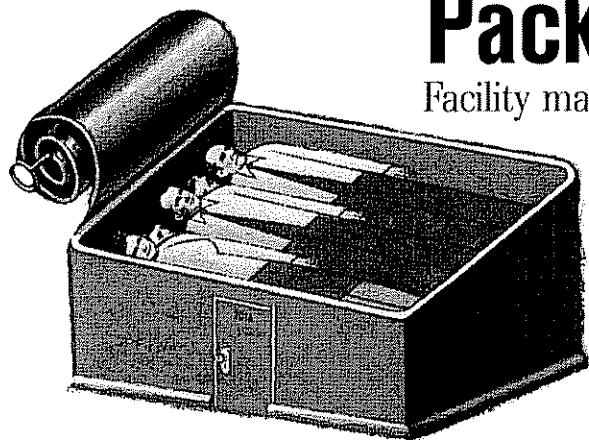


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BY MARY K. PRATT
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

Ever feel as if the walls are closing in? It's not your imagination. They are. A recent study found that offices are getting smaller.

And your psyche isn't the only one learning to cope. Those in charge of designing and managing office space are making adjustments, too.

Facility managers are rethinking their roles. They're adjusting day-to-day operations as well as design standards to make these tighter quarters as comfortable as possible.

The report, by the **International Facility Management Association**, found office space shrank dramatically between 1994 and 2002. And it's affecting workers at all levels:

- Executives and upper management lost 17 percent of their space, with averages dropping from 289 square feet in 1994 to 239 in 2002
- Senior managers lost 15 percent, with average square footage going from 200 in 1994 to 169 in 2002.
- Middle managers have had to make do with 16.5 percent less space, going from 151 to 126 square feet.
- Senior professionals went from 115 square feet to 97 square feet, a nearly 16 percent loss
- Technical professionals lost 12 percent of their space, dropping from 90 to 79 square feet.
- Senior clerical personnel lost only 2.5 percent, going from 81 to 79 square feet.
- And general clerical staff went from 69 to 66

Packing 'em in

Facility managers grapple with the ever-shrinking office

square feet, a 4 percent loss

"It started in the late '90s with the rising cost of real estate and the tremendous demand for workers in office space," said **Steven Basque**, principal at **ADD Inc.**, a Cambridge design firm. "The last couple

of years — with the abundance of real estate — haven't led to a dramatic turnaround. They're still cutting back, and I think it's because electrical, heating and air conditioning costs are still high."

Companies should prepare their workers for the transition to tighter quarters, Basque said. They should also highlight the positive points. If you're taking filing cabinets out of cubicles, emphasize that you'll be putting them in common areas so everyone can find what they need.

When including everything from workstations to hallways, conference rooms to kitchenettes, facility professionals once planned on an average of 250 square feet per person when designing office space.

"I do know today in certain environments people are driving that down to 200, and I'm aware of places where it's down to 180," said **Bob Takach**, a portfolio transaction manager with **Trammell Crow Co.** in Boston.

From top to bottom

And it isn't just a matter of cramming existing furniture together. Facility managers need to re-examine everything from airflow to door size, electrical systems to furniture configuration, experts said.

Existing infrastructure needs to be checked first, said IFMA chairwoman **Sheila Sheridan**, who retired in January as director of facilities and services at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Can the system provide enough heating, air conditioning and ventilation as people start pack-

ing in? If not, the system will have to be upgraded, she said. And then there are the electrical systems and lights. Can they support all the extra people?

Designing the space is another big consideration for facilities managers. With good design and the right furniture, Takach said, "you can make a flow more dense and still make it work."

Furniture manufacturers are making smaller pieces to accommodate this trend. Meanwhile, space planners are focusing on design concepts they hope will keep employees close without making them feel cramped.

Designers are even taking out traditional doors that swing open, replacing them with sliding doors that require less space.

Making it last

Meanwhile, owners are cutting out delicate finishes that can't withstand heavy traffic flow. And they're asking their facilities managers and space planners to add fabric on the walls, rugs on the floor and special ceiling materials to help minimize the additional noise that comes from putting more people in smaller spaces.

Planners are also building in meeting or conference spaces so that workers who need privacy — for example, to make a conference call or hold a sensitive meeting — have access to such places. Software helps facilities and office managers schedule access to these rooms.

Facilities managers have to examine other areas that nonprofessionals might overlook: Do the elevators run frequently enough to accommodate the rush of additional people at peak hours, such as lunchtime? Are there enough bathrooms to avoid lines, and are they cleaned frequently enough? What about parking? If a building now holds 25 percent more people, that could create a crunch of cars.

"There are incremental things that go beyond just saying space is getting smaller," Sheridan said, adding that it's up to facility managers to work with property owners and business owners to point out these factors.

"It really is a team effort," she said.