Great Culture.
Great Workplace.
Lessons From America's Best Companies
Culture is a powerful strategic tool in business today. It is used to
tell a company’s story, celebrate its successes, revere its history,
 attract employees, intrigue customers and provide a tangible
connection to a company.

At Kahler Slater, from our experience working with success-
ful companies over time, we know how important culture is to
overall business success, so we decided to seek out benchmark
companies and study the ways they intentionally design work
experiences and spaces that manifest their great cultures. We
chose as our benchmarking group, the large, medium and small
companies appearing on the Great Place to Work® Institute list.
As an interdisciplinary design enterprise that creates transfor-
mational experiences and environments for visionary clients
throughout the world, we ourselves have appeared on the Great
Place to Work® Institute list for Small- to Medium-sized compa-
nies since that lists inception, seven years ago. And, as design-
ers of great workplace experiences for our clients, we were
sure that our Best Companies to Work For in America (hereafter
known as Best Companies) peers would have a lot to share on
the topic of culture in the workplace.

This study is the second time we have reached out to our fellow
Best Place to Work list members to discuss specific aspects of
how the physical environment plays a role in supporting them in
their quest to become and remain a Best Place to Work. Our first
research report, “What Makes a Great Workplace?” measured
how Best Companies achieved thirteen (13) attributes identified
as important contributors to creating a great work environment
(see Appendix). This time, however, we narrowed our focus
significantly to study in more detail a 14th attribute that surfaced
during our initial site visits - how the workplace expresses organi-
zational culture.
Why this particular attribute? Over and over we have heard from Best Companies that their strong and unique cultures really set them apart from other companies. They believe their cultures are a primary key to their success. From our work, we know that physical environment in a workplace can strongly reinforce a company’s culture messages. In this study, we wanted to explore the role that the physical aspects of the workplace play in intentionally communicating and reinforcing the culture at these Best Companies.

WHY STUDY BEST PLACE TO WORK FOR COMPANIES?

For more than 25 years, the Great Place to Work® Institute has been leading a movement to identify and celebrate great companies for others to emulate. Over the course of these years, the Institute has not only measured companies against their Trust Model®, it has also studied the performance of these companies. The Institute’s process is unique from the dozens of other business rankings because it measures from an employee perspective through a comprehensive employee survey. The rigorous employee survey and investigation procedures used by the Great Place to Work® Institute have revealed hundreds of enterprises of all sizes that are proven to have created high-performing workplaces. Year over year, these companies outperform their competitors on many business measurements such as: financial performance and less voluntary turnover, and they enjoy other benefits such as: receiving more qualified job applications for open positions, fostering greater innovation, creativity and risk taking, and receive the benefits of higher productivity and profitability. So, given a track record of this competitive edge, it stands to reason that these Best Companies can offer lessons to the rest of business as to how culture plays a role in their respective successes.

In addition, many companies in these lists rank high in what is known as employee engagement, a field of inquiry that generally
measures employees’ willingness to invest discretionary effort, recommend their companies to their friends, increase their likelihood of staying, etc. The correlation between employee engagement and business performance has been repeatedly proven. The Corporate Leadership Council, for instance, has found that engaged employees perform 20% better than non-engaged employees and are 87% less likely to leave their companies.

According to a study by the consulting firm, Development Dimensions International, a company with 10,000 employees can experience a $42 million benefit, simply by moving its workforce from low to high engagement.

We theorized that companies with these kinds of engaged employees, particularly those with high trust environments as measured by the Great Place to Work Institute lists, are most likely to be leveraging all of their physical attributes to tell the story of their culture in compelling ways that are unique to them. It is in this spirit that we pursued this investigation.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE**

When you think of an outstanding corporate culture, the word fun might be the first thing that comes to mind followed by well-publicized images of Google or Zappos. Fun aspects of corporate culture are front and center because they are, well, fun. But corporate culture is about more than free food, workplace laundry facilities and worker benefits and amenities. In a recent study by the American Management Association (AMA) “Cultivating Effective Corporate Cultures- A Global Study of Challenges and Strategies,” culture is defined as “the shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organizational functioning and that provide them with guides for their behavior within the organization.”

