I believe that the design of the workplace today should be focused on what I call the ‘In-between spaces’, places away from the desk where collaboration, chance encounters and concentrated work takes place. The break out zones, touchdown spaces, meet and greet space, café’s, business lounges, presentation spaces, project spaces, meeting rooms, quiet rooms, hubs, VC pods, quiet booths, telepresence spaces, coffee bars, project team spaces, restaurants, etc. are the real areas where most inspirational work takes place. Equally important though is that these spaces, when created and executed well, can change or encourage new behaviours and be the glue that binds organisations and individuals together, setting the tone of an organisation’s culture and brand, providing the catalyst for making a difference to staff performance, loyalty and satisfaction.

Ok, that’s a big assertion and may not apply to every organisation but the impact of these areas should not be underestimated.

If we take a step back I would argue that ‘In-between spaces’ actually exist in three scales:

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**Urban Scale**

Ray Oldenberg for example is an American urban sociologist who has written and lectured extensively for decades about the importance of informal urban public places for the good of a community’s social vitality, democracy and civic engagement. He described places such as hairdressers, café’s, bars, pubs, community centres, sports grounds, etc. as Third Places. I would call these “Urban In-between spaces”. He suggests each have characteristics that promote social equality by levelling the status of guests and encouraging engagement. In his books, *Celebrating The Third Place*, 1989 and *The Great Good Place*, 1991 he points out the following
characteristics of ‘Urban In-between Spaces’ as I call them:
• Free or inexpensive
• Food and drink, while not essential, are important
• Highly accessible
• Involve regulars – those who habitually congregate there
• Welcoming and comfortable
• Both new friends and old should be found there

It is remarkable how these characteristics are so similar to the briefs for most interior workplace ‘In between spaces’ which I will come on to.

BUILDING SCALE
I am referring to office building design now and for me the ‘In-between spaces’ concept means not being afraid of creating spaces architecturally that are unexpected, quirky, irregular and even inefficient. These types of spaces offer great opportunities to create ‘In-between spaces’ for the occupier. Of course this philosophy flies in the face of the BCO (British Council for Offices) guidelines and most architects, workplace consultants, developers and agents’ desires to make speculative office buildings which are super-efficient - 18m deep, 1.5 m grid, 2.7m floor to ceiling height and rectangular. The point is what is good for the developer is not always good for the occupier. Many occupiers today see the building as a shell that can evolve and be adapted over time and unusual spaces are not necessarily a problem but an opportunity to create special ‘In-between spaces’. Thankfully not all buildings follow the BCO Guidelines to the letter and some of the best office buildings for occupiers have a great deal of ‘In-between spaces’. In the UK, these include, the Macquarie Bank building, Unilever HQ, One New Change, BA Waterside, The Co-operative HQ, and even the Suisse Re HQ in the Gherkin, for example.

WORKPLACE SCALE
Today’s focus on ‘In between spaces’ in the workplace is a result of the changing nature of work and the changing demographics and work styles of the today’s workforce which is on the one hand getting younger and on the other hand getting older. Designers and architects are responding to the demands of Gen Y and their tech savvy “work anywhere and anytime” spirit, as well as the fact that by 2020 over 50% of the working population of the workforce in the western world will be over 50 years old. The way these two sets of workers carry out their work is very different, and the types of spaces, furniture, technology and the workplace environment can be, and should be very different to address these differences.

In my view the key to successful ‘In-between spaces’ are that they should have some or all of the following characteristics:
• Enable informal or formal meetings/collaborative work in comfort
• Enable individual concentrated work with some acoustic and visual privacy
• Have available and free of charge high quality coffee / tea and snacks as part of the experience
• Be free to use and available for all
• Available at all times and actively encouraged as alternative work settings to the desk
• Be located in the very good parts of the building, with easy access, good natural light or views
• Incorporate high quality furniture and finishes
• Flexible to change over time
• Wi-Fi enabled

The percentage of most organisations’ space budget which is allocated to ‘in-between spaces’ vs. workspace is growing. Our time as designers spent understanding the brief, designing and creating these areas should also grow in proportion to the time committed to understanding and designing general workspaces or desk areas.

For over 30 years workplace consultants and designers have developed sophisticated tools for measuring what happens at the desk, these are often called Time Utilisation Studies or TUS. These tools miss the point completely, as they focus on whether a person is at their desk or not, and if they are, what they are doing. I say, who cares what they are doing at their desk. The fact is most people only spend about 40% of their time at their desk during a typical working day or week, regardless of what type of industry or business they work within. For the rest of the time they are in or out of the office, probably working within “in-between spaces”.

I believe the challenge in the world of workplace design is to allocate enough of our time as designers to understanding and creating the appropriate ‘in-between spaces’ and also to exploring new ideas and quite frankly …to design something! It is all too easy to rely on furniture solutions only, and let our role be to just specify and space plan. That’s not good enough.

Not to take anything away from the furniture industry that has marched ahead for several years creating excellent new products specific to the ‘in-between spaces’ market. Well done! But as designers and architects we should be just as in tune with our client’s needs, and design spaces, places and objects that inspire and solve these ‘in-between spaces’ needs.
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