



**Advanced  
Workplace  
Associates**

# **Interpolis Head Office – *Tilburg, Netherlands***

In association with



Expanded Case Studies from the British  
Council of Offices report –

***ICT and Offices; practiced realities  
and their business benefits?***

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## Learning from the lessons of others

IN FEBRUARY 2006 the British Council for Offices launched its report '*ICT and Offices; Practised Realities and their Business Benefits*'. The report was sponsored by Orange and King Sturge and researched and written by Advanced Workplace Associates (AWA).

The report examined the past, present and future for work and the workplace against a backdrop of developments in ICT over a period of 20 years.

Included in the report were a series of shortened Case Studies that were captured from Leading organisations which led to the findings in the report.

The British Council for Offices have kindly given permission for the publication of the full text from the original Case Studies as a means of telling the stories that led to the evolutions each organisation has made in its deployment of the workplace.

We hope you find it provides fuel for your own organisations evolution to the Advanced Workplace.



Andrew Mawson, Managing Director.

## Interpolis Head Office - Tilburg

Interpolis is a leading Dutch Insurance company that started life in the 1970's as an insurance provider to farmers and agricultural organisations. By the late 1980's the organisation's core workforce was scattered across Tilburg in 8 offices, each with its own technology and style of workspace.

Management consultants McKinsey were invited to review Interpolis's processes to establish how they could become more efficient given a backdrop of changing European regulation and an increasingly competitive business environment. As a consequence of this review the Interpolis Board decided it needed re-energise the organisation and seek new, customer focused and innovative ways to do business and to create a more dynamic organisation. In 1996 in order to improve the operational performance of the organisation, create a consistent culture and generate a sense of energy, the Board of Interpolis decided to consolidate the organisation onto a single site in Tilburg.

Initially the approach to planning the workspace in the new building was conventional; there were no financial pressures to use new ways of working to drive down the amount of space used. Instead the project team was tasked with delivering a more innovative workplace needed to reflect the company's emphasis on customer focus and the provision of solutions to customer problems. The team knew what sort of workplaces and people it needed but not how to achieve the change but it needed help to develop these and communicate with the Board.

Interpolis turned to an external consultant, Erik Veldhoen of Veldhoen & Co. who was known for his ideas on flexible working, to work with the Board to help them understand what was possible and to help this translate into a workplace design. Initially to develop the concept Veldhoen was engaged to work with the Board and the project group.

## Designing the New Workspace

When staff moved into the new building in 1996 staff at Interpolis each had their own desk. But before long in order to bring about a more innovative culture and cope with expansion and a rapidly changing organisation, it was decided to explore workplace sharing models.

Workplace utilisation surveys were undertaken and showed, for example, that the Public Relations staff were at their desks for only around 10% of the working day; Facilities Management staff for only around 30%. On the other hand, Call Centre staff were observed at their desks for about 80% of the day.



It was decided to introduce a flexible approach with a small group of staff to trial the concept. The same workspace layout was used everywhere, and everyone used the same type of desk. A sharing ratio of 10 people to 8 workspaces (1.25) was proposed overall, but differed from group to group. Staff were given permission to work some of their time at home where appropriate for them, their team members and clients. Those working mostly at home were not allocated a desk in the office and instead accessed their software applications and files over the network from home and used a 'hot desk' when in the office.

After six months of this experiment each person involved was interviewed and, based on their feedback, a mock-up of the proposed new flexible working environment was installed on one floor of the main building, Park Wing. Everyone practised using this space for a day a week, then the layout was further refined based on the feedback and two departments (around 400 people) moved in. The rest of the Park Wing was then refurbished in the same way and in December 1996 the other staff moved in.

In 1997 Interpolis started growing again and by the end of 1998 it was decided to add a second building. This time the infrastructure to support a more flexible approach was incorporated from the beginning. While the 12 m width of the Park Wing may have been appropriate for a conventional workspace it had not proved ideal for a more flexible approach and the second building was extended 60 cm to provide a width of 12.6 m which fitted the grid better.

When this building was complete the total space available to Interpolis was a gross space of 60,000 sq m including parking space and atrium and a net office space of 37,000 sq m. The Park Wing has 4 floors with a 180 m length floor plate, the new wing has 6 floors and 110 m length floor plate, and the tower has 16 floors. Some 2,500 people are now accommodated here.



***Any user can access their applications and files by logging in and entering their passwords at any desk.***

## **Technology**

Because of the relatively high price of laptops, initially only desktops were provided. More recently flat screens have been installed and laptops have been provided for very mobile staff. In the more static departments, such as Contact Centres, laptops were not considered ergonomically appropriate. More recently, Interpolis have experimented with the use of wireless local area networks.

Any user can access their applications and files by logging in and entering their passwords at any desk. Files and applications are held centrally and accessed over the network.



The main telephone system is an Eriksson system. Everyone has a personal phone number and within the office everyone uses a DECT mobile telephone which they leave on charge each evening at a telephone wall on the way in to the area they work in, where their personal paper mail is also delivered.

With DECT phones there have been challenges. 72 telephones are provided for every 45 workplaces but if there are more than 45 people in a departmental area at any one time they cannot accept calls as the network becomes overloaded. A GSM network for mobile telephones is now being tested.

The evolution of Interpolis's switch to accommodate use of Voice over IP (VOIP) is also being explored to provide further flexibility and mobility. The original building, the Park Wing, has a conventional infrastructure and does not have raised floors. In the second, newer building the raised floors have a height of 12 cm. The planning grid of 1.8 m was used with floor boxes delivering data and power connections.