A business’s culture entails many elements – those unwritten rules of interacting with one another that help people understand what’s important to the group and how to behave to ensure their success in that organization. Culture is about values,
how respect is expressed and to whom. Culture identifies a company’s sources of inspiration and celebration. Culture tells us something about the company’s relationship to the community at large. Culture is about belonging.

Providing a sense of belonging is essential to creating a high-performing company. Psychologist Abraham Maslow, while researching motivation, ranked “social needs” in importance above only physiological and safety needs. And he included the experience of belonging as part of the “social needs” category. High-performing companies recognize that their success depends on more than merely having a rock solid business plan and set of mission-critical objectives that establish their pre-eminence among their competitors. They must be able to attract and keep the best available talent by providing that sense of belonging. High-performing companies must be able to create and sustain an environment in which employees can focus on their work, learn from each other, stay inspired and freely innovate in a spirit of collaboration with their co-workers.

Cultural anthropologist, Arna Banack, states, “The literature has not done a good job of demonstrating culture’s impact on the bottom line. A company’s largest fixed cost is salary and benefits, which is all about their employees and organizational culture. Real estate averages about 7% of costs, a small amount compared to HR costs. The opportunity is to use that 7% as a strategic tool to help create the kind of culture you need to accomplish your goals and make your largest fixed costs-people- more effective. Part of being effective is living the brand. It is all connected: brand, space and culture.”

“Part of being effective is living the brand. It is all connected: brand, space and culture.” Arna Banack

OUR METHODOLOGY
Our methodology utilized an on-line survey sent to a comprehensive list of Best Companies from the large, medium and small lists, followed by virtual and personal site visits. Our site visits to a variety of Best Companies took us around the United States. We looked at how these Best Companies use their workplaces to reinforce the unique elements of their cultures to employees and visitors.

In this study, we focused on the tangible artifacts and visible manner that organizations communicate their cultures. Our hope
was to learn how these organizations use specific artifacts and visible elements of culture such as buildings, interior spaces, and graphics to communicate and support their unique stories to employees and visitors. These physical artifacts of a workplace are often the most immediately visible examples of how the company communicates and reinforces the enterprise’s values to all its employees.

We are grateful to all of our participants in this research, for it is their story we hope to tell. Together, if these practices can inspire others, we have achieved our goal to help others see the value in intentionally leveraging the workplace as a vehicle to support, celebrate and manifest culture.

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

Our search for connections between how organizations are leveraging their physical workplaces to support and manifest their great cultures revealed some very compelling data and fascinating examples of Best Place to Work companies that make their cultures come alive.

We discovered that the Best Companies to Work that we surveyed and visited throughout the United States had found creative and inspiring ways to manifest their cultures.

Using the framework of the Great Place to Work Institute’s Trust Model®, we could see that they each used their workplaces to instill pride, to build camaraderie and to support trust through respect, fairness and credibility.

As we reviewed the survey results and traveled the country meeting our fellow Best Companies honorees, we learned how the physical experience one has in their workplaces syncs with their cultural visions. The workplace cultural expression is a valuable source of energy, inspiration, community, excitement – as well as that crucial sense of belonging.

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**We believe that demonstrating our company’s unique culture in our physical workplace gives us a competitive advantage in...**
The companies we surveyed and visited represented a wide variety of industry segments, styles, geographic regions, and frankly, budgets for architecture, communications and interior design. But regardless of the company, we found that four characteristics are common among all of them:

- Visual communications that build pride, engage & recognize people and accomplishments
- Dedicated spaces to celebrate and build camaraderie
- A visible “spirit” of the culture
- External and internal brand alignment

The following provides an overview of each of these characteristics and illustrates the best practices that we discovered through our survey and site visits.
1. A visible “spirit” of the culture

Throughout the synthesis of our collected data, it became clear that a company culture has a spirit that can be palpable and experienced. That spirit comes through how a person experiences the organization on many levels – from the people that greet them to what is visible on the walls or even what is experienced on the path to the entry. The spirit of the culture is manifest through the intentional choices that a company makes about everything from the office location, down to the details of furniture, artwork and signage.

