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THE CONCRETE JUNGLE



product+ Evolution

Nine-to-Five Allsteel Offices

Examining a century of office spaces.

Open or closed floor plan? Standing desks or collaborative tables? Foosball table next to a beer fridge or coffee machine? There's no doubt that the office environment is changing, and the best way for designers to determine where these changes are going is to consider the past.

In order to identify the trends that shaped the workplace as we know it today, we worked with Allsteel to dive into their over 100-year history of office design. From the Industrial Revolution to World War II to our current age of smartphones and Internet, where and how we spend our nine-to-five days has evolved over the years. Take a look. [i+s](#)



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THE OFFICE AS FACTORY | 1880-1945

Characterized by wide open spaces without partitions, offices in the late-19th through mid-20th centuries focused on maximum efficiency. Because employees in early offices were typically tasked with repetitive processing, the importance of the workspace required an area where supervisors could easily watch over employees.

THE CHANGING FACE OF WORKSPACES | POST-WAR

After WWII, employers began to take comfort and style into consideration as jobs became less routine and repetitive, instead focusing more on retaining employees and creating a space where clients could be brought in. Advancements in technology and the sleek style of Modernism crept into the office space, adding color, ergonomics, and image-oriented furnishings for both staff and management.

CUBICLE REVOLUTION | 1964

The introduction of modular components was originally intended to create more organic and open environments for employees, creating private, personal space within an open office. Unfortunately, the new design ended up being misused to create the efficiency-driven, dense, and regimented “cube farms” current offices are rallying against.



BIRTH OF THE TECHNOLOGY HUB | 1980s

Advancements in technology led to the introduction of the fax machine and personal computer into the office, which helped streamline the work process, but led workers to be even more tethered to their desks. In trying to accommodate these new means of operating, workstation standardization made a return in the office landscape.

OFFICE ANYWHERE, ANYTIME | 1990s

While technology has only grown in importance from the addition of personal computers and the Internet, the increasingly mobile models—such as laptops and VPN—broke the chains of total standardization. Employees were free to work from home or on the road, and they began to roam the office as work became more complex, interdependent, and collaborative.

OFFICE AS CONSUMER CHOICE | 2000s-PRESENT

Further breaking free from the desk, contemporary offices understand that work can be done anywhere at any time. Because jobs now take on many different forms, the spaces where work occurs need to be more transitional, offering a broad range of spaces and settings for optimum efficiency. Bye-bye to desk farms—in our ever quickening fast-paced world, offices are shifting to keep us on the go, and working in a way that's best for us.