

Case Study

ThoughtForm, Inc

This 20-year old, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania firm produces information (web sites, publishing systems, learning curricula, company branding) and depends entirely on how well its knowledge workers create, collaborate and communicate. The speed at which that work happens is critical to their success.

The ThoughtForm work environment was designed about the time computers entered the communications industry, so it didn't support mobile computing well. The space also couldn't support the company's evolving teams and work processes.

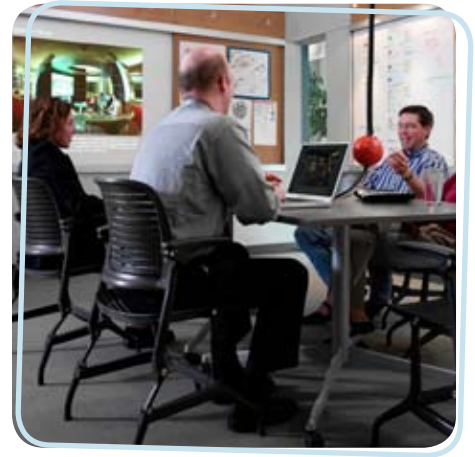
Architecture and design firm Archideas and Steelcase® used Work Effectiveness tools to connect ThoughtForm's collaborative business goals with their space:

- Observation – Using techniques developed by social anthropologists, the design team “lives” in the actual workspace to see how work gets done, what's missing, how people and information interact and move throughout the organization
- Network Analysis – Sophisticated electronic surveys to map the organization's networks: who the “go-to” people are, how decisions are made, how structured or loose work processes are, etc. The analysis focuses on enhancing innovation, communication, decision making, work process and learning
- Co-design – Using structured exercises, the design team brings the space's future occupants directly into the design process

The team identified key business issues the new space had to address:

- Expressing the ThoughtForm brand by making work visible and showcasing thoughtful workplace innovations
- Fostering the sharing of ideas to support innovation and learning
- Supporting effective work processes and diverse work styles

The new ThoughtForm workspace is smaller than their previous one, but workstations have more function, support more diverse workstyles, and make it easier for teams to succeed.



Some of the ThoughtForm workspace solutions:

- Team neighborhoods formed with Pathways® Post and Beam to organize space, support lighting and route utilities
- Informal meeting and hospitality areas with Detour™, Stitz and Cachet® seating
- Modular, interchangeable tack/write boards throughout the space to make the ThoughtForm process visible and give ideas an easy way to travel
- New workstations are smaller than the company's previous ones (80 sq. ft. v. 44 sq. ft.) but these Answer® workstations have more worksurface, and along with Smoke™ mobile tables give workers great flexibility to arrange their space how they need to
- Details® Slatwall and monitor arms get worktools, piles and monitors off the worksurface
- Smaller workstations also opened up more space for project rooms, conference areas and enclaves

The results of a post-occupancy Network Analysis at ThoughtForm show that a knowledge business can be measured just as effectively as a production line:

- Innovation measures are up 15%
- Networks that encourage collaboration and innovation are 14% healthier
- Work processes are 37% more effective, with a subsequent study showing a reduction in project cycle time

“Our space says, ‘Wow!’ Visitors can immediately see our thinking, our products, our culture. It increases their confidence. We took a big leap, re-engineering our workplace from top to bottom. Naturally, you'd expect a long period of adjustment. That didn't happen. We hit the ground running and haven't stopped.”

- Reed Agnew, ThoughtForm principal