

Workplace brief

Coca-Cola European Partners

Creating the Happiness Factory

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In 2014, Coca-Cola European Partners (CCEP), embarked on a journey to transform its headquarters near Stockholm, Sweden, into a workplace that truly reflected the brand’s rich and storied 131-year-old history. With the help of Leesman, a global business intelligence tool that benchmarks how workplaces support employee experience and organisational performance, and GoToWork, a consultancy firm focused on developing and following through workplace strategies, the organisation embraced a new way of working and completely reimaged its employees’ connection to their workspace.

Few objects are as immediately identifiable as Coca-Cola’s glass contour bottle. The iconic curvy design was introduced in 1916 to make the soft drink distinctive from a growing number of copycat brands. The brief given to the Root Glass Company of Indiana was to design a bottle so unique that it could be recognised in the dark or even if it was broken.

This attention to detail encapsulates CCEP’s mission to maintain its status as an original and outstanding brand. Everything the organisation does is driven by this objective including the design of its workplaces. Back in 2014, for example, the Swedish contingent of CCEP came to the conclusion that its head office — located in a southern suburb of Stockholm — did not meet the brand’s high standards. According to Karin Ståhl, a workplace strategist who was brought in to help develop the refurbishment and change project, while the Swedish team conceived of its status as an “employer of choice”, this wasn’t necessarily reflected in the design of the head office.

The challenge

Consequently, four years ago, CCEP began to think about how a new space should feel and operate. First, a visioning session was carried out to identify the organisational goals and which ways of working would best facilitate them. As part of the pre-occupancy

assessment, Leesman was bought in to perform their standardised workplace effectiveness survey. At the same time, CCEP also performed their own utilisation survey and a range of in-depth interviews with users of the space.

Leesman’s pre-occupancy survey produced an overall Lmi effectiveness score of 56.0 for the organisation’s Swedish home. This number put it 5 points below the Leesman global average and 16.7 points behind the Leesman+ average, the marker for highest performing workplaces in the world.

Nevertheless, Ingrid Ljung, the senior property & facilities manager at the head office, says there was already an awareness among the management team that something had to be done before the project even began. She describes the scene pre refurbishment as “boring” and “messy”. The original workplace comprised 150 cellular offices connected by long, grey corridors, while product samples and other clutter were strewn across the floor.

The design of the office also made it feel like a ghost town. Ståhl adds: “The office was silent. It felt empty even though there were lots of people here. You could leave your workstation in one room, go to the other end of the building and not see anyone.”



Subsequently, all sorts of employees, from young people to long-serving staff, were unhappy with what they perceived to be a lack of community spirit. The results from Leesman’s pre-occupancy survey in 2014 showed that only 40% of CCEP’s employees in Stockholm believed their workplace contributed “to a sense of community at work” — which led Ståhl, Ljung and CCEP to a crucial discovery: the level of collaboration between the different functions was too low.

So, the organisation set on a course to transform its Swedish head office into a new activity-based working (ABW) space. For Ljung, this would also mean moving to a collaborative, flexible and digitally enabled environment.

The change

A change of this magnitude, however, is never straightforward and the CCEP team was immediately presented with a number of obstacles. According to the Leesman survey, for example, the largest respondent group by time served was ‘12+ years’. This shows that once people join CCEP’s business in Sweden they tend to stay, but it is these long-serving members of staff who often struggle to embrace changes to working environments, practices and expectation the most.

Meanwhile, the Swedish head office is one of the only corporate CCEP sites in Europe to be attached to the organisation’s production and distribution facilities. Ståhl explains that in one of the first iterations of the workplace transformation project, the production and supply chain offices were excluded from the research limit the scope of data collected. But this created some resentment among adjoining staff, so the decision was eventually made to investigate the state of all administrative facilities throughout the facility, including the production and logistics offices. According to Ståhl, a large proportion of the supply chain staff wear different clothes (bright orange), so it was imperative not to create any further divisions between the teams and see the entirety of CCEP European Partners in one location.

So Ståhl and Ljung developed a plan to make the transition as fluid and as easy as possible for every single employee. Ståhl led a series of meetings and lunch & learn sessions where the different teams could find out about the project. This included lessons on how ABW would work as well as special workshops that invited employees to analyse and discuss the data from Leesman’s pre-occupancy survey. “From day one their feedback was used to develop the content of the workplace brief and the change management programme,” says Ljung. “[Employees] were able to impact how we put the plans together, not only for the building and designing of the new space but also the ways of working.”