During our research, we found that many of the companies we studied know, even if intuitively, that communicating culture begins immediately – in some cases, well before visitors and employees even enter the front door. The first impression is powerful and should be consistent in feel and message throughout the workplace as people move beyond the entrance and throughout all the workplace environments.

The genetic research company, Genentech, for instance, has even created the street name where its headquarters are located to celebrate the essence of what its people do: DNA Way. Hanging from the outside of the buildings, visible to passing cars, are gigantic banners featuring faces of people – patients who have benefited from Genentech’s research. No one can miss the message that is reinforced constantly: Genentech’s culture is proud of its world-class employees, whose work saves lives.

Zappos, the online shoe retailer, expresses their open team spirit and non-hierarchical culture by assigning equal workspace to all – from the CEO to the call center reps. As an indication of their open door policy, they simply eliminated ALL doors.

Clothing manufacturer, W.L. Gore, lives by the simple corporate objective, “Make money and have fun.” They have many visible indications of a commitment to fun with volleyball courts and outdoor picnic areas at almost every plant in the United States. Additionally, W.L. Gore makes a conscious cultural decision to maintain a smaller, more intimate community feel by limiting the
size of their facilities to only accommodate 150-200 associates - a number they feel allows all the associates to communicate and engage with each other. Both of these gestures are strong and visible ways that the workplace environment supports the spirit of their desired culture.

At Ultimate Software, a Miami-based HR software company, the culture is energized and competitive-inspired largely by its gregarious CEO whose love of sports comes through. That competitive spirit is immediately visible to visitors, as a basketball court now occupies the primary space of what was originally a typical atrium lobby.

The court was the result of a sales challenge wager between the CEO and staff. The challenge inspired employees to exceed what seemed to be a ridiculous, unreachable $100 million sales goal. Once the goal was met (and exceeded), the CEO stood by his word and converted the atrium into a basketball court. The court is a visual reminder of his commitment and truly embodies the spirit of the culture at Ultimate Software!

At 4Imprint, a Wisconsin company that personalizes promotional items, a family spirit drives the culture. And so, while the physical space itself is relatively modest, there is no question that the company cares about its employees and their families. Framed pictures of kids’ artwork line the lunch room walls, which is also equipped with a computer game to entertain both staff and their children who often come to the office to wait for their parents. To celebrate Take Your Child to Work Day, 4Imprint has portraits taken of the visiting children. The photos are displayed in a collage, reminding all that this company supports families and knows how to celebrate its family culture.

Dixon Schwabl, an advertising and marketing agency that was named number one Small Best Company to Work For in 2010, introduces visitors to their playful culture when visitors see the slide linking two floors in the office. They also once had a padded primal scream room for employees, showing the company’s support for the challenges of their expressive and creative culture.

At six-time Best Company, McMurry, a marketing and public relations firm in Phoenix, AZ, the employees drove the leadership to undertake a major renovation to alter the facilities to better express the culture of the firm. The resulting renovation created
a communal area for dining, bringing the feel of a campus union where members of the staff from all of their buildings come together to dine and celebrate, a lobby where the corporate values are projected and where a commissioned piece of art illustrates the company’s mission, core values and strategies. Engaging employees in decisions affecting their workplace in such a demonstrated manner was a respectful gesture between employees and leadership that has paid dividends in employee commitment and loyalty.

Other visible artifacts of culture at Hilcorp Energy Company in Texas are smaller in scale and equally meaningful expressions of culture. Their technical team rooms have a special light outside the doors that illuminate when the teams are actively brainstorming innovative ideas, reinforcing their commitment to teamwork and a focus on innovation and new ideas.

