

Client Enrichment Series – Q & A



Topic: Shape Your Agency's Workplace With Activity Based Planning

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Date of Presentation: January 21, 2021

Links to [Slide Deck](#) and [Recording](#) (Passcode %0XZn33G)

Link to Client Enrichment Series Information: www.gsa.gov/ces

Additional Workplace Links:

workplace@gsa.gov - email for the National PBS Workplace Team

[Activity Based Planning Guidebook](#) - Tools and resources for designing a workplace that responds to organizational metrics and employee work styles

[Sound Matters](#) - A guide to achieving acoustic comfort in the contemporary office

[WIFM - Workplace Investment and Feasibility Modeling tool](#) - previous CES session recording

[Return to Workplace Strategy Book](#) - lessons learned, a framework for decision making and practical examples

1. How are time/space utilization analysis conducted typically? Can you provide an example?

Answer: Time/Space Utilization research approach is used to understand how a space is actually used by an organization. It's most commonly used to understand typical meeting room use. For example, if a client agency location currently has a 10-person meeting room, the Time/Space Utilization approach could be used to identify how often the 10-person meeting room is occupied and to what extent the room is at full capacity. If the 10-person meeting room is primarily used for small 4 person meetings, and other feedback from staff indicates a lack of meeting room space, a workplace recommendation could be to replace the 10-person meeting room with two 5-person meeting rooms. However, the Time/Space Utilization research approach is labor-intensive. It requires a person to actively observe the subject space and take notes on

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its use. To reduce the cost of the effort, this activity is often done by a client agency staff member who is quickly trained by GSA or the workplace consultant.

2. Is there a min/ max of a space project where we could use this? This seems a more formal process of the informal process we normally perform when building out new space? When is the right time to use this process?

Answer: There is no minimum or maximum size for using the Activity Based Planning approach. It is scalable and GSA has used the overall approach for organizations ranging from 20 employees to 2,000 employees. During the initial discussions between GSA and the client agencies to define the workplace engagement, research tools are selected and customized based on the location's population size and other criteria.

Generally speaking, the ideal time to start a workplace engagement is between 6 - 9 months prior to when GSA needs the final requirements package, such as a Program of Requirements (POR). The Activity Based Planning recommendations determine these requirements, and it can take some time to coordinate diagnostic research activities with local leadership and bargaining unit representatives, create initial workplace recommendations, refine the recommendations based on local leader guidance, and then create the final set of requirements.

3. What changes did GSA R6 make since moving into their facility in 2016?

Answer: GSA has not done any significant changes since the initial move-in. Only a few minor changes have been made, such as adding more dry erase walls for collaboration, and small furniture modifications in a couple of areas where furniture was being underutilized.

4. Does GSA offer these workplace planning services across all regions?

Answer: Yes! Workplace strategy services are offered across the country. GSA has both in-house personnel to manage workplace engagements, as well as a network of workplace consultants to also provide these services.

5. How do you deal with Union workplace standards when you are considering the workspace layout? Our requirements of 56 sq. ft. cubicles for everyone, and 100, 200 and 300 sq. ft offices make these kinds of changes hard to carry out. Even hoteling and telework has to be approved by the Union.

Answer: When a client agency has a union workplace standard, GSA always recommends that preliminary discussions occur with the union representative and client agency

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leadership before the workplace engagement begins. These discussions include a detailed review of the Activity Based Planning approach that is recommended for that location.

One topic that is addressed in these discussions is the common misconception that in order to be equitable, everyone should have the same size workstation or office, or that workstation/office sizes should be based on rank or grade. There are other workplace strategies that can better support employee work practices, especially if those employees accomplish very different types of work. By understanding how work is and could be more effectively accomplished, the Activity Based Planning approach identifies the performance characteristics of an equitable workplace. A part of this is also identifying how other work locations, such as working from home, can contribute to (or hinder) this goal.

6. *Is there a min/ max on a space project where we could use process? This is a more formal process of the informal process we normally perform when building out new space? We couldn't use this for every space action so when is the right time to use this process?*

Answer: Activity Based Planning can be used on any sized project. The answer to Question 2 above describes the scalability and timing of using this approach.

7. *Does activity based planning occur during, before, or after the lease procurement stage? It seems wise if it were done early.*

Answer: Activity Based Planning identifies those strategies that will improve the effectiveness of the workplace. Depending on the overall goals of the workplace engagement, outcomes typically consist of space requirements (e.g., Program of Requirements) and other non-spatial recommendations such as telework and mobility strategies. Activity Based Planning should be accomplished as early as possible before any space requirements are needed. Question #2 provides more details on the overall timing.

While Activity Based Planning is best conducted as a means to developing space requirements, many of the research techniques can be used during and even after the space procurement. For example, using a combination of the Visioning Session, Pre-Occupancy Survey, and Employee Focus Groups could provide insights into how to improve the organization's culture or business operations. Conducting a Current Space Analysis could identify ways to "fine-tune" the workplace without the need for costly alterations or furniture reconfigurations.

8. *Will any of the tools mentioned here be available for customers to review after the meeting?*

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Answer: Of the research tools used in the Activity Based Planning, the questions used in the Pre-Occupancy Survey are available by sending a request to ryan.doerfler@gsa.gov. Ryan will send the survey template that GSA uses and provide an overview of how it is customized to meet the needs of the project and client agency. The other research tools are uniquely created for each workplace engagement and are not available as a standalone version that can be distributed.

9. Are there cost estimates (based on square footage or headcount) published anywhere for the range of services (Activity Based Planning Diagnostic Tools) offered in a Workplace Engagement?

Answer: Like many professional services, the cost for a workplace engagement will vary depending on the deliverables that are produced. Deliverables can range from space program calculations to concept drawings to telework implementation guides. The cost of a workplace engagement is dependent on the research tools that are utilized. For example, the Time/Space Utilization approach is labor-intensive and can significantly increase the overall cost. For this reason, it's only recommended for targeted studies on very large projects.

10. Has GSA had any discussions on how/if the pandemic will result in changes to workspace planning? Specifically, the utilization rate and shared spaces (hoteling).

Answer: The long-term impacts of the pandemic on workplace planning is a topic that GSA is continually exploring. Within GSA, the significant majority of employees across the country have been full-time teleworking since March 2020. GSA was in the fortunate position where shared space approaches, such as through hoteling (ie, desk sharing with the ability to reserve a desk), was relatively common across the country. Many employees, such as those in our headquarters, were already accustomed to sharing a desk and working with remote teams. As with many organizations, both private and public-sector, GSA is currently evaluating to what extent can expanded full-time telework, as well as shared spaces, can be a more permanent workplace strategy for both creating an effective workplace and yield a lower utilization rate (ie, the average amount of area per FTE).

Activity Based Planning provides a consistent structured approach for this exploration. While each client agency has a unique mission, with correspondingly unique work processes and organizational cultures, the approaches in Activity Based Planning can be utilized by any organization. Strategies, including desk-sharing, are selected and customized so as to yield the maximum workplace effectiveness.

11. What is a range of cost that agency has to pay for a Workplace Engagement?

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Answer: As described in the answer to Question 9 above, the cost for an Activity Based Planning workplace engagement can range significantly depending on the research tools that are utilized and the desired deliverables to be produced. Reach out to our Workplace team at workplace@gsa.gov to discuss the specific scope and desired outcomes of your project.