

Navigating Design Change in the Academic Workplace

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Historically, the corporate workplace has reflected society's cultural and technological achievements, from the production-line settings of the early 20th Century to the 1950s German-influenced 'Burolandschaft' or 'office landscape' and the more recent activity-based working paradigm. The design of the workplace has remained a contested field of ideas aimed at maximising productivity, minimising overhead costs, maintaining staff satisfaction and reflecting the organisational brand. The academic workplace has seemingly escaped such interrogation and scrutinisation over the decades, until now. Increasingly universities are being confronted with the dilemma of growing student (and therefore staff) populations, reduced government funding, limited building stock and finite campus space for new buildings. In the search for space optimisation strategies, the academic workplace has become the focus of opportunity and change.

Historically, academic offices have reflected academic status, that is, the larger the office the more senior the ranking of the academic. Until relatively recently, university space guidelines have confirmed the status-space relationship of academic offices, rendering a challenging process of breaking down such bastions of tradition. However, academic work activities have evolved, no longer represented by the archetypal image of the secluded book-writer who emerges periodically to teach. While the pressure upon academics to balance research and teaching continues, the activities are increasingly becoming collaborative, interactive and technology-enhanced. The contention of many people within universities is that the typical individual academic office no longer serves the best interests of research and teaching objectives, suggesting the need for work environments that encourage interaction, knowledge-sharing and collegiality. Architects and university facility managers are looking to examples of corporate workplaces that have transformed under the mantle of promoting innovation, creativity and productivity. However – perhaps unsurprisingly – such initiatives are being met with significant resistance from academics who are reluctant to relinquish hegemonic control of their spatial symbolic status.

The Deakin University experience reflects the direction of many Australian universities, aiming to introduce new space standards that move away from the status-space relationship. On the Burwood campus, Deakin University is building a new Burwood Highway Frontage Building to house academics from a broad cross-section of Faculties. In Geelong, the Waterfront campus is being refurbished to consolidate the Faculties of Business & Law and Arts & Education. The process of change has been rocky to say the least. This presentation will outline a 'warts and all' narrative from these two projects, in the hope that other universities aiming to travel down a similar path may benefit from the experience. As the Deakin University experience has demonstrated, **the right** leadership and communication is essential.