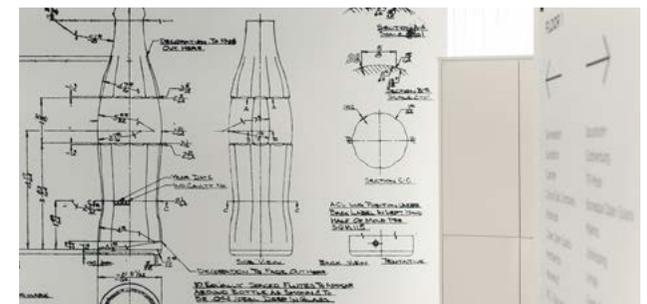
Together with this consultation, CCEP appointed “champions” to act as ambassadors for the project. These staff members were not managers but employees who had significant influence and impact over the working environment. Perhaps the most notable of these ambassadors, however, was CCEP European Partners Sweden CEO Pierre Decroix, who Ljung describes as a role model for ABW. He threw all his support behind the new way of working by quickly adapting to his new office-less role while encouraging others to follow suit. “He was very brave when he did that, and we couldn’t have made the change without him,” says Ljung.

Decroix, Ljung adds, was clear about the agenda with his management team from the beginning, though some of his executive colleagues were a little more reluctant to buy into the change at first. Nevertheless, a series of serious discussions about the long-term ambitions of the organisation followed and eventually everyone understood the aims behind the workplace brief.

Once development began on the new workplace in August 2016, employees were moved into temporary accommodation such as bungalows and additional desks in the visitor centre onsite. “It was really tight because we didn’t have that much space,” says Ljung. “We didn’t have desks for everybody, so we were activity-based in this period too. But it worked really well.”

In a moment that had the potential to be very unsettling for staff, Ljung ensured that she was always attentive to people’s needs. “I shared the map [of the new space] with sandwiches, cinnamon buns and all kinds of good fruit to cheer them up every Thursday,” she explains. “I started to serve breakfast, too, so they had something to look forward to — and it was really popular.”

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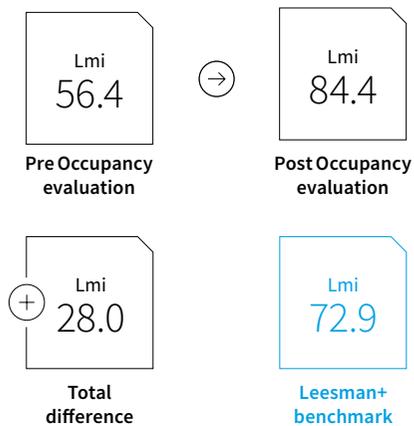


In preparation for the move, Ljung and Ståhl ran ‘clean out sessions’ with the different teams. Treating it like a short holiday, staff were encouraged to think about what physical, mental and behavioural things they should pack. “People were excited about moving to the bungalows, then it was a tough squeeze, but I think we did a great job to cheer them up. We also had a ‘all hands day’ where everyone was mobilized and joined forces,” says Ståhl.

The results

CCEP moved into the newly refurbished workplace in February 2017, just eight months after construction had begun. The lift this gave the organisation and its employees was immediately palpable, and further proof of the project’s success could be found in the results of Leesman’s post-occupancy survey. The overall Lmi effectiveness score increased by more than 28 points to 84.4 compared with the results of the pre-occupancy data, placing the new workplace 9.7 points higher than the Leesman+ average.

Lmi comparison



“We change every day, so we can see that the same people want to be in the same area but not at the same desk.”

Ljung describes the ABW space as a “great functional layout”. The two main floors can be accessed via the stairs or the elevators, while the space features a mix of workstations, meeting rooms, team tables and breakout areas. Ljung says concentrations areas are located in the centre of the building – so the further one moves in, the calmer everything becomes.

While Ljung and Ståhl claim that the Swedish head office was already a relatively non-hierarchical environment, they both accept that the new design has increased the potential for an even flatter democratic structure. Yet the level of flexibility in the new space is such that Ljung can adjust the amount of personal space at any moment.

To accommodate CCEP’s global structures, Ståhl explains, the team calculated that it would have to leave room for at least seven separate offices should directors need them. Nevertheless, Ljung says, “We use the offices for meeting rooms, so nobody knows I can change the office around.” This is, she reveals, a form of succession planning: “If we one day lose Pierre, the new CEO might want an office, and the directors might want one too.”

The move to a flexible workspace has led to a change in employee behaviour. “They are not claiming their own areas,” says Ljung. “We change every day, so we can see that the same people want to be in the same area but not at the same desk.”



