



Generale Knowledge

We're all aware that, in this post-recession, technology-driven era, workplace design mistakes are all too easily made as businesses try to push their own working practices and culture forward. Fixed or agile? Completely open plan? Team or individual? A mix of all of the above? The questions keep coming. Furthermore, those mistakes are often extremely expensive and incredibly difficult to put right. European financial services group Societe Generale (SG) may just have come up with an ideal solution.

We've headed out to the bank's Tower Hill facility, and more specifically its TH2 floor, where a forward-thinking approach to the workplace is just the start of a long, exciting and – importantly – tried and tested journey. Project Manager Jeremy Gibbs is happy to tell us more about this intriguing solution.

'I work on this floor so I'm one of the guinea pigs, if you like,' Jeremy smiles. 'This is a pilot scheme and the only way to really observe and to discover what works and what doesn't work, and whether there's room for improvement, is to live and breathe it.'

'This is a massive change for us. There have been a number of lessons learned from this scheme. SG is currently in five different buildings across London and we have around 3,000 people throughout those buildings. Last year the decision was made to consolidate into one building in Canary Wharf and that building is currently under construction. We'll be moving into Canary Wharf in 2019. This gives us the perfect opportunity to look at how we work today and what we can look to improve upon and fine tune it so we can understand exactly how we want to be working in 2019.'

'This is a pilot scheme and the only way to really observe and to discover what works and what doesn't work, and whether there's room for improvement, is to live and breathe it.'

Jeremy Gibbs, Project Manager

'The second driver is that we recognise the fact that there is a significant trend in the market to move towards flexible working. Also, the way we were using our real estate portfolio, it simply wasn't big enough for the number of people we've got – so there was a real need to look at how we can better utilise the space we do have today.'

'We're not looking to go through all the buildings – we didn't want to make a massive investment, knowing that we're already going to invest



significantly in the Canary Wharf project. This is about striking a balance – it's about doing something sensible that allows us to get through the next four or five years, whilst also giving us the opportunity to experiment and fine tune what our requirements and strategy will be for the new building.

'We started the whole programme by first looking at home working. We launched a new initiative, actively promoting and giving people the flexibility to start to work from home. We're not saying to people 'You need to work from home' – we just want people to know that the option is available to them, depending upon their role, of course.

'The next aspect was to look at how we were using our space. We hired tp bennett, who provided us with a number of ideas and helped us throughout the whole process, starting with launching the engagement process with senior management, explaining the concept and presenting what it could look like and how it could work.'

As Jeremy mentioned one of the main drivers behind turning TH2 from a trading floor to an open plan space came from the recognition that Societe Generale's latest acquisition and continued expansion had resulted in an increased demand on their buildings, and with a new, consolidated office in the pipeline, a review of how to make the most of their current real estate was undertaken. 'By looking at how other global companies addressed similar problems, SG was able to acknowledge that through changing their space and rethinking their work styles, they could maintain efficiency and create a better working environment,' tp bennett's Katy Boulter tells us. '

There were previously a large number of cellular offices on this floor, a real shortage of meeting rooms and no collaborative space whatsoever,' Jeremy recalls. 'Everyone had their own desk – and the floor was also very dark. It certainly didn't feel as light and as open as it does now.

'There are no cellular offices on this floor whatsoever now. Our senior executives have come out of their offices and there are no problems finding meeting rooms now. People also share

desks now – other than PA's and senior managers, who still have their own dedicated desks. Despite having all this open, collaborative space, we now have a 42% increased capacity – and people love it. The feedback has been incredibly positive.'

'Supported by the SG initiative, 'Work Smarter', tp bennett helped guide the bank into this new way of working, and develop an office environment that would help encourage collaboration and flexibility,' Katy continues. 'Before the project's launch, Level 2 acted purely as a trader floor. Densely populated, its layout was based on fixed desks and team division, necessitating the use of partitions and access control, which in turn darkened the space and generated a sense of a disjointed work force.'

'Supported by the SG initiative, 'Work Smarter', tp bennett helped guide the bank into this new way of working, and develop an office environment that would help encourage collaboration and flexibility.'

Katy Boulter, tp bennett

'The new approach has seen an open plan office divided into three main zones, where departments would be allocated 'neighbourhoods', supporting a 1:1.2 desk sharing ratio, so that any member of that team could select a work point that suited their needs for the day.'

Each neighbourhood has allocated KI storage for team and personal use (with each team member having one linear metre of lockable, private storage to house their items when not using a desk), along with a shared resource area nearby for convenience. However, staff are not limited to their neighbourhood, should another setting better suit their day's task. 'We did need to do a bit of re-educating – and we put a fair amount of pressure on people in terms of the amount of storage they have. The more you give people, the more they tend to take.'

Quiet zones dotted throughout the floor offer a variety of work points designed to support isolated focused work. These provide a phone free environment for individuals to work without distraction to ensure maximum efficiency, as well as providing positions for visitor use. Visitors

are also welcome to occupy the seats in the central hub.

This dynamic central hub offers touchdown desks, informal meeting seats, presentation booths and refreshment areas, to deliver an easily recognisable and accessible communal zone for people to meet or work. All work points are fitted with power and data ports, as well as being supported by Wi-Fi to allow all laptop users access to the system with minimal fuss. It is also notable that, throughout our visit, there are plenty of people 'touching down' and others making use of standing-height tables rather than sitting.

The surrounding meeting rooms can be accessed from both the collaborative and traditional zones, as well as acting as a visual and acoustic barrier between the hub and desking areas. In total there are 17 meeting rooms throughout the floor, the majority of which are 2-3 person rooms, suitable for 1-2-1 meetings, conference and private calls, or quiet working. 'Only three of these meeting rooms are bookable,' Jeremy tells us.



Given that this was the first office of its kind within the bank, there was a certain pressure to ensure it worked. However, from the start of the process it was clear that SG were keen to explore new ways of working, and very much viewed TH2 as a pilot for a larger future project as well as a potential template that they could roll out globally. From a design point of view SG were very interested in exploring new ways of working, and providing an exciting work environment for their staff. The team had a keen interest in what furniture would be utilised to help achieve efficiency, and also looked to inject a level of colour beyond the corporate black and red. In fact, red and black have now been replaced with vibrant, bright blues and plenty of white.

'It's been an amazing success – which is why we're now going to roll this out to two other floors in this building,' Jeremy reveals.

This may have started out as a pilot scheme, but we can't help but be impressed by not only the results here at Tower Hill, but also the initiative, the process and the collaborative thinking.

We think SG has not only caught up, but has done a fair bit of overtaking here