

LINDA HAUSMANIS, KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE WORKSPACE DESIGN SHOW 2021
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Leveraging the lynchpin profession

****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY****

Hello everyone,

My name is Linda Hausmanis. I am CEO of the Institute of Workplace and Facilities Management. It's an honour to have been invited to speak today and I am delighted to be here.

We live in turbulent times. They say that time speeds up as we get older. It certainly feels that way. In the five years since I became CEO at what was then the BIFM, we have seen enormous changes. And as we follow developments up in Glasgow this week, we know that ongoing change and adaptation are essential to our future survival. For many this is unsettling and challenging.

But I am an optimist.

The American writer Kelly Corrigan has said this about turbulence:

"Without turbulence the sky is just a big blue hole. Without turbulence, you sink."

Today I want to land on a few things that strike a note of optimism and opportunity. Not least that the *workplace* opportunity has never been more ripe – whether you come from a workspace design discipline, as many of you do; or from the workplace and facilities discipline like the professionals that I represent.

One way to understand a sector's evolution is a time series of activity.

It is twenty years since the Institute I represent held its first awards. You can tell quite a lot by looking at how that celebration of excellence has evolved from then to now.

In many respects it's an encouraging picture. In this critical period for our climate, it's good to acknowledge our profession's longstanding contribution to environmental wellbeing, which we have been recognising for two decades.

As I stand here, in the week of COP26 it's useful to be able to offer a topical example. But I use it because it is also one that illustrates the case I'd like to make today for the workplace and facilities profession. The lynchpin profession you might call it; the one whose super-connector potential can really help organisations to achieve higher goals.

Through our Awards - which has evolved from a modest "Office of the Year" competition – you can trace an arc for FM from a profession whose identity with building management was total, to one finding that its core purpose – its "why" - is fundamentally about enabling people and enabling work, wherever it happens.

Back in 2001, the Best Customer Service Initiative was the only category that hinted at the involvement of people.

Yet time and again, I hear it said that FM has always been fundamentally a people profession. Indeed, some commentators have argued, since the very first definitions of facilities management, that workplace management is FM's true nature; and its identification with 'building management' and nothing more is a reaction to its heavy commodification in the 1980s and 90s, where any idea that it could be a value creator in organisations was ignored.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with building management per se; or that it can't be a specialism. Heaven knows we have seen the critical role that building custodianship has played during successive lockdowns and in recent developments on building safety. It's part of our DNA.

But in recent years, we have seen the people focus being cemented in our profession, and the recognition that culture and technology, as much as space, are enablers for people to do their best possible work, driving productivity.

As a mark of how things have evolved - or caught up - the initiatives celebrated by the sector in 2021 include workplace experience, collaboration, social value, wellbeing, diversity and inclusion. All of those concepts helping to shape our workplaces today and tomorrow.

In one sense things have come a long way. One only has to look at the brilliant Workspace Design talks agenda you have put together to see the connection between place, people and productivity: The Experience of the Future Workspace; Designs to Inspire Creativity and Innovation; Inclusive Design; Designing Environments to Improve Employee Wellbeing. Its all there. This is not the productivity of F.W. Taylor's nineteenth century scientific work studies, but a route to creative, innovative, inclusive productivity. Perhaps a more sustainable productivity too – in every sense.

Here is a workplace future – to paraphrase from the show's website - based on togetherness, collaboration, and the spirit of cooperation. And here is a lynchpin profession that can help to optimise that place taking into account workspace, technology and culture. Not workplace limited to “office” space but anywhere that work happens.

Shifting the focus to how people work, not where people work.

The origins of workplace

Hybrid working is the phrase of the moment. Will it stay or will it go? I see that you are discussing that one tomorrow. I'd like to suggest that hybrid isn't a brand new concept. Nor is it a template solution. Rather, it is an example of workplace principles in action. What do I mean by that?

In December 2016, a report called *The Workplace Advantage* was published by the Stoddart Review, in memory of the late Chris Stoddart, a former FM of the year and a passionate advocate of workplace principles. It was a landmark piece of work and five years on it remains a beacon for demonstrating the contribution that the workplace can make to organisational success.

A key finding was that the tech-enabled workplace actually brings people together, facilitating greater levels of collaboration and innovation, underlining the very purpose of the workplace as a productivity enabler.