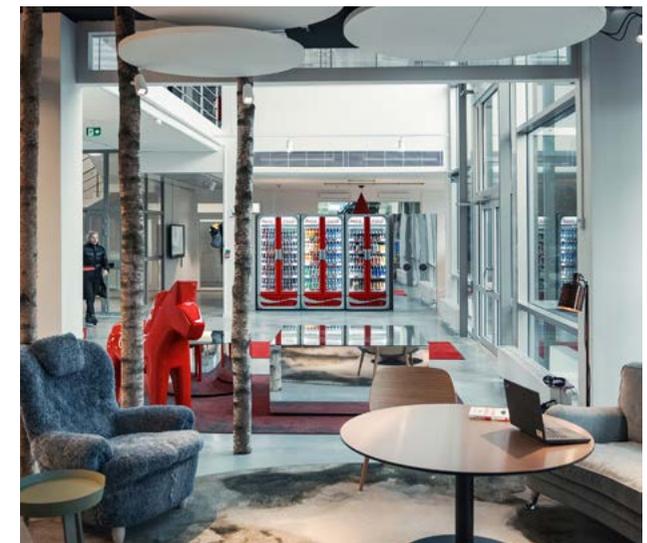
In fact, Leesman’s post-occupancy findings show just how successful the switch from cellular offices to ABW has been for CCEP. The organisation has created a workspace that even sedentary employees find effective reporting a high Lmi. The irregular nature of these findings cannot be understated. CCEP’s scores in Stockholm contradict Leesman’s ABW report, released in 2016 which revealed that ABW offices are more effective when employees are highly mobile.

The ABW design is supported by incorporating CCEP’s various brand colours into the space. Ljung says colour is used to create self-guiding interiors and give much of the building a 3D feel. The entrance, ground floor and a number of meetings rooms are all emblazoned with the famous CCEP brand. One level up, the first floor has a ‘Fanta lounge’, which contains the orange and yellow colours synonymous with the Fanta brand. The second floor, meanwhile, features a blue and green ‘Sprite lounge’. Finally, there is a ‘Monster lounge’ named after CCEP’s energy drink, which Ljung describes as more masculine and black.

CCEP calls its new building ‘The Happiness Factory’, and it’s easy to see why. The name, which was created by Decroix’s personal assistant (as if to demonstrate the democratic qualities of the organisational culture), signifies the fun nature of the space. “From day one, everything was aiming for playfulness and gamification. Everything was joyful,” says Ståhl.

But what separates a Happiness Factory from a normal office? “I think it was the imagination behind the project,” answers Ljung. “Previously, the design was rougher; it was like a factory inside the office. That is not what we wanted, so the architects had to change it and make it smooth. We have a perfect match now; it’s not shiny but it is fresh, tidy and very comfortable.”

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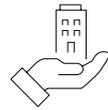
The sense of joy can also be felt in the music that is played within the building. Music is played in the informal social areas where employees can make calls, chat and relax. Ljung describes these areas as places where you can laugh. “If there is music you can speak louder. We don’t need science to tell us where we can be happy or loud — it explains itself,”

One of the most remarkable findings from Leesman’s pre- and post-occupancy surveys is the difference in the employees’ pride in the old and new space. Just 33.5% of CCEP staff surveyed before the refurbishment agreed with the statement “It’s a place I’m proud to bring visitors to”. In the newly designed ABW workspace, however, that figure climbed by 62.3 percentage points to 95.8%.

Ljung says the organisation understood that the low levels of pride in the old workplace were not befitting of a brand with the stature of CCEP. So, the team was eager to design a space that was suitable for a wide range of guests. “There were big discussions while forming the workplace brief around how we could lure our biggest clients to meet with us in our head office, so we don’t always have to visit the big retail chains,” she explains. “From the beginning, I saw the potential to bring clients and other people to the office to see the facility, taking the walk bridge over to the production site where you can see into the plant.” Meanwhile, designing a space that would make employees proud, and showcase CCEP’s great tradition, would also help to build the employer brand and attract the best talent from the Stockholm region.

The verdict

Overall, Ljung says CCEP’s employees are very happy with the new office and, though the level of change had the potential to become a hugely disruptive force, they have taken it in their stride. She thinks back to how staff were walking around the building with maps during guided tours — their mouths agape at the transformation — and how they have now adjusted well to the new way of working. “I would claim that even those coming in newly employed to the organisation know how to approach the office, the ways of working and the onboarding process, which is really tailored for the CCEP brand and how we should be aligned with the corporate culture,” she explains.



It’s a place I’m proud to bring visitors to

Pre Occupancy Evaluation	33.5%
Post Occupancy Evaluation	95.8%
% increase	62.3%



Ultimately, the refurbishment of CCEP’s offices in Stockholm serves as an example of how a prestigious global company can design a modern workplace totally aligned to an organisational culture that has been cultivated since the 1800s. Much like it did with the contour bottle over a century ago, CCEP has designed a space that makes it stand out from the crowd.

Interior Architect Reflex Arkitekter.
Photo Hannes Söderholm.