



JAMES CALDER

THE WORKPLACE IS A JOURNEY RATHER THAN A DESTINATION, AND WE HAVE ONLY JUST BEGUN. WE ENTERED THE INFORMATION AGE 25 YEARS AGO, AND ARE SLOWLY WORKING OUT WHAT THAT MEANS FOR THE WAY WE LIVE AND WORK.

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It's no surprise then that there are a few legacy systems to work our way through, as well as lots of mind-shifts to be made. The low cost of mobile technology is quickly pushing aside the old ideas of the industrial age office, with the global recession making it harder to justify expensive outmoded and uncompetitive operational models.

In the new age, innovation can come from anywhere, and Australasia seems to be one of the places where the workplace is evolving rapidly. The latest projects here are pushing ahead from the activity work setting models developed in the 1990s and first piloted here in 2002. These projects, such as NAB at 700 Bourke Street and Fairfax at Pyrmont and Melbourne, are beginning to look at hybrid solutions that are highly tuned to individual organisational cultures, which should show the path ahead for the next workplace evolution. A few organisations are well equipped to move to the next generation of workplace model, where individuals and teams can work flexibly and in real time. These organisations have innovative workplaces already (and understand the advantages of speed to market and team performance, as well as the, not often talked about, issues such as the potential personal disconnection that can be a downside

of the Information Age). They also understand the significance of the container – the collaborative building typologies that are fundamentally different from the old Industrial Age central core towers. In some cases, such as Macquarie Group's One Shelley Street, we are seeing organisations returning to owning or developing rather than leasing key buildings to ensure they can create what they need.

When it comes to new projects around Australasia, latest thinking revolves around two aspects: how will teams work in the future, and how will technology such as social media be harnessed and become part of the fabric of how we will work. These phenomena are both factors of and contributing to the breakdown of the old organisational structures and silos.

We have seen the demise of organisations like Kodak, that failed to act quickly enough to see the threat of the digital age to their businesses, but perhaps the story of Apple and Sony is even more relevant. Sony had all the technology Apple had, but their structure prohibited speedy implementation. Apple got the job done and is now the most profitable company in history, and Sony is still making losses. The issue is not whether to change structure but how to implement it quickly. This is where implementing

the new, digital age workplace can drive cultural and behavioural change much faster than any other lever.

And it doesn't just happen in new buildings. The vast majority of the workplaces will have to be developed in existing buildings with predominately existing furniture supplemented by affordable new technology, such as 'bring your own devices' (where the user will increasingly pay for their own device) and cloud computing (such as Google Apps). We are just beginning to see the first of these projects and, with an emphasis on good change management; there is no reason why this quick fix of existing workplaces can't be as successful as the big budget, completely new workplaces. This is a massive opportunity. For every One Shelley Street or Darling Walk there are a thousand workplaces that will have to make do with the existing fit-out for a very long time. A bit like being stuck with 35mm film when the best have gone digital.

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