

The industry of healthcare is more complex than ever before. Pick up any newspaper or watch the evening news and you'll hear about how rapidly changing technology, spiraling costs and a growing and increasingly demanding group of users is creating daily challenges for healthcare professionals.

Is Your Healthcare Environment Keeping Pace?



So, how do you meet these challenges and at the same time deliver the highest degree of patient care?

Traditionally, most healthcare organizations have made significant investments in three key areas:

Technology. Adding to or upgrading technologies and network systems, often with complex enterprise systems, intranets or wireless capabilities.

Process. Redefining their care delivery model, through enterprise-wide restructuring or re-engineering.

Is Your Healthcare Environment Keeping Pace? *continued*

People. Helping their healthcare professionals become more productive by redefining the organizational structure or initiating wholesale changes in organizational culture, while working to attract and retain clinical staff – one of the most immediate issues facing healthcare today.

But, what about space?

An often overlooked, yet highly critical element in achieving the desired effect of these investments is the healthcare environment itself – the place in which all of this change is taking place.

The industry of healthcare has changed vastly, and an important question to ask is whether or not the physical environment has kept pace with these changes. Does it support and promote the investments made in technology, process and people? Does it provide the ease and accessibility required to encourage new ways of working? Does it inspire and encourage the people working there?

Unfortunately many hospitals are trying to provide modern care in antiquated facilities. Often new work processes and operational models are adapted to the hospital or departmental layout rather than the other way around, and the successful implementation of these changes is compromised or delayed.

“When the physical environment is carefully considered and viewed as a critical tool in supporting the key strategies around people, process and technology, it can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of these initiatives,”

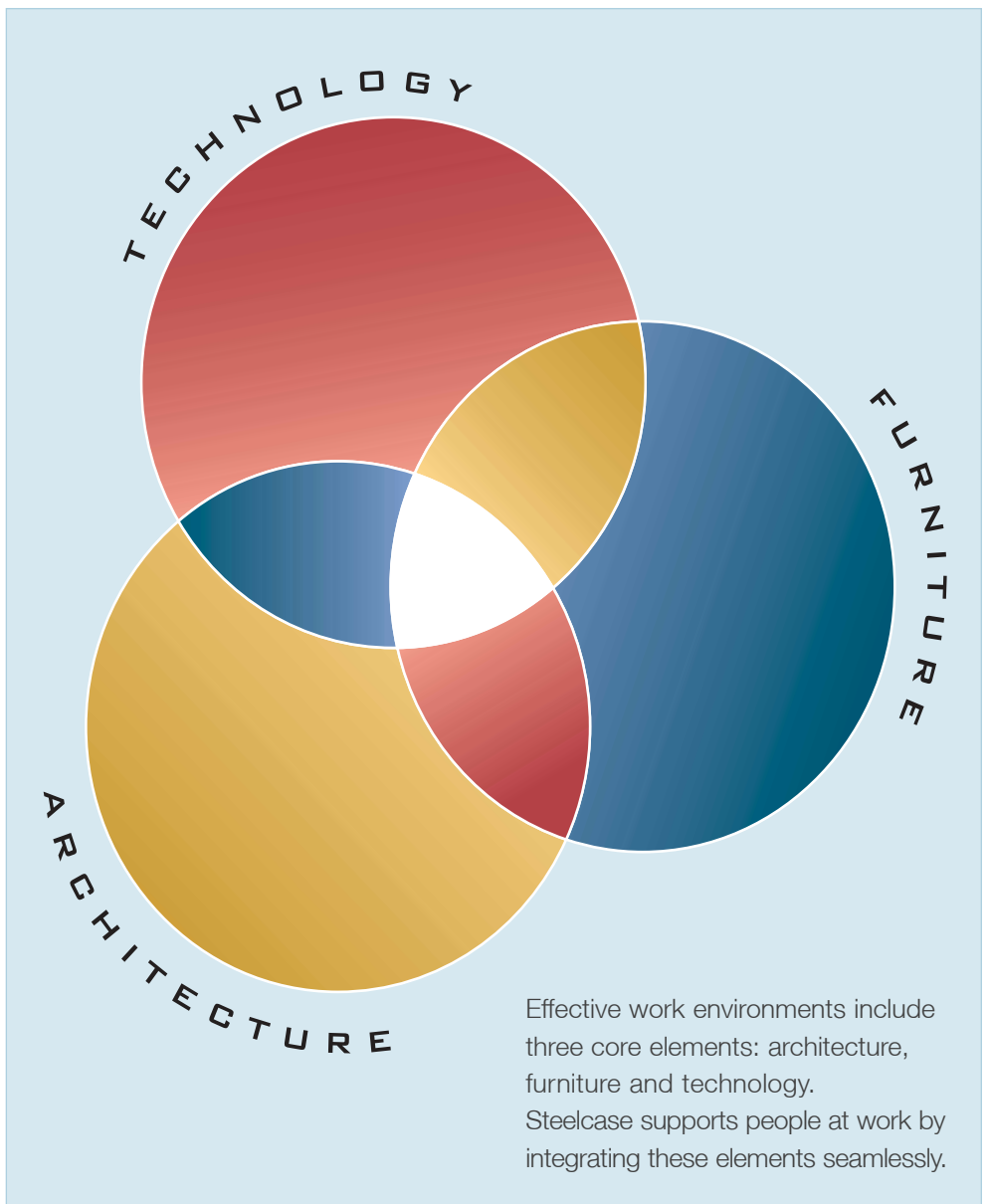
explains Joyce Bromberg, Director, Workspace Futures Exploration, Steelcase Inc.

