FACT SHEET

Activity-Based Working (ABW)

*About this tool*

**PURPOSE:** To provide answers to frequently asked questions, address common myths and offer best practices on ABW

**AUDIENCE:** Employees of all levels who are looking for information about workpoints, unassigned seating and productivity in an ABW space, in the context of GCworkplace

**USE:**

* in presentations to employees
* in emails
* on internal websites
* in blog posts

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## Frequently asked questions

* **What is a workpoint?**
* It is any space where employees can perform their work, and is designed specifically to support different functional requirements. Each workpoint is equipped with furnishings and the necessary digital tools to support a variety of tasks and varying degrees of interaction or concentration.
* **What types of workpoints will be available to us?**
* [Common workpoints can be found on pages 19 and 20 of the [GCworkplace design guide](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/gcwiki/images/2/22/GCworkplace_Design_Guide_-_April_2019_EN.pdf). List the types of workpoints you will be including as part of your workplace modernization project and, as an additional option, the types of tasks that can be done in each of them. You could also add pictures of the future workpoints.]
* **What if I come to work and all of the desks are occupied?**
* There will be enough workpoints to accommodate 100% of the employees if they all come to work on the same day.

The design of the space will ensure that there is more than enough workpoints for everyone and will support individual and collaborative work. Whether you are attending a meeting, collaborating with colleagues, or doing individual focused work, you will have enough options to support how you work in the new space.

* **What does unassigned seating mean?**
* Unassigned seating means thatyou will no longer have a dedicated workstation to sit at, store information, or keep personal effects. You will have a personal storage locker to store your computer as well as personal items. In this environment, employees move away from a fixed point and choose the optimal setting based on their work activities, their personal preferences and workstyles.
* **How can you make sure employees do not fight for the “best spot” (e.g. by coming to work earlier)?**
* The work environment we are establishing is not one that promotes competition for the most desirable workpoints. Employees should not feel they need to change their work hours to get a preferred spot. One of the five key design principles of an ABW environment is based on equal access to space. You are encouraged to vary where you sit on a daily basis to ensure everyone gets a chance to work from any workpoint. An ABW environment is designed with enough workpoints to accommodate 100% of the employees if they all come to work on the same day. You might not always get your favorite spot when you get in, but as you and your colleagues perform different activities throughout the day and move around, new workpoints will become available.

[Explain how your organization will address the situations where employees always use the same workpoint.]

* **Will I be provided with a document that explains how unassigned seating works?**
* [How and when will you explain unassigned seating to your employees?]
* **Will I be able to reserve a workpoint?**
* [Detail the steps your organization is taking **if** they are adopting a reservation system (including how to reserve, which workpoints can be reserved, for how long they can be reserved, etc.).]
* **Will there be a system for locating people on a day-to-day basis? Will colleagues have to search for each other?**
* Having a tool (e.g. IM, Cisco Jabber, etc.) that enables employees to indicate where they are located creates a culture of openness and trust. It is more efficient to know where people are located in order to organize meetings, collaborate or interact—whether it is in person or virtually. ABW enables employees to collaborate through a variety of different settings (in person or virtually) which means that individuals may sometimes be dispersed from their teams. When adjusting to a new, modern way of working, it is understandable that the way that people used to engage with one another is placed under pressure (or needs to be organized in a different way). Fortunately, when employees have the mobility and flexibility to move around the workspace in a way that best suits them, they are more easily able to control their level of productivity by choosing how and when they connect with their colleagues. It is up to the individuals, teams and managers to determine suitable ways to connect and keep each other up to date. One positive aspect that we hear very often is that increased mobility in the workspace means that people are able to properly meet colleagues that they have only ever emailed before. Connection to one’s team is important, but connection to the wider organization is one of the biggest social changes that often occurs in an ABW workplace.

[List and explain the tool(s) your organization is adopting to connect people (including how to use them, when they will be available, if training will be provided, etc.).]

* **What equipment will be included in an individual workstation?**
* The workstation will be equipped with fixed furniture (i.e. sit-stand desk, ergonomic chair, monitors and required cables). You will bring your laptop/tablet, power cord, mouse, keyboard, and basic office supplies, and will remove and lock these in your personal storage locker at the end of each work day. Basic office supplies (pens, stapler, paper clips, etc.) will be available in an area that will be designated for that purpose (business centre).
* **Some people require dual monitors or oversized monitors. Will these be made available?**
* Typical individual workstations will be equipped with either dual monitors or an oversized monitor. If you require special equipment and technology to complete your work, this should have been addressed as part of the functional programming exercise, and therefore made available to you in the new workplace.
* **Will there be exceptions to the unassigned desk rule?**
* Prior to the move to a new unassigned environment, factors such as the duty to accommodate and the nature of the work being performed will be taken into account and exceptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis. If you believe you have a requirement for an exception to the unassigned desk environment, please discuss it with your manager.

