

# Software Design


Microsoft takes note of modern demands in office design for its MEA headquarters – a functional adaptation of a shopping centre.

As tasty and tempting as it may be to create a prototypical office design and apply it to all their workplaces worldwide, corporate heads should resist such lures for the sake of their own businesses. Generic recipes for workspaces – usually reeking of neutral colours and ugly furnishings – don't work. There's nothing worse than making your staff feel like they spend eight hours or more a day in a place that is more like a clinic or interrogation room. More and more companies of all sizes are reaching this conclusion, inviting creative takes on the workplace and addressing today's more transient workforce.

For the set up of its MEA headquarters in Istanbul, Microsoft sought to address these issues together with Swanke Hayden Connell Architects (SHCA). The 75,000 sqf office inhabits a building that was originally constructed as a shopping mall, hence its unconventional hexagonal floorplate. Its four floors are connected by a central void which acts as a light well and houses the elevator column. Natural light is a central tenet of this project. The entire top floor is encased with floor-to-ceiling windows and topped with a fenestrated apex. This sunlit level serves as a lounge balcony with sofa chairs and informal meeting areas. Its glass encased levels below are also flooded with natural light. Walls, ceilings and floors are sparkling white for a pristine and polished aesthetic. At the base of the void, raised timber floors offer a reprieve from the bleached interiors and provide an open area. Other business support areas and staff amenities include a product launch/demonstration suite, staff cafe, fitness space and the rooftop.

Ultimately, large MNCs such as Microsoft want their workplaces to be highly efficient, aesthetically engaging

and appropriately stamped with the company's identity. In many cases all three aspects are important for staff attraction and retention, thereby affecting a company's chances of long-term success. Inserting tight-knit clusters of cubicles onto a floor may be the most efficient use of a footprint, but sorely lacks stimulation and opportunities for collaboration. Alternatively, having an entertaining and playful office with amusing breakout areas may appeal initially, but is not necessarily conducive to productivity. And since many employees are shuttling to and from meetings and working on the road or at home, fixed desks are becoming obsolete. Therefore, SHCA went with a flexible and open space devoid of private offices.

As for corporate branding, tasteful and subtle means is the name of the game. This project's most blatant logo representation can be seen at the reception counter. Here, a clean achromatic block only decorated with an offset company insignia greets clients. Behind the desk, the company name is emblazoned on a string curtain giving the appearance of a pixelated image. More subtle depictions are found in its curved feature walls embedded with light cubes in white, red, green, blue and yellow (company colours). Providing a measure of visual and acoustic privacy, these areas serve as casual meeting spaces with comfortable lounge chairs. "This interactive environment not only significantly improved internal communications and productivity but is as stylish as it is sustainable in one energised, agile and adaptable work ecosystem that supports collaboration anywhere, anytime and anyway. The success of this building shines though its theme and that is truly Microsoft," says Renier Saayman, MEA Portfolio Manager at Microsoft Real Estate and Facilities Division. 

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