

# Post-Occupancy Green

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For more meaningful progress on green building, sustainable design and sustainable operation must become more intertwined.

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In a paint-by-numbers kind of way, sustainability can be very straightforward. Especially in states such as California, where building codes all but mandate projects be built to standards that would achieve LEED certification, sustainable design can be as simple as tallying up the points.

Now that LEED is commonplace, it is time to concentrate on the spirit of sustainability, which involves designing, building, and operating smartly. Sustainability is not just a turn-key operation. Architects and interior designers must commit to making sure that green buildings are efficient and make sense for our clients' businesses in the long term.

The first step to fulfilling that obligation is to adopt a holistic view of the real estate life cycle. At Gensler, we look at each project's sustainability in four, chronologically ordered pieces: strategy, design, implementation, and operation.

Before anything can be designed, we must first understand our client's business and organizational structure. We need to know what is working and what isn't, what's past and what's upcoming, in order to develop a strategy to design appropriately with attention to the client's current and anticipated needs.

By understanding how employees in a particular organization work, we can design personalized spaces that encourage productivity. The four modes of work: learning, focusing, collaborating, and socializing, help shape this understanding. A Gensler workplace survey established that top-performing companies—those ranked highest on accepted measures of corporate leadership, including financial, brand, and employer-of-choice measurements—provide workplaces that support the four work modes. A successful real estate strategy looks at business culture, as well as operational efficiencies, to

design inspirational spaces that can serve more people with less square footage.

With a workplace strategy defined, intelligent design can be implemented sustainably (specifications, procurement, delivery, construction, etc.). The final piece, perhaps most important and often overlooked, is operation. This is where a tool such as the Workplace Performance Index (WPI) comes in.

The WPI was developed to facilitate pre- and post-occupancy evaluations for clients. The point is to get a snapshot of the client's business and work style to inform design decisions and then understand how well we hit the mark with the ultimate workplace solution.

A new sustainability module now incorporated into the WPI adds seven new sections: Health and Well-Being, Thermal Comfort, Air Quality, Environmental Control, Lighting, Connection to the Outdoors, Awareness and Priorities. These sections harvest information about employee comfort level and the extent of control over workplace comfort conditions. Post-occupancy, this information will help us gauge whether we had the proper strategy and design for the client. It also will give us an idea on whether the strategy and design are being honored by the client.

That means clients have a responsibility, as well. It's a responsibility to their employees, themselves, and to us, the designers. Sometimes, clients need to be reminded what they asked for and how we delivered it. By going back after a company moves into a new workspace, we can revisit the early strategy and design discussions that could be months or years behind us. We might need to show them what they have in terms of sustainable features and systems and demonstrate how those systems and features can be optimized to their benefit.

Other instruments can move beyond the WPI. A planned LEED financial evaluation tool that can gather and analyze data on turnover, absenteeism, revenue per worker, management changes, restructurings, etc., would be able to determine the hard metric impact on an organization. One size does not fit all, and it's important that quantifying an impact is meaningful. Is a client looking for payback on a future sale? Minimizing first costs? Maximizing future revenue? Minimizing carbon footprint? Minimizing operating expenses?

There is a growing body of evidence that supports how LEED certified buildings positively impact project performance through operating efficiencies, rent premiums, higher absorption rates, higher resale values, and local tax incentive

programs. The LEED financial evaluation tool empowers leaders with the ability to make informed and defensible decisions in pursuit of a LEED rating for their project.

Sustainable design and sustainable operations must become more intertwined if we're ever going to get ahead of this carbon-burning curve. In the end, the most efficient systems will never compensate for space inefficiency. You can have scads of recycled materials, low-flow water fixtures, and compact fluorescent bulbs galore, but it doesn't make you sustainable if you have twice as much space as you need, and you leave the lights on and the water running.

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