

a customer story

professional services

A new building for the ages.



PricewaterhouseCoopers

Dublin, Ireland



Credits:

Workplace Environments

Mullally Leonard Partnership

Happens every day. At a business meeting someone will look around, notice a number of fresh, new faces and say, “Wow, these people sure are young!”

Of course “they” are, at least to some of us. That’s because four generations of people are working side by side for the first time in history.

As baby boomers and older traditionalists (now in their 60s) delay retirement and stay on the job, they’re rubbing shoulders with Generation Xers, most of whom are in their 30s, and the newest members of the office staff, the Millennials, still in their 20s.

Many companies are wondering how to deal with this generational change. PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in Dublin, Ireland’s leading professional services firm, recently opened a new headquarters that offers valuable answers.

PwC’s 1,800 professional workforce is younger than ever: 62% of the workers are under age 30; another 24% are in their 30s; and just 14% are over 40. Such a multigenerational workforce presents challenges for PwC and practically every organization: How do you effectively manage a workforce of diverse ages and expectations? How do you plan and build a workplace that performs for all ages? What are the best ways to facilitate the transfer of huge stores of accumulated business knowledge from older to younger workers?

The right workplace definitely can help an organization meet these challenges, says John Hughes, an applied research consultant who led the Steelcase team for PwC’s new headquarters, Spencer Dock. “So many young people are coming into PwC’s workforce, and management was determined to address a key issue for these people: having easy access to more experienced people, mentors, people they can learn from.”

It’s not as simple as just asking older workers to be mentors; the right environment needs to be in place, says Bruce Simoneaux, Hughes’ fellow workplace consultant. “Younger workers tell us that the number one way they learn is by overhearing the veterans on staff. But if you put

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those experienced people in private offices, the younger people not only don’t hear those conversations, they’re intimidated by the private offices and they feel cut off from the people inside.”

Nor should workspace planners default to open offices for everyone. “Different types of work require different workspaces, and



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different ages respond differently to different environments,” says Simoneaux.

PwC addressed these challenges head on. To better understand the needs of their growing ranks of GenX and Millennial workers, three years ago management began in-depth, ongoing discussions about the needs of all workers, how the workplace could better support individual work styles, and how to ensure that PwC’s new workplace aligned with the company’s aspirations as an organization.

The Steelcase team worked with PwC management to map out the organization’s goals, including critical success factors for the project, workplace issues, an internal SWOT analysis, and other measures. Interviews with partners, group discussions, and planning workshops followed.

PwC carefully defined the changes they wanted to make in the organization’s culture, workplace, and business practices. All levels of the organization got involved in the discussions.

Donal O’Connor, senior partner, says the questions struck at the core of the business: “What sort of an organization are we? What do we want to be? How can the work environment help us achieve that? Involving the staff meant people felt very engaged. They personally saw the results as we went through the process.

“I give great credit to the Steelcase team, who provided a tremendous help,” he says. “Early on, I was just so enthusiastic about what people would like, the gym, the restaurant, etc. But they took me aside and said, ‘Donal, that’s great. But it’s better if your people come up with the ideas.’”

A key milestone was mapping where PwC saw themselves as an organization today, and where they wanted to take it. “The Steelcase team showed it very cleverly and simply. Where our people said they wanted the organization to go, and what the leadership team said: it was a perfect fit,” says O’Connor. “Seeing that we were all on the same wavelength was an important point in the process.”

Transportation was one of the issues raised by PwC’s people. Being able to get to and from the downtown area was important, especially for younger people attracted to Dublin’s dynamic urban culture and entertainment scene. They were concerned that planned transport to the new location would not be in place by the time of the move.

To address this concern, two online transport surveys were conducted eighteen months and six months before the move. PwC people identified where and when they needed public transport, and that information was used as a basis for supplementing public transport. PwC busses now run throughout the day between three city

center connection points and Spencer Dock, and complement the city’s bus and rail services.