Conscious choices that make culture visible ensure that both visitors and employees understand the cultural norms and expected behaviors. “A good culture creates an environment in which each employee believes he or she is integral to the success of the organization and its goals. It also provides a blueprint for how to behave…” Whether the spirit is high energy and highly competitive, or playful and whimsical, we noticed that Best Companies make that spirit highly tangible in the office experience.

2. External and internal brand alignment

Successful companies recognize that, in most cases, there is an experience component to their brand – some kind of emotional engagement between their customers and their product or service. Ideally, that experience must somehow be expressed within the company’s internal culture and physical space. Hotels, for instance, have long recognized that their brands are experienced differently by employees and visitors through a sharp delineation between the “front of the house” (the places that guests experience) and the “heart of the house” (the spaces behind the scenes that support staff activity). The delineation is not
The company’s culture and brand experience in the physical environment is consistent with external marketing and brand experiences.

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as clear in corporate settings. However, many companies introduce their brand and culture on a company website or via advertising as a form of a “front of house” introduction.

Prior to visiting any of our selected companies, our staff completed a review of the company website to understand the particular brand message sent externally, in order to understand and evaluate whether the physical workplace was in alignment with the external brand communications. Obviously, the more similar those two expressions are, the more intact the cultural experience is for employees, potential employees, investors, or customers.

**JM Family Enterprises** is a fairly literal example of external and internal brand alignment. A company with a long and intimate history with the Japanese automobile manufacturer Toyota, they decided to design the entire corporate campus with a respectful nod to a distinct Japanese culture. Gardens, architecture, artifacts like shoji screens, even the gracious and respectful security personnel, send a message of alignment. The campus is unmistakable as the headquarters for the most prominent owner of Toyota dealerships in the United States. (Of course, all the cars in the employee parking lot are Toyota models.)

At **Cascade Asset Management**, a company that offers “environmentally responsible IT asset retirement” (in other words, it recycles computer parts and components), environmental awareness of every sort is emphasized. Not only is the headquarters building “green,” there is also a display of the many things they did while planning the building to make it environmentally sensitive. Inside the conference room, the table is made of sunflower seeds. There is a rain garden outside and the building is surrounded by walking trails.

Employee nameplates are constructed (by new employees) out of recycled computer pieces, showing both commitment to the organization’s purpose and lots of individual creativity!

However, when fun is the brand and product, fun must also be part of the internal culture as well. At **Mattel**, employees
are shuttled between buildings in a Hot Wheels van. Employees are encouraged to collect Mattel toys (with Barbie playing a starring role, of course) and display them as part of their workspace.

Likewise, at the online auction company, eBay, merchandise, the very core of their business and brand, is celebrated. Each building is named after a category brand, such as Fashion or Home and Garden. The conference rooms are decorated accordingly. In the Fashion building, for instance, one conference room is decorated with a feature wall filled with shoes purchased on eBay. In one Home and Garden conference room, the wall displays pink flamingos. The expectation is that eBay’s customers are likely to find anything and everything they could possibly want online. And so the emphasis on quirky collections of unexpected, literally off-the-wall merchandise, brings that brand experience home to its employees every day.

Similarly, BuildaBear leverages their commitment to the comfort of a teddy bear by naming conference rooms after their furry products. The connection to their retail product message is consistent, using an internal creative team for communications throughout their facility, and using retail fixtures for displays similar to stores. As a family focused culture, their “World Bearquarters” is planned to accommodate the children and dogs typically found visiting, lending to a fun and playful atmosphere consistent with their culture and their product offerings.

By consistently expressing culture and brand messages, an organization is building upon a trusting relationship with their employees and customers. Internal and external brand alignment will increasingly play a more important role in the future according to the AMA study, “Cultivating Effective Corporate Cultures,” which stated, “Some observers would like the whole idea of a “corporate culture” to go away, arguing that it is too vague and amorphous. In a competitive global society, however, it will be more rather than less, important. That’s because, in the highly multicultural, technological mediated organizations of 2018, it will be even more critical for far flung organizations to forge unique identities for both customers and employees. This will be a part of the “branding” efforts that organizations embrace to maintain and establish market share in an extremely competitive world.”