[Some details of this answer may not apply to your organization, so edit as required.]

* **How will conflicts be resolved? For example, an individual does not follow the clean desk policy and fails to reset the workstation?**
* Communications and change management will play an important role in making sure employees adopt the new ways of working. Specific situations will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis in collaboration with managers, directors and directors general. As well, general business rules or an etiquette will be developed in collaboration with employees and then communicated.
* **Are there examples of existing unassigned ABW environments?**
* Yes, there are successful projects in many of the regions across Canada. Have a look at the following [Project story collection](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/GCworkplace_Project_Story_Collection) created by the Workplace Solutions team at Public Services and Procurement Canada.

[If your organization wants to add additional information from these projects available to employees, make a note of how you plan to do so.]

| Myth busters | |
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| **“I won’t have anywhere to put my personal belongings”** | |
| You will be assigned a personal locker, which is equipped with space to store personal items (such as coats and other clothing), basic supplies (laptop, keyboard, mouse, etc.), as well as limited paper file storage. | *Tips*   * *Although there is limited room for paper files, you are encouraged to adopt a paperless approach by using GCdocs* |
| **“The goal of GCworkplace is to cut costs and further reduce the space allocated to employees”** | |
| The goal of GCworkplace is to provide Government of Canada employees with workspaces that meet the seven dimensions identified as most important to them (digital, inclusive, healthy, flexible, efficient, collaborative and green). The goal is not to reduce space, but to use it differently and in a better way. | *Tips*   * *Using the space efficiently provides you with more options, and a greater variety from which to accomplish your activities* |

| Myth busters | |
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| **“GCworkplace is Workplace 3.0”** | |
| GCworkplace *is not* Workplace 3.0. The GCworkplace vision was developed and refined based on three main elements:   1. Lessons learned from past workplace initiatives (e.g. Workplace 2.0) 2. Engagement through public service renewal initiative 3. Looking at global workplace trends and innovations   To find out more about the GCworkplace vision and how it was developed, visit [[GCworkplace GCpedia page](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/GCworkplace)]. | |
| **“GCworkplace is a one-size-fits-all solution, just like Workplace 2.0”** | |
| The design of GCworkplace spaces is based on the specific activities of the groups that will occupy it; therefore, there are as many variations as there are groups! Each ABW environment is different because not all groups work the same way (i.e. ratio of collaborative work versus focus work) or use the same tools. | *Tips*   * *Check out the* [*GCworkplace Project story collection*](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/GCworkplace_Project_Story_Collection) *to see the various types of ABW spaces that have been created under the GCworkplace vision* |
| **“I can’t supervise my employees if I can’t see them”** | |
| With modern tools and a culture of trust and open communication, employees are empowered to decide where and how they feel most productive. Now more than ever, employee performance and productivity should not be measured on physical presence but rather on results. | *Tips*   * *Training and tools are available to support you as a manager or supervisor, to better understand your role in this changing way of working* |
| **“The GCworkplace design solution is just about unassigned seating”** | |
| The GCworkplace vision and the activity-based working (ABW) design solution implies that employees move away from a fixed point and choose the optimal setting based on their work activities, their personal preferences and workstyles. | *Tips*   * *You now have the freedom to choose where you work based on your personal preference. Only you know how and where you can be your most productive self!* |
| **“I will have to get in early if I want to have a desk”** | |
| With GCworkplace, workspaces are designed with enough workpoints to accommodate 100% of the employees if they all come to work on the same day. You might not always get your favorite spot when you get in, but as you and your colleagues perform different activities throughout the day and move around, new workpoints will become available. Workstations are unassigned, but meeting rooms, collaboration spaces, etc. can be reserved (consult your organization’s protocols to determine what reservation system is in place). | *Tips*   * *Everyone has equal access to space. Refer to your organization’s etiquette guide with regards to repeated use of the same workpoint by the same employee.* * *GCworkplace is flexible and can adapt to changing needs. If certain workpoints are needed more than others over time, the space can be changed to reflect these new requirements.* |
| **“I will be forced to work from home”** | |
| Remote work is linked to health and wellness, as well as work-life balance, and is part of the GCworkplace vision. It supports flexibility, the quality of the workplace that employees value most, and represents an additional option employees can choose as they decide where and how they feel most productive. According to the Treasury Board Secretariat, participation in telework is voluntary and no employee should be required to telework.You will always find more than enough seating for you to accomplish your activities and tasks in an activity-based working (ABW) design. | *Tips*   * *Remote work is an option that you can to discuss with your manager* * *If working from home is not for you, GCcoworking may be an option–ask your manager if your department participates in the program* |
| **“Activity-based working (ABW) reduces productivity as it involves changing workpoints, setting up and dismantling every day or many times in the same day”** | |
| The variety of workpoints and the mobility offered in an activity-based working environment allows you to be supported by the right set-up for the type of activity you have to perform. This contributes to your productivity. | *Tips*   * *The type of workpoint and the work zone you choose sends a signal to colleagues about the level of focus you require.* * *Travel light: find a bag or “locker caddy” that fits all your belongings and can easily be carried everywhere you go!* |
| **“The increased mobility and unassigned seating create a disconnected feeling among team members”** | |
| The GCworkplace vision translates into work environments that support team collaboration and socialization by incorporating collaboration points that are either open, semi-enclosed or more private, as well as a great virtual workplace that supports getting together whenever you need to, no matter where you are. | *Tips*   * *Use the available technologies to collaborate and stay connected with team members.* * *Make a point to include some time at the beginning of meetings to chat with colleagues about their weekend plans, or any other topic of interest.* |
| **“Executives need a closed office and their administrative assistant needs to be assigned to a workstation right next to them”** | |
| Due to the nature of their work, executives spend most of their time outside of the office, in meetings, visiting other workplaces, or traveling for business. An empty assigned office or workstation then results in a loss of space that other employees can’t benefit from. | *Tips*   * *Read the interview with a Director General Office employee to learn about the benefits of GCworkplace!* |