Attracting and retaining young talent is a key issue for PwC. “Ireland is approaching full employment,” notes Hughes. “Workers are increasingly interested in appropriate work/life balance. It’s a tough industry that PwC competes in, and to continue to hire and keep the top professionals is an ongoing challenge for them. They used Spencer Dock not only as a chance to reinvent their workplace, but as a catalyst to changing their culture, and ultimately to help them attract and hold on to the best talent.”

Spencer Dock’s interior design by Liam Mullally, partner of Mullally Leonard Partnership, Dublin, expresses the PwC culture in an invigorating, colorful workplace. “Where one works should be visually stimulating,” says Mullally. “So every time you go around a corner at PwC, you get a peek of some different colors, something new. People need color – especially in our Irish climate where at least fifty percent of the days are dull – you need color to enliven the space.”

Daylight floods the building’s nine floors via a central atrium as contemporary furniture provides an open vista to even the furthest workplace setting. People meet and talk in both formal and informal spaces throughout the building. They also enjoy a 200-seat restaurant, Starbucks coffee dock, fitness

center, and state-of-the-art training and meeting rooms. Walkways and bridges provide easy access to every part of the three-block-sized building.

The building's many venues for formal and informal communication help people who were brought together from three separate offices located in different parts of the city, support PwC's new, flatter organizational structure, and make mentoring easier.

"Seeing people cross the bridges implies that people are communicating not only within their divisions but also with other parts of the building. It reflects the dynamic of the building, that this is a living building," says Mullally.

Early in their planning, PwC considered and tested open plan areas for entire departments, assuming that putting everyone in the open would foster more cross-generational mentoring. But they quickly learned that some people needed private space for more focused work, such as research, an important part of PwC's business. People also needed places for private meetings, phone calls, or just to get away and refocus.

Spencer Dock represents lessons learned. "We have some people in glass offices within the open plan, but they're not removed from the team. Tea and coffee areas are located centrally, so they're places where people congregate. It breaks down the barriers between grades. The camaraderie, the team environment, the atmosphere, it's all fantastic," says Susan Creedon, a member of the business development team who was responsible for the communications part of the project.

At PwC, the strategies for retaining a top flight workforce – flattening the organization, encouraging more collaboration, involving people in planning the workplace – are intertwined and interdependent. Simoneaux says businesses benefit when they encourage strong social connections. "What we're seeing in organizations, and

some of the new research, is that companies that do a good job at encouraging communication and fostering strong social connections – places where people make friends at work, not just colleagues – get a big bounce from those efforts. People have more interest in working together and helping each other, and they collaborate better. Productivity goes up."

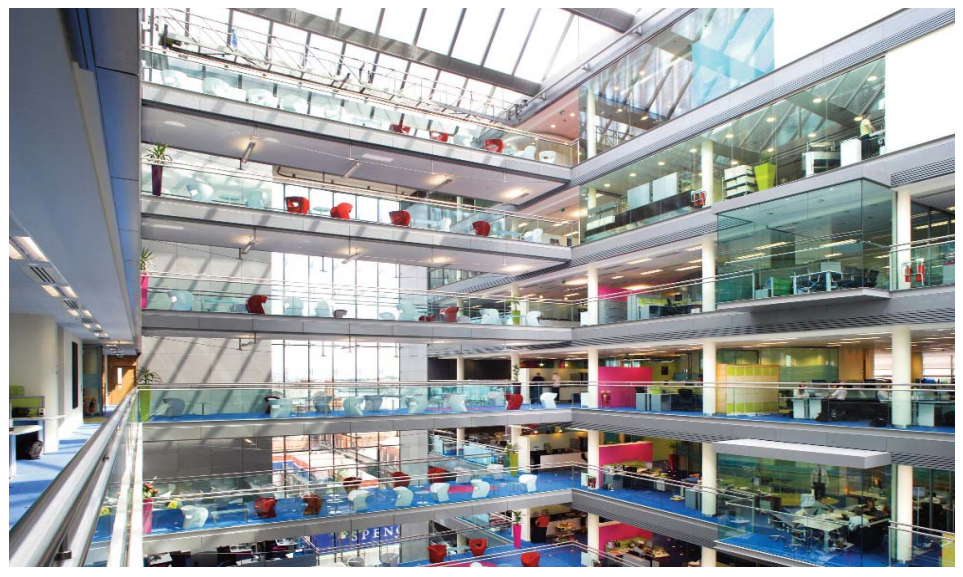
Informal gathering places throughout Spencer Dock are used by both groups and individuals. "Transitional spaces are places