Mattel Hot Wheels van

eBay pink flamingo conference room wall art and room signage
3. Gathering spaces to celebrate and build camaraderie

Celebrating and building camaraderie usually involves creating a sense of community inside the organization. And much like most successful communities, people need space in which to gather and experience events as a group. Think of a town square or one of the grand plazas of any major European city. These places encourage connectivity and communal behaviors that enrich the experience of those in the place. And we found that Best Companies have created the corporate equivalent at a variety of scales and expense.

Gathering spaces in Best Companies to Work For are considered highly important spaces; key strategic spaces to be cherished and protected. We found that gathering spaces at these companies range from large rooms dedicated specifically to all-hands meetings, to indoor and outdoor adaptable spaces that are multi-functional. Recognizing that it seems to be human nature to gather around food, many companies are creating enlarged kitchen/dining areas where people will convene in more informal situations. In many ways, Best Companies know the power of giving people the chance to gather – for fun, to celebrate, to remember, to honor, to collaborate, to relax. These can even be outdoor spaces, if one is lucky enough to have the right climate.

The value of “transition space” shouldn’t be overlooked. While found space might not be large enough to hold a full all-hands meeting, a wider than normal circulation path adjacent to support service areas such as copy centers, mailboxes or cafes might double function as a gathering space with the use of mobile furniture. At Kahler Slater, our Kahler Kafé actually functions as the periodical library, mail distribution center, eating and meeting space as well as the treats table where birthday edibles are centralized, intentionally designed to create opportunities for casual collisions. The most prominent feature is a large chalkboard wall where friendly challenges are posted and victorious celebrations are flaunted.

Does your organization utilize the workplace environment to celebrate success?

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Kahler Slater Kafé
Many of the survey respondents indicated that they have dedicated spaces for communal eating and celebrating with the intentional purpose of social engineering cross-functional collaboration. At Sage Products, a medical product manufacturer in Cary, Illinois, a large café with both indoor and outdoor seating provides an area where those in manufacturing join with those from the business offices to mingle over lunchtime – a respectful gesture to encourage building connections across the organization.

Gathering spaces can be very modest yet no less important. At SnagAJob, a national online job search company their communal meeting space is simply a large, unfinished storage space in their building with simple folding chairs and tables. Once a week, that room is transformed into a lively space for the entire headquarters team to meet, share information and to celebrate with “shout outs” where employees and leadership recognize outstanding performance and celebrate important business and personal milestones.

Equally unpretentious is the meeting space at Badger Mining, a multi-year Top 5 Best Small Company. It is as a company with a true family feel – multiple generations of family members have worked there. One large, flexible room serves many functions for lunch, training, birthday parties and even for CPR classes.

Meeting spaces don’t have to be inside. At McWhinney, they have made excellent use of the fact they are adjacent to a nature preserve. And so, in addition to the meeting areas they have indoors, they have also set up grills and picnic tables outdoors, giving their employees a place to sit and meet in the fresh air. Similarly, outdoor patios offer cookout opportunities for employees at Rackspace in Blacksburg, Virginia and at Northeast Delta Dental in New Hampshire - even in winter!

The findings indicate that most of the Best Companies surveyed considered creating or repurposing space to celebrate and offer opportunities to build camaraderie among employees. They intentionally considered the benefits that come from creating a community “focal point” within their facilities where employees can gather to relax, eat, share information and celebrate special events.
4. Visual communications that build pride, engage and recognize people and accomplishments

In the book, “The Ownership Quotient” the authors argue that organizations with “strong adaptive cultures” often have a competitive edge in the marketplace. In their work, they indicate that by celebrating and recognizing those who exemplify the organization’s values, its behaviors and its standards, an organization is investing in reinforcing its culture11. Not surprising to us, many of the subjects in their book also reside on the lists of companies acknowledged as Best Companies.