If the pandemic has shown us one thing, it is the speed of technological evolution. Technology rapidly stretched the concept of workplace last year as millions of us became remote workers overnight. And we continue to see its use in the shift from managing buildings better to creating better experiences, so it's no surprise that we've seen changes in technology regarded as the foremost positive force by the facilities market in our 2020 and

2021 Outlook surveys.

The pandemic has brought us closer to workplace than we have yet been. I've heard it said that it changed the office more in one year than in the previous hundred. It has forced on us the opportunity to reimagine the workplace. As we move into new modes of working, we are seeing organisations adapt physical spaces, working culture and technologies. In many major organisations the workplace and facilities teams are leading this change. It has confirmed them as the department of enablement.

This was illustrated beautifully by Martin Read who in his editorial to the “hybrid” edition of *Facilitate* last month, observes that opportunities for the workplace profession to see through transformational change have in the past been hampered by cost and board level ambivalence. This time, he argues, the C suite has been attuned to hybrid working from the start as business owners have seen workers adapt easily to sudden relocation causing *them* to reconsider long held perceptions of where office work is done.

This is a moment for workplace. Adapting workspaces, culture and technology to empower people to work wherever they are most productive should be the goal, because fundamentally workplace is driven by how people work, not where people work. That is workplace in action.

We may have been saying this for some time, but of course, it is relatively early days. The future of work and the hybrid / non hybrid debate will continue. Can we know how more distributed working patterns will affect us in the longer term? Can one-size fit all? Is it good for our wellbeing? Where does the workspace and responsibility for it begin and end? How will organisations manage their property portfolios? In our 2021 Outlook Report, 84% of client side respondents had changed their flexible working strategies and nearly six in ten said they would be reducing the amount of space they occupy. What will happen to our town centres? How will these changes influence our carbon and climate goals? Many unknowns. Much to learn. So, we have to control what we can.

What we know is that each organisation is unique and will require a bespoke approach to optimise productivity, underpinned by meaningful engagement. The opportunity is here for facilities professionals to be front and centre of that, assisted by technology.

What we expect to see is more skilled facilities professionals continuing to make a difference by using the experience of the pandemic to devise integrated property or workplace user strategies that can blend a number of factors. These include the future demands of a

(probable) smaller office footprint, the impacts of businesses rationalising and refocusing service requirements and the changing expectations of the physical workspace as somewhere to bring people together differently than before; underpinned, of course, by clear purpose.

And organisations must use these departments of enablement to develop and review their workplace strategies with learning and meaningful engagement.

Looking forward

We don't yet know where the future of work will go. So we will focus on those things we can control to support our members to get to the workplace advantage.

Before I close, and let your event begin, I want to land on three areas that are personally important to me and will, I believe, continue to dominate our conversation and our agenda.

Alongside the physical future of work and the workplace, and its proof points, the mega themes of sustainability and technology will remain critically relevant for at least the next decade and most likely way beyond. A stand-out area where more work is needed is equity, diversity and inclusion, or EDI.

First the proof points. I've been talking about workplace and facilities as the lynchpin profession. How it can help organisations achieve broader goals through its super connector position in organisations.

Some might say that nothing substantive has been proven on this before or since Stoddart. That the workplace advantage is a kind of "Holy Grail" that eludes discovery.

In fact, for years workplace and facilities management professionals have discussed how best to demonstrate the added value of their work with the aim of settling doubts about their strategic impact; an effect that has been hampered by a lack of "scientific" evidence.

This absence of "proof" has allowed a reductive 'non-core' narrative to prevail for more than thirty years.

In more recent times, with a range of activities exploring various parts of the workplace experience and their impact on individual and collective performance; a body of work has developed. A collection of work that has presented an independent project team supported

by IWFM an opportunity to see whether the workplace performance 'Holy Grail' could not only be real but might be within reach. I'm not one for a cliff hanger but I am going to stop at this point and resist rolling on immediately to the next part in typical Box Set style. Instead, I'm going to go old school and say that we will have more to say on this development shortly. It may yet get us closer to the practical data that can demonstrate to organisations the impactful work that this lynchpin community leads. That would be good news wouldn't it? Look out for news about it in the very near future.

Second, in the wake of this week's Leaders' Summit, it doesn't need me to say that sustainability is probably the single most important - all-encompassing – challenge we all face.