where individuals and teams can reason, reflect, and rejuvenate, and release stress," says Hughes. "People use them to work quietly in small groups, or individually. These spaces are another way for organizations to support the needs of different generations of people at work."

While there are some enclosed workplace settings, they're interspersed among open plan areas. Glass walls and visitor seating make them more accessible and support social networking. "The whole building is



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more open, more transparent. It's a very egalitarian building and people are working that same way. Everyone is more comfortable approaching their seniors, or their juniors," says Mullally.

The open plan workspaces were planned with input from people at every level of the organization. They identified issues ranging from a need for flexible workspaces that supported different styles of working to providing for the security of client information. "It got people to think about what sort of space they needed to do their work," says Mary Cullen, a member of the senior partner's team who was closely involved with the project.

"Our people came up with ideas and suggestions, and worked with the architect on the design of the workplace settings. As a result of that involvement, there's not been one single issue with those settings since we moved. Everybody is very happy," says Cullen.

PwC conducted a major communications process during the planning, design, and construction of Spencer Dock, employing a variety of methods, including:

- online surveys of all PwC people on issues such as transport, the restaurant, fitness center, etc.
- an intranet site with regularly updated information and a Q&A forum
- regular meetings with a focus group of representatives from each department, who in turn circulated information via email and in person to everyone in their groups
- individual and team interviews at all levels of the organization
- short video presentations by O'Connor, so the organization's chief executive could speak with everybody
- a printed reference guide that replicated the intranet site, published shortly before the move to the new building
- a show area set up on site nine months before the move
- "showcases" with all suppliers for the project, from furniture and technology to the new cashless vending system, two months before the move

It was a multi-year communications effort. "Two years before the opening of the building, we brought together our first group of 40 to 50 people, one or two from every business unit," says Creedon.

This group served as information providers, relaying information from project leaders to individual departments, and raising issues and asking questions raised by their constituents. "We covered everything in our meetings, from catering issues and the restaurant to IT, benefits, the client hospital-ity suite, everything.



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"These people were ambassadors for the project. They went back to their teams and shared the information. Anyone could ask questions. We didn't want anyone surprised by what they saw in the new building."

For O'Connor, the project started out as a vision nearly a decade ago for a new workplace that would energize the organization and provide a competitive advantage. "I wanted a state of the art building, something people could be proud of, where people would look forward to coming into in the morning, a place that was way out in front of competitors. I think we've achieved that. The feedback we've gotten from our own

people and from clients has been fantastic," says O'Connor.

"Like every business, we have a few partners who have been around a while and were a bit cynical about some of this before we moved into the new building. Now they're saying things like, 'I look forward to coming to work in this building.' 'It's so much better than what we used to have, so much better than what we expected.' And they were the cynics!"

Mullally notes that it usually takes some time for people to feel comfortable in a new workplace, but PwC is ahead of the curve. "I had lunch with two people I hadn't seen since the move-in. I asked them how they'd settled in. One said 'I don't remember the old building at all, we've just meshed in here. The old building is gone.' The other man agreed and said simply, 'We've settled in just fine.'"

"All of our people are proud of the building and delighted to show others around," says Cullen. "We've had a hugely positive response. We're the talk of the town."

Soon they'll have another group to show around. In addition to new hires, each year PwC welcomes a large group of new recruits. In 2007, that's 250 new college graduates joining the firm. They'll work in a building which the company can rightfully claim to be "a building by our people, for our people."

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