Connecting the dots between workspace design and the triple bottom line

Today several organizations around the world are encouraging and promoting standards for environmentally efficient buildings. Interest in these “green” buildings has increased immensely, but just like financial metrics do not provide a total view of the effectiveness and efficiency of the workspace, the environmental focus tends to be one dimensional. Work in today’s office environment is first and foremost a social activity. In order to fully understand how to support effectiveness and efficiency in the office workspace we must understand how financial, social and environmental issues are interdependent. Building on their user-centered research and understanding of social networks and their commitment to the environment, Steelcase, a global office manufacturer, has developed an approach to engaging their clients in understanding their workspace in an integrated economic, social and environmental framework. A review of the state-of-the-art research and knowledge of the workspace and its effects was performed. The significant contributing factors were identified and their relation to a set of sustainability impact categories were determined and if possible quantified. The workspace is an asset that can be employed to support an organization’s strategic objectives by acting as social interfaces that affect behaviors and culture. In order to allow sustainability to be ‘sustained’ in companies it has to be integrated in the organization’s context and aligned with its strategic direction. Characteristic business drivers in companies were mapped and then linked with the appropriate sustainability impact categories. This approach to connecting the workspace with sustainability allows companies to assess their own performance in each of the sustainability dimensions relative to their own business context. This is expected to engage and empower companies to take action and make informed sustainable decisions in the design of their workspace.

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