A recent study by Blessing White indicated that the number one characteristic sought after by young professionals is to “work for a solid company with a strong mission, great culture and upstanding leadership who lives and breathes their organizational values.”12

There are many ways that Best Companies have found to reinforce values, celebrate accomplishments, engage new employees and recognize the contributions of their organizations and their people. The passions and creativity of their employees (as individuals and as team members) are an essential part of telling the cultural story. Celebrating these accomplishments, consequently, is key to inspiring individuals to continue going above and beyond the call.

How does that translate into visual communications, you may ask? The workplace offers opportunity to use visual communication in ways that strike an emotional cord around company values and draw attention to the spirit of the company. We believe that if you repeatedly experience the culture and the values in visible and tactile ways, you learn to appreciate their meaning. This does not imply that by posting values on the walls you can ensure a great culture.

The GPTW® Institute defines pride as:

- Pride in one’s personal job and individual contributions
- Pride in work produced by one’s team or workgroup and
- Pride in the company’s product and community standing

In employee surveys or casual interactions, our employees describe our offices or facility as a workplace they are proud to show their friends and family.

| 76% | Strongly agree |
| 22% | Agree |

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However, the visual reminders can help to hold individuals accountable and act as reminders to reinforce the importance of consistent behaviors.

The toy company, Mattel, features oversized graphics throughout the building that show children playing. One example includes a banner of two smiling children’s faces above the entranceway, flanking a sign that celebrates the fact that the company is one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For. The company’s values are playfully displayed throughout – emphasis on the word play – which factors into each of its values: Play to Grow; Play Together; Play With Passion; Play Fair. Photos of joyful children everywhere remind Mattel employees who they’re really working for and that it’s also culturally okay for them themselves to experience the joy of play as they go about their work.

Whether a company invests in large scale super graphics as are seen in the eBay lobby, in the conference room naming at Kahler Slater or the use of simple posters stating the core values at SnagAJob’s Richmond HQ, the efforts to reinforce values can have a lasting impact reminding tenured and new employees of what behavior is expected of them.

At McWhinney, new employees are welcomed in a culturally appropriate way; a tree is planted in their honor on the company nature park, reinforcing their connection to the sustainability of the area as well as sending a message, “This is where you can put down roots and grow your future.” Colorado’s magnificent scenery has prompted many of McWhinney’s employees to become avid, amateur nature photographers. And so McWhinney has set up a friendly competition for the most beautiful nature photos, which are then framed and hung where visitors and employees alike can admire them.

Using visual communications to connect employees takes a personal twist at DAXKO, a software company and 2009 Best Company. They have a “Favorites Wall” where each team member is photographed holding a sign or object that tells passers by what their favorite thing is - be it a book, travel location, sports team, movie, etc. This wall provides an opportunity to make a personal connection between employees, while reinforcing their team focused culture.
Managing first impressions is an important responsibility of communications. At Root Learning, a business consulting practice in Ohio uses a nature theme upon which many of their communications are built. Their lobby features a tree where names of all clients who visit the space are recorded and a celebratory history display focuses on the growth of the organization and the impact its growth has had on helping other companies grow. The company logo, a large tree with substantial roots shown, is a consistent reminder of the role this business consulting firm plays in nurturing the lives of its employees and customers.

In Cleveland at the Sherwin Williams headquarters, the lobby offers visitors a museum-like tour of the history of the company’s innovations in paint. Somewhat formal in nature, the museum setting offers a playful note of whimsy and community pride. A specially painted model of an electric guitar (Cleveland is the home of the Rock and Roll museum), featuring the famous “we cover the world” Sherwin Williams logo as a can of paint spills down the neck of the guitar onto the globe, which makes up the body of the instrument.

Formal displays to celebrate accomplishments abound at Best Companies where formal and informal trophy cases, wall displays and banners offer visitors and employees a connection to company and team performance. The main communications wall at ENEGO, an engineering company, brings employees together to learn about philanthropy opportunities, community events and to celebrate business results.