Structured cabling has been installed in both the Park Wing and the new wing: CAT5 in the former, CAT6E in the latter. The risers are glass fibre

## Departmental Office Space

Within the 40 areas of departmental office space within the building - each 45 m x 12.5 m with approximately 45 desks per area - no-one 'owns' a workplace. While space is allocated by department, staff, including management, can and do work anywhere in the building. The initial sharing ratios of 1.25 people per workstation within office areas have increased to 1.5 people per workstation. This has been achieved by people working more of their time at home and by the provision of other, more communal places in which staff can work in addition to the office areas.



Each of the office areas has the same layout. At the entrance is a post wall and a telephone wall where staff collect their post and pick up a DECT telephone for the day. Within each area is a mix of workplace settings. Initially, these included open plan workplaces; small, glazed, enclosed, single occupancy

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'cockpit' rooms which contain docking stations and can be used for both communication and concentration; and long team tables in the open work space areas. Other types of settings have since been added, including 'lounge' places - small enclosed rooms with low, informal seating and a low table; workplaces which can be raised so that one can work standing up; meeting places; and communication places. There is no workplace booking system.



Meeting and communication places include open plan meeting tables, more formal meeting rooms and the soft seating open area which is also used for informal meetings. Each department also has one or two conference rooms which can be booked through Client Services via the internet. These rooms can be used by other departments. Support services include a standard facilities corner and a pantry.

Paper has been reduced by 70-80%. External mail is scanned in; electronic documentation is stored digitally; and documents are printed only if really necessary. There are no drawers in the desks: staff have lockers for their personal belongings. There is shared departmental storage; and shared central storage for project documentation.



Giving individuals some control over their environment is an important element of the flexible approach. Staff can raise and lower their desk lights and turn them on and off, they can change the temperature and open the windows. Desks and chairs can be raised and lowered electronically. There is a clear desk policy but it is not formally controlled.



## **The Club House**

Complementing the individual departmental office workspaces is a 'Club House' for the use of all staff. A number of well-known designers were each invited to design one of a number of meeting zones which have created a number of very different spaces within the building. Meeting, working and eating is all mixed together within a series of distinctively designed areas that include open work tables, enclosed rooms, food counters and dining tables. Wireless network access is provided in these areas and an IT helpdesk is provided where staff may bring their telephones, laptops, etc, and have their problems solved.

## Change Management

Going back to the early thinking about their first building, the Board was not in favour of a flexible workspace. Erik Veldhoen, the external consultant, was invited to put forward his philosophy and explain the dynamics and costs. He positioned the concept as being primarily concerned with distinguishing Interpolis from its competitors and enabling it to become an innovative, customer focussed, problem solving company. He persuaded the Board that it was a good idea and acted as a buffer between the Board and the project group as the workspace strategy was developed and implemented. The Board briefed the department directors who were charged with leading and managing the change within their own departments. Their involvement in the process made it easier to get employees to follow.

The group who had been complaining the most about their existing workspace were chosen to be the 'guinea pigs'. They were advised that the Board had decided to follow this route, so they must adopt a flexible approach or leave the company. A process was developed for discussing ideas with the Board. People were made responsible for what they were doing. They were involved in the development process and participated in workshops concerning the use of flexible workspace.



## Indicators of Success

Visiting the Interpolis building, there is no doubt that the organisation presents a sense of trust, energy and vibrancy and this is borne out in the FM Satisfaction rating which has moved from 6 to 7.5 over the time of the work evolution.



In addition there is a very clear space cost benefits to Interpolis. In 1996 when they moved their people into their first building they had 1500 people working from 1100 workstations. They now have 3500 staff working from 2700 workstations.

For Interpolis organisation changes are handled easily and without cost. Boundaries between departments are flexible with communities of staff blending in to each other with overflow areas to cope with peaks. As staff numbers grow the number of workplaces remains stable.

## Key Learning Points

***The more radical approach... is to develop strategy and processes and 'construct' the building around these.***

- Direction must come from the top down. The commitment of the Managing Director must first be gained and then the Board before pro-actively seeking understanding and buy-in from the rest of the organisation.
- Draw on the experience of a good consultant. It helps to have a third party who can act as a buffer between you and the people you are seeking to influence at Board level and to communicate the vision and advantages of the strategy you are proposing.
- The conventional approach starts with the available workspace. The more radical approach – followed by Interpolis - is to develop strategy and processes and 'construct' the building around these. What is the market asking for, what are your targets, your market segment? What changes in technology might occur in the near future which will impact on what you do? For example, telephone is already wireless and data must become wireless. What will this mean for a building?
- Remember there will always be constraints on what you can do: city regulations, environmental regulations. Keep processes and plans as flexible as possible.





***Advanced Workplace Associates (AWA) is an independent management consultancy that improves business performance by implementing advanced Work, Workplace and Workplace Management practices in leading organisations***

AWA was formed in 1992 following an extensive research programme funded by a group of leading European companies known as The Learning Building Group. Since then, AWA have undertaken projects for some of the world's leading companies applying advanced concepts to improve business performance.

### **Our services include:**

**Advanced Organisational Development** - Facilitating the board in developing a strategic vision for the evolution of the organisation, developing leadership and change programmes and managing multi-disciplinary transition programmes.

**Strategic Workplace Planning** - evaluating current workplace performance; identifying potential for improvement; recommending practical actions; researching new locations; quantifying opportunities for advanced workstyles and workplace models to provide best value against defined business scenarios.

**Advanced Working Transformation** - defining the pre-requisites for advanced workstyles; identifying the dependencies for sustainable advanced working; facilitating the process of transformation in safety from traditional to advanced approaches to work, workplace and management.

**Business Support Services, Strategy and Transformation** - evaluating the performance of Business Support Functions (Real Estate, Facilities Management, Information Technology, Human Resources and Purchasing), defining improvement strategies and leading the implementation of strategic development programmes designed to improve the contribution and performance of the Business Support function.

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