What I can say is that I see a major opportunity to use post-pandemic rethinking to achieve a number of sustainability goals in their widest sense. Ones that are people centric and values-based.

This summer's IPCC report's 'code red' warning is unequivocal. The way we design, build manage and maintain our buildings can and should make a lasting contribution to carbon reduction. Industry is under intense scrutiny to play its part in delivering against national net zero targets. It will be interesting to hear what comes out of the COP.

By collaborating to understand and catalyse the necessary change, the built environment and the facilities profession specifically can take a lead in averting catastrophe.

There is a way to go; and without workplace and facilities managers who bring together the needs of owners, end users and the supply chain, sustainability cannot be achieved.

The results in our 2021 sustainability survey published recently show a gap between intent and action. Our research suggests that organisations are missing a holistic, long-term approach to determining and delivering the outcomes that meaningful action requires.

All the more reason why concerted action is needed to deliver in this area. The challenges are many; a lack of data; multiple methodologies; questionable carbon calculations; a shortage of the right skills; short-termism. Perhaps a lack of serious intent. Our findings suggested that two thirds of organisations that have committed to net zero are failing to track energy consumption effectively.

Despite this, there has never been a better time to act.

As well as changing the nature of work, the pandemic is also changing attitudes around the art of the possible and hope about the impact we *can* and must make.

It's time to make sure the responsible business drivers that we see in the sustainability report, translate into real world impacts. IWFM needs and wants to collaborate with expert members and partners to empower facilities professionals to be the agents for change they can and must become.

We need to put ESG criteria at the heart of business, to call out what we see as lip service and for all creators and custodians of the built environment to show leadership by working with supply chains that demonstrate serious intent.

IWFM must step up too. Not least to reflect the importance of sustainability within the Professional Standards. We cannot expect our members to upskill without helping them with the tools and the pathway shaped for the 2020s.

We are working on that as part of the review currently taking place so that we can provide the right tools and guidance to prepare our members.

We can't act alone; we invite anyone wanting to help close the intent | action gap to join forces with us so that our profession can deliver on its sustainability potential, driving the holistic sustainability strategy needed.

Third, sustainability in its widest sense has many dimensions and there is another aspect that matters. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

At our conference this year we did something bold. We bookended the sessions with speakers who have never shied from controversy.

Deborah Frances-White spoke compellingly about belonging.

But it was David Olusoga's closing keynote that was the big hitter. Nobody went for the early train that day.

Workplaces must stay relevant and able to attract and retain new generations; to keep the best talent. Workplaces also need to reflect the society in which they operate.

Olusoga argued that the vigour with which young people engaged with the Black Lives Matter protests represented a shift of consciousness from a generation that sees things differently.

“If you walk into a workplace in Britain” he says, you will see diversity at the bottom of the organisation. You will see black and brown faces in security, catering and cleaning – and not at the top. We’ve got used to that we’ve normalised it and the younger generation does not. They see that as an injustice. They recognise it almost instantly in a way that we don’t. That is the challenge facing almost every sector; we’ve normalised the abnormal.

Olusoga was talking about the profession that my organisation represents. He landed some points. One delegate said

“Being in a room of people who didn't necessarily sign up to talk about racism was interesting, and I applaud you for making the decision to do it as it might have been a difficult one. I went straight to the train station and picked up a copy of his book so it certainly had an impact on me.”

We have been behind on this issue. So we have stepped it up on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion by establishing a new Focus Group.

Group members – fifteen in total - each with significant EDI experience, insight and expertise are helping to examine our practices and policies to ensure that we make the biggest possible impact on EDI in the sector.

We are expecting to publish our EDI statement later this month. We are also collaborating with a range of chartered professional bodies in gold standard research on barriers to progression and impactful actions.

Friends, I came here today to put the case for the lynchpin profession. As we all adapt to a post-Covid world, I think its time has arrived.

I may have no doubt posed more questions than answers on the future of work. But as an optimist I want to pass on something positive for a successful and fruitful event. So, to end, I am going to borrow a line from Sir David Attenborough’s inspirational address to the Climate talks this week.

For all of the challenge and the turbulence, Sir David reminded us that humans are the greatest problem solvers ever to have existed on Earth. That thought gives me hope for a future – a workplace future - based on togetherness, collaboration, and cooperation.

Thank you.