For more information on the myth busters above, take a look at the [GCworkplace Communications Toolkit](https://www.gcpedia.gc.ca/wiki/GCworkplace/Communications_Tool_kit)!

| Best practices | |
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| ***For managers*** | |
| **Recognize every job and employee is unique** | |
| With the variety of tasks and different employees who accomplish them each day, it is not only beneficial but logical for these employees to require different work environments. Employees will greatly benefit from variety in the workplace, such as collaborative areas or quiet rooms. As a manager, you should also consider the possibility of telework arrangements as an option. | *Tips*   * *Evaluate the kind of work your team performs (individual vs collaborative work, internal vs external clients, etc.) and the kind of spaces team members need to be successful.* |
| **Keep communication channels open** | |
| Given the flexibility that comes as part of an activity-based working environment, employees may be physically separated from their colleagues and manager, leading to feelings of isolation. As a manager, you may consider holding meetings (either in-person or virtual) to connect the team and encourage communication. | *Tips*   * *Ensure employees know they have the freedom to choose where and with whom they work.* * *Check in with employees as required to reduce feelings of isolation.* * *Take steps to allow open communication with your team.* * *Use videoconferencing software to conduct meetings (where possible) in order to minimize the lack of physical presence.* |
| **Manage by results, not presence** | |
| In the past, simply seeing employees at their desk implied they were getting work done (even if they weren’t actually doing work). This management style conflicts with ABW, which supports mobility in employees and may mean employees are not always located in the office. In this new workplace, performance must be managed and evaluated based on results, not on physical presence in the office. | *Tips*   * *Clearly establish what you expect from employees (objectives, communication, meetings, etc).* * *Ensure employees know they can contact you if required, even when you are working remotely.* |
| ***For employees*** | |
| **Adopt the clean desk policy** | |
| It is imperative that desks be kept clear of personal belongings, papers and files, office supplies, and so on. In an activity-based working environment, overhead storage bins and filing cabinets are obsolete. The new workplace is equipped with disinfecting wipes, as well as a list of procedures to follow in case of emergencies (emergency exit locations, emergency contact numbers, and maintenance and repair numbers). | *Tips*   * *When you leave a workstation for the day, wipe it down and ensure it is clean.* * *Don’t leave your laptop, phone, etc. at a workstation if you are going to be away for an extended period of time (each organization will establish an acceptable time, but a good rule of thumb is to pack up if you plan on being away for more than XX hours).* |
| **Personalize your workplace… in a new way!** | |
| The depersonalizing of workspaces contributes to the clean desk policy and allows workpoints to be shared more easily. | *Tips*   * *Personalize your storage locker, or other specifically designated areas in the new workplace.* * *Your smartphone or laptop background can also be used for photos!* |
| **Embrace new technology** | |
| The activity-based working environment is mobile, flexible and collaborative; as such, technologies have been updated to support it. Flexible technologies include Wi-Fi, smart phones, upgraded videoconferencing software, and GCdocs. | *Tips*   * *Scan and transfer files to GCdocs to reduce paper files.* * *Take the training offered on new technologies to become more familiar and to fully benefit from them.* |