“The space can become a strategic asset.”

High performance space.

Every healthcare environment, whether old or new, is made up of the same three common elements – architecture, furniture, technology.

While these three elements are always present and integrated in some way, they may not always support each other as they should.





Architecture

Architecture. These are the interior structural elements – the floors, walls and ceilings, that define the physical boundaries within the space. Architecture should enable you to determine the successful mix of private, individual and group areas, with various levels of acoustic and visual privacy.

It should also provide opportunities for better communications through visual display and information persistence.



Furniture

Furniture. These are the movable elements – the desks, tables, storage components and seating that set the tone for the environment, be it a lobby, administrative area or patient room. These are the things that make a space comfortable, personal and stimulating.

Furniture should help people by providing the support they need, where and when they need it.



Technology

Technology. This can be broken down into two broad areas – appliances and infrastructure.

Appliances are the technology tools you use everyday: computers, PDAs, printers, scanners, etc. Infrastructure is the power and cabling system that makes the appliances work and keeps the facility running.

The appliances and infrastructure enable people to manage connections – with information and with other people.

When these three elements are strategically planned to be fully integrated, they can create dynamic and flexible spaces that provide a high performance environment for the people who use them.

“A high performance space is one that enables people to focus on their work,” says Joyce. “Whether it’s administering, caregiving, teaching or researching, providing the support and tools people need to connect with both technology and with one another, is important in order to gather and share the knowledge and expertise critical to the success of healthcare organizations.”

People can focus on their work more effectively when the space provides quick and easy access to whatever tools they need to perform the work they’re doing at that particular time.

Considerations include access to privacy when required, the ability to access technology anywhere and everywhere, and the tools designed to help people share ideas and communicate effectively with one another.

The most important factor to keep in mind is that space should be designed with the users in mind. It must also be highly flexible to accommodate change – in process, in technology and in the way people work – quickly and with minimal disruption.

Things to consider.

Field research and observational studies conducted by Steelcase over the last few years revealed six key factors that should be considered in order to leverage flexible architecture, furniture and technology to create high performance environments.

By studying the activities that go on in a space and addressing these key factors through insightful planning, it's possible to create healthcare environments that fully support the activities of the people who work in them.



This actual nursing station at a North American hospital was designed to address the six key factors that help create high performance work environments. Each of these is discussed on the following page.

1. Manage the workplace strategically.

This requires the ability to plan, provide and manage all of its essentials, within the budget and culture of the organization. The main areas to consider are:

- Flexible, adaptable furniture and interior architecture
- Flexible, dependable and secure technology infrastructure

This will help to create a workplace that can change quickly and easily to accommodate changes in technology and in the healthcare delivery system, with a minimum disruption to people.

2. Balance privacy.

Providing healthcare providers and patients with the level of privacy that is required for different types of interactions. There are four kinds of privacy:

- Acoustical
- Visual
- Territorial
- Informational

3. Making work visible.

Using the space to visually display information to help people share ideas, communicate learnings, transfer knowledge, and provide wayfinding. Flexible interior architecture, combined with adaptable furniture and worktools, allows more opportunity to place visual communications in the most effective places.

4. Managing connections.

Enabling the transfer of information and knowledge to and between healthcare providers, patients and family members. People need:

- Accessible technology
- Easy access to paper-based information
- Environments that encourage people-to-people exchanges

5. Supporting diverse workstyles.

Supporting diverse workstyles. Supporting the various tasks people do throughout their day by providing appropriate settings and worktools, that address ergonomic, as well as psycho-social elements.

This also requires understanding the diverse ways people work, which can be grouped in the following categories:

- Predefined tasks
- Variety of tasks with moderate, expected interaction and interruption
- Unpredictable ongoing work with no obvious pattern

By understanding this, you can anticipate and plan for what people will require in their environment to be most effective.

6. Offer inspiring spaces.

Using space to revitalize and inspire everyone that works in or visits a healthcare facility. Well-designed spaces can encourage communication, ongoing learning, sharing and innovation. Inspirational environments should take a variety of forms and design and should include both:

- Peaceful respite zones
- Stimulating social zones

"It's critical that these factors are considered when designing both administrative and clinical healthcare spaces," says Joyce. "It will help you create highly effective environments for the people who work in them and ensure that the environment is keeping pace with the ever-growing demands of the industry."

Steelcase recently completed an in-depth study of the healthcare industry. If you are interested in learning more about our research findings and their implications on space, please contact Phyllis Goetz, National Sales Manager, Healthcare, at 214.789.0435/pgoetz@steelcase.com