Corporate real estate and IT collaboration

Also in this issue:
Exploiting change and uncertainty
Automation of corporate real estate
The rise of coworking
Symantec’s super project is a complete 180 from its Superfund past

by Carolyn Rickard-Brideau

Every organization is looking for an edge. Something to distance it from its competitors. That catalytic mechanism that makes its work product extraordinary and allows its workforce to engage in ways that catapult it beyond a 9-to-5 commitment.

The workplace has to be more than just a container that holds an organization’s employees. It needs to positively influence the people who come in contact with it, not only through created communities of workplace culture, but through the physical impact the built environment has on its inhabitants. The places we inhabit can have a beneficial impact on our bodies as long as they take into account the way humans are wired.

The WELL Building Standard™ aims to do just that. By incorporating design measures that interact with human neurobiology, designers can deliver positive outcomes like increased energy, stronger cognitive and memory capabilities, and increased productivity.

That something extra

Symantec Corp., the global leader in cybersecurity and one of the world’s largest cyber-intelligence networks, was looking for just such a path for its planned headquarters renovation in Mountain View, California. As you might imagine, talent acquisition in Silicon Valley is not for the faint of heart; when the Googleplex is your next-door neighbor, it qualifies as perhaps the most competitive environment in the world for attracting the best and brightest talent. So when Symantec decided to renovate one of its headquarters buildings, front of mind was its current employee base and the quality of talent it would recruit in the future.

During its interview for the project, Little, in association with AP+I Design, reinforced Symantec’s interest in salutogenic design and the WELL Building Certification. The software company recognized an opportunity not only to create an environment that would be a great place to work, but to make a tangible and measurable difference in the lives of its employees. The prospect of having its workplace designed to result in a healthier, more productive environment was an attractive one, especially since the Symantec facility would be the first WELL-certified building in Silicon Valley and one of only 200 WELL-certified spaces worldwide. WELL became the competitive edge Symantec leadership was looking for, a pilot for what could ultimately be rolled out to all Symantec buildings globally.

A long way from its origins

This headquarters renovation also needed to accomplish pragmatic design goals that would support and advance the culture Symantec had built over its 34-year history. Prior to this renovation, the work environment was all built offices – no interior glass, no sidelights, no clerestory or windows in doors. Some offices hugged the exterior envelope, while others were built-out in rows away from exterior glass. The overall lack of daylight or views resulted in a dark, claustrophobic, uninspired and – just as important – unhealthy workspace.

Keeping a bright and inspired future in mind, the Symantec team aggressively sought to create an environment that put employees first: their health, their happiness and their impact on the organization. A place that would be restorative, accommodate activities to support individual and team work-styles as well as idiosyncrasies in posture, and help to eliminate a sedentary lifestyle and create a healthy foundation that would impact employees’ wellbeing even outside of work.
Comfort, Fitness and Mind categories. Nourishment, Little and AP+I worked with project stakeholders to develop beyond the WELL Building environmental prerequisites of Air could significantly improve Symantec's environment, requiring a more, the team found that all of the parameters the project could meet, given that the buildings to be impacted t goals with WELL Building criteria by triaging the standard to determine what s design team to align the overarching goals of the project with shared values for occupants. The team also began the process of aligning Symantec's design goals with WELL Building criteria by triaging the standard to determine what parameters the project could meet, given that the buildings to be impacted were now 15 years old. Based on this review, the team found that all of the mandatory WELL Preconditions could be met.

To optimize the space, however, several areas were identified that could significantly improve Symantec’s environment, requiring a more comprehensive approach to health and wellness. With a passion to evolve beyond the WELL Building environmental prerequisites of Air, Water and Nourishment, Little and AP+I worked with project stakeholders to develop a detailed plan for wellness-oriented features that would impact the Light, Comfort, Fitness and Mind categories.

- Light management is an integral element of interior space design. Preconditions in this category cover management of brightness and visual acuity while encouraging daylighting in work areas and ensuring minimization of glare as well as control of shading. Symantec’s optimizations in this category focused on avoiding glare transmission through the workspaces, and selecting materials and surfaces that had low reflectivity in both the work and common areas. A system of task and overhead lighting complements available daylight-improved lighting design, which incorporates daily changes in light color and temperature to align with human circadian rhythms. Controllable shades and blinds augment these features by allowing independent control of areas as lighting changes throughout the day, and a large skylight on the fourth floor provides further natural lighting throughout the space.

- Comfort preconditions require compliance with ADA regulations and the development of strategies for ergonomics, adjustability, and acoustic and thermal comfort. To address these issues, Symantec’s design team improved the adjustability of furnishings by specifying sit/stand desks and adjustable monitor displays. An acoustic mitigation plan identified noisy areas, and required equipment and mechanical systems were designed to minimize vibration and sound transmission, lowering stress and allowing deeper focus. Symantec further optimized this section by minimizing the intrusion of exterior noise in the space, thereby reducing the force of sound on surfaces.

- For Fitness and Mind, the team sought to incorporate biophilia (the innate human tendency to seek connections with nature and other forms of life) through the use of natural patterns, opportunities for interaction with nature, and views to nature throughout the design, which reduces blood pressure and human stress hormones.

Elements for Beauty and Design were also carefully considered. The goal was to invoke human delight while celebrating Symantec’s culture in shared, central spaces that connect employees and visitors to Symantec’s mission and values while creating a sense of place, purpose and identity. A new, multi-story atrium with a central connecting stair became the showpiece for stitching together these goals, integrating a variety of public and collaborative areas with core messaging and brand imagery over several floors. As part of the atrium’s programming, Symantec developed a quarterly rotating art program to showcase photographs of the company’s humanitarian efforts in underdeveloped countries across the globe.

In concert with wellness-oriented features, healthy space needs to integrate essential supportive health programs like stress-management resources, healthy foods and other lifestyle support. Fitness and Mind preconditions include dissemination of information regarding WELL and wellness, accomplished through measures such as a health and wellness library that helps educate employees on how various strategies incorporated in their space benefits each one of them personally. Additional wellness information is accessible in the fitness center and on Symantec’s internal website. The design and stakeholder teams also created policies that support altruistic behaviors, such as charity and volunteer work, and material transparency, disseminating information about the building materials used so employees can understand what is surrounding them, literally, and the effect those materials have on their health.

Results strong and favorable

Employee feedback validates the success of Symantec’s goal of infusing an active culture of wellness throughout the new space. A robust “Movement in the Workplace” program encourages employees to be more active in the space and is promoted through the strategic placement of meeting rooms and other shared spaces away from work neighborhoods. Associates are happy about having sit/stand desks that allow a change in posture, lessening the negative effects of a sedentary work style.

Symantec also offers activity incentives, such as employee subsidies for the use of sports clubs; internal events promoting the use of hula hoops, jump ropes and the like; and an on-site walking/running path that links to the local Hetch-Hetchy trail.

The effects of a WELL space have rippled beyond WELL Building certification to a cultural mindfulness about personal health and wellness. Symantec’s “Get Up and Move” campaign, originated in its renovated Silicon Valley space, will now be rolled out to all of its locations. Additionally, over 60 percent of company employees are now gym members.

Other outcomes of the new workspace design speak to increased employee engagement and workplace satisfaction. A post-move survey of employees reveals a 30-percent increase in collaboration and a 50-percent increase in feeling more innovative in the new space. Beyond the numbers, employees who work in the building simply remark that their overall quality of life feels good. I almost feel healthier just walking into the space.”

Carolyn Rickard-Brideau, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, WELL AP provisional, is a senior partner and the Workplace Global Practice Leader for Little, an international architecture and design firm.