

## The Editorial Notebook Office Landscapes and Inner Space

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### The Editorial Notebook

# Office Landscapes and Inner Space

Almost half of the offices in America are being done over today — 40 percent of a recent sampling of corporations had remodeled or redesigned in the last five years — and half of American office workers are miserable. This conclusion is drawn from a recent survey of office workers, their employers and office designers questioned about the best working environment.

Although 63 percent of executives believe that they have made their employees happy with the design changes, seven out of ten employees express no joy over the results. Quite aside from the trauma of coming in after a weekend to find that one's ego has been violated by an unfamiliar setting, there seems to be a failure of communication between employers and the employed about preferences and priorities.

The specialists who design new offices are aware of the basic requirements for heat, light, air and equip-

ment, but seem to think that new furnishings and lively color schemes can create contentment and productivity. Employers favor computerization and innovative technology, which are low on employee lists. The bosses also believe that worker satisfaction increases with the latest fashions in office interiors.



Few workers agree. They resent the slick, inflexible, impersonal arrangements featured in the professional magazines, full of standardized euphemisms for environmental amenity. The new "office landscape" has nothing to do with trees except for those next to the receptionist's desk. New office systems simply regiment discontent. The workers want more, not less, privacy; better workspace, and easier access to essential equipment. They rate these things higher than raises or fringe benefits. They agreed, almost to a man and a woman, that the rela-

tionship of surroundings to job satisfaction is extremely high.

Their call is not for more stylish design but for more considerate and comfortable design. The wish for private and individualized working quarters is dramatically expressed in, of all places, the schools of architecture: Students turn elegant studios designed by prize-winning graduates into shanty-town shambles partitioned with plasterboard and tin — artistic license in the quest for one's own place, to do one's own thing.

The business of "space planning" cannot begin to cope with the deep-seated needs, inner defenses and libidinal responses that dictate the personal sense of space. Those who spend more time in offices than at home find the psyche continually assaulted. Gild not the lily, perfume not the air; when the designer comes in, let the worker beware.

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