisation of the office building through activity centred design is the quickest way to achieve sustainability goals as well as showing financial savings. Therefore, when designing our workplaces, we need to question the wisdom of allocating space to rows of filing cabinets, estimated in London to cost an average of £700.00 pa each in floor rent, or providing desks for people who work everywhere else but in the office.

// Different settings created to promote social interaction



**BBC Media City Salford Quays Manchester**  
Designers: Woods Bagot. Photographer: Richard Townsend.



// Lockers with coloured doors are used for personal storage in areas of 'hot desking'

**BBC Media City Salford Quays Manchester**  
**Designers:** Woods Bagot. **Photographer:** Richard Townsend.



// Space utilised by creating hubs

How then should we design workplaces that will suit our future needs, express unique cultural values and reward the people who use them? Very simply, by applying imagination to the way the space is equipped and decorated. Architects Penson took references from Africa, Indonesia and South America to provide a vibrant set of visual clues in the new London HQ for Cisco's Emerging Markets team. Using colours, textiles and local craft pieces, the new workspace reflects the rich diversity and regional differences of both the employees and the customers alike.

Another approach is to connect with the culture of the organisation, and the desires of the workforce, before making any design assumptions. ID-SR worked closely with the BBC to develop the design strategy and implementation for the new Media City complex. They understood that the area of Salford Quays is already a creative destination and that the move would present the BBC with a strategic opportunity to refresh the way they work and reflect their vision. As an innovative and highly creative organisation, the BBC's production of multi-platform content has brought about changes in the way they work and the resources they need on a permanent and temporary basis. The production of programmes and the gathering of content have become increasingly agile and the work space needed to reflect that. The move to Manchester has therefore presented the BBC with a great opportunity not only to develop an entirely new way of matching the workplace to the work in a cost effective manner but also to respond to, and celebrate, the vibrancy and wealth of talent that became evident in the profiling carried out by ID-SR.

One of the world's most advanced workplaces is the Shelly Street HQ for the Macquarie Group in Sydney, which accommodates 3,300 people. The project was the culmination of many years of development and innovation that led to a design philosophy aimed at encouraging collaboration and more productive modes of working.

The purpose of the brief was to change the culture of the Macquarie Group from a vertical command control model to collaboration-based teams that rely on trust rather than mandate. No one has an assigned desk and working areas have been configured to match the free flowing nature of the employees' needs. As a result of this increased flexibility, fixed storage was reduced by 52%, and with digital storage resulting in a reduction in printing, 42 tonnes of paper have been saved. This is just part of the tremendous change brought about by matching design and space to the way people work today.

**Source: Barry Jenkins is Director at Design Consultants BroomeJenkins, is visiting tutor at Bucks New University, Member of the Industry Board of the National School of Furniture (NSF) and is Director and Vice Chairman of the South Coast Design Forum.**

[www.broomejenkins.com](http://www.broomejenkins.com)



**Eversheds LLP - London HQ**  
**Designers:** Woods Bagot. **Photographer:** Richard Townsend.