Rackspace took the idea of building pride in accomplishments to the extreme with one element of their workplace graphics. They created the world’s largest word search puzzle of their organization values and had it certified by the Guiness Book of World Records. In addition to providing a large focal point in the space, the employees are challenged to find and “claim” words in the puzzle on their Intranet. Unique displays can also be found at Zappos where a T-Shirt Hall of Fame celebrates important milestones of achievement.

Communicating what is valued and using visual communications to connect people are two important ways that Best Companies build pride and reinforce culture — key cornerstones of successful organizations. Using visual communications to capture the minds and hearts of employees, to tell the story of an organiza-
tion and to reflect the company values were found to be successful strategies deployed by the company’s in our study. In particular, communicating the commitment to a larger community came through in both formal and informal ways. For Mattel, the ceiling space filled with banners at the entry to the campus cafeteria became the perfect place to connect employees to the mission of Mattel’s philanthropy to organization’s supporting children...a fitting connection to both their brand values and focus on play. The family focus at 4imprint showed through as their philanthropy efforts were focused on a map showing support for an employee and her mom walking coast to coast to raise money for a charity.

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

**MANIFESTING CULTURE IN SPACE: THE OVERLOOKED CULTURAL ADVANTAGE**

Employee pride and corporate culture are both somewhat abstract concepts, so it’s understandable that many companies may overlook ways of manifesting their cultures in the physical workplace. Company leaders may assume that to capture culture and express it in inspiring ways will be too expensive to even consider...or perhaps limiting in terms of timeliness and relevance. The concern might be that if you try to tell a story by using the physical environment, the oft-told story might grow tired quickly.

When a company considers all the ways it builds and reinforces its culture, the physical expression of who they are and what they stand for is often overlooked. Consider for a moment the many ways that companies tell the world who they are and what they have to offer: websites, blogs, Facebook, press releases, speeches, videos, etc. Even employee “handbooks” contribute to perpetuating a company’s carefully crafted brand personality and culture. These are the expected players in telling the company’s story to the world and to its employees.

But the often overlooked dimension to company storytelling – a third dimension, offers a way the company uses its physical attributes; the way space is allocated, the way it presents itself in its lobby, in the work areas, in the flow between departments and with the visual communication messages on the walls. All of these elements offer opportunities to manifest culture and
help organizations express their authenticity. And it is a proven method to tell a story...Throughout all of history, great cultures have used the physical environment to tell their stories. From the caves of Lascaux and the Sistine Chapel, to the modern halls of sports venues and family living rooms, our stories and our cultures are on display for all to interpret and understand.

Although the workplace environment in the future may transform even more into decentralized workplaces, the workplace will remain a place for people to gather, to associate, collaborate and to innovate. Within these environments are opportunities to reinforce, manifest and celebrate the culture you have or help to support the transformation into the culture you want.

CONCLUSION
In this study, we have found that best companies are leveraging their work environments as strategic tools to reinforce, manifest and celebrate their unique cultures.

Our study reinforces that when the physical attributes of a company match its brand messages and culture, the company stands to experience measurable advantages such as employee attraction and retention, inspired and collaborative work teams, pride in the organization that can translate into discretionary effort and innovation that leads to a true competitive advantage.
APPENDIX

What Makes a Great Workplace?: Learning From the Best Place to Work Companies

Attributes of a well-designed workplace include environments that allow:

01. Individuals to perform distraction-free work
02. Collaboration and impromptu interaction
03. Undistracted teamwork and meetings
04. Accommodation of personal work styles and workstation personalization
05. Individual control of thermal comfort
06. Access to daylight
07. Control of glare
08. Workspaces allocated by function
09. Clear wayfinding
10. Adjacencies that support work flow
11. Accommodation of changing technology
12. Ergonomic accommodation
13. A professionally-maintained plant program
14. Expression of organizational culture

REFERENCES


9. Cultivating Effective Corporate Cultures, p43.


Great Culture.
Great Workplace.
Lessons From America’s Best Companies

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