



Photos courtesy Mayhew

# Case Study: Town of Markham

## Effective workspace design helps cut costs and enhance employee performance and morale.

By Angelica Blenich

With a population of 297,950, the town of Markham, Ont., is reportedly one of the fastest growing communities in Canada. The rapid increase in population has led to many infrastructure changes, resulting in new demands being placed on the municipality.

Recently, the town council recognized a number of deficiencies within its office environment regarding size, natural light, collaborative space and other elements. When the opportunity to add another office building became available, the town saw an opportunity to remedy these issues while tackling a number of strategic operational goals.

In deciding upon the move, Markham turned to Mayhew, a local firm specializing in designing efficient workspaces. After collaborating with these workspace strategists, it was determined the new space would be an ideal location to relocate several groups, making space available within the existing civic centre for organizational growth.

The result was a bright office building that enhanced employee performance and morale, addressed concerns regarding personal and collaborative space and met environmental standards.

### The challenges

Before deciding to implement a new workplace design, the town was faced with a number of challenges with its previous office space. After the organization selected a new design, Mayhew worked as a consulting partner on the project.

The company performed an on-site functional assessment and recognized the non-alignment of workspaces with job functions. To help remedy the situation, Mayhew established new standards and recommended a point system, enabling Markham employees to customize their workspaces based on their job functions.

"We were getting squeezed at our previous office, located at the Markham Civic Centre," says Steve

### Advantages of the design

- Flexibility that lowers the costs of future moves.
- Reducing the overall height of the workstations and lowering the panels from standing height privacy to seated/collaborative working heights.
- Equal workstation sizes.
- Removal of overhead storage, thereby reducing the costs of workstations. (Average cost of the new workstations were approximately 50 per cent less than previous ones.)

### Design features

- Customized workstations.
- Rock garden.
- Lower workstation panels.
- Classic, neutral finishes, creating a uniform appearance with broader appeal.
- Fewer components in inventory, decreasing operational and inventory costs.
- Use of recycled paint.



Andrews, director of asset management for the town. "Each year, our number of employees would increase and we were lacking the workstations to put them in. To create more room, we had to reconfigure that space and disrupt the work habits of other employees. This was also becoming very expensive."

In addition to the cost issues, some employees were being placed in areas with insufficient light. The new space, which accommodates the organization's 90 employees, had to resolve these problems, as well as meet additional requirements.

Some of these requirements included boosting employee morale to help meet retention and acquisition objectives, maximizing square footage with new furniture to reduce the overall workstation footprint and increasing the number of collaborative spaces.

"We were also in need of more boardrooms, due to the nature of our day-to-day responsibilities," says Andrews.

When designing the new office space, one of the main objectives was to incorporate a more open floor plan for employees. The shift from a high-wall, private office setting was initially met with resistance by some workers.

"It was a real challenge to move people into this open, low-walled, team environment," says Andrews. "It required people to give up a lot of personal space in favour of collaborative space."

This change led to smaller individual desks, sufficient for day-to-day needs, but resulting in less congestion within the office.

The previous office layout allotted approximately 14 m<sup>2</sup> (150 sf) of workspace per employee, while the new design offers approximately 12.5 m<sup>2</sup> (135 sf).

"The new configurations have allowed for less congestion," says Andrews. "For example, the aisles are wider. Yet, there is also more space to sit."

Unlike many current office environments, the town also wanted its new space to focus on environmental aspects, such as natural light, for the benefit of all employees.

"The old style was if you're an executive, you build your office right beside a window to ensure you get as much of the light as possible for yourself," says Andrews. "Here, we left the open windows available for the entire staff and not just for private offices."

Another important aspect of the new design was to reintroduce workplace standards throughout the organization.

"One of the areas that rated poorly in terms of employee satisfaction was physical space," says Nicole Stanway, lead design consultant for Mayhew. "This played a significant role in deciding how to design the new space."

Mayhew's furniture design uses fewer components, which results in less disruptions and lower costs when new employees are hired or office space is reconfigured.

The town was also concerned about the environmental impact of the construction and materials being used. With its Zero Waste Initiative in effect, Mayhew worked to create specific demolition specifications that greatly reduced the amount of materials going to landfill. The majority of the demolished

materials were able to be recycled, with some construction materials even recycled back into the design.

### Results

Since their completion, Markham's newly designed offices have resolved many of the original concerns the town was facing.

The new space reportedly provides a healthier, more natural work environment where employees and visitors say they feel more comfortable, as well as improved access to natural light and airflow. More overall space has been created by implementing workstations customized to employees' job functions, which has contributed to stronger staff acquisition and retention.

"Not only are the colours much more vibrant and pleasant in the new space," says Andrews, "but the openness has also strengthened employee morale and relationships."

With files from Mayhew and the town of Markham. For more information, visit [www.mayhew.ca](http://www.mayhew.ca).

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