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THE NEW FRONTIERS OF WORK

DISRUPTIONS ARE TAKING PLACE AND CREATING A NEW LANDSCAPE IN THE SPACE WE CALL THE OFFICE. OUR INDESIGNLIVE.SG EDITOR ROUNDS UP SOME OF THE KEY DISCUSSIONS PUT FORTH AT THE WORKTECH16 SINGAPORE CONFERENCE ABOUT THE FUTURE OF WORK.

TEXT » JANICE SEOW

IMAGE » COURTESY OF WORKTECH/UNWIRED

Increasingly, we're hearing about – and seeing – extreme changes taking place in the workplace. Pundits have described how the 'fourth industrial revolution' – characterised by a new range of technologies that fuse the physical, digital and biological worlds – will herald a revolution of such proportions that how and where we work will change beyond recognition.

To what extent is change occurring in the workplace, and how can – and should – organisations, designers and the industry at large respond? These questions were the subject of vigorous discussion at the recently held Worktech16 Singapore conference, where speakers included best-in-category designers and thought leaders from Singapore and around the world.

The topics in the full-day session revolved around the new patterns and practices unfolding in the corporate landscape. Philip Ross, Futurologist and CEO of Cordless Group and UNWORK, kick-started the discussion with a series of future-looking ideas for the workplace that were driven by new and cutting-edge technologies. In one example, he observed how a growing number of big corporations were utilising software that would allow the mapping of organisational structures based not on traditional hierarchies, but on factors such as real networks and interactions. He also cited a new workplace analytics

division to be launched by Microsoft that would offer data centred around areas such as team performance and employee interactions.

In that same line of thought, Ross brought out global management consulting firm McKinsey's theory of the 'digital hive' and their belief that the secret to organisational success lies in having layered, multidisciplinary, cross-functional teams that sit and work together and that are fluid.

Another speaker, Rhian Windridge, Director Project Management APAC (Google Account) at CBRE, discussed, among other things, how evolving tenant demands are helping to change the shape of our physical workplace, and how the growing millennial population entering the workforce was "going to have an impact on the type of places that corporates are looking for."

According to findings by CBRE, CEOs perceived staff attraction and retention to be one of their biggest sources of competitive advantage by 2030. With respect to the needs and wants of the millennial workforce, Windridge sees an increased focus on experience versus function in the workplace. "We're moving away from the sense of the workplace being about a desk, and towards a much more diverse range of experiences in the workplace. It will be supported by technology, but it won't be driven by



it," she said.

Leading on from that discussion on workplaces and the millennial worker, Primo Orpilla, Co-founder and Principal of Studio O+A, drew examples from working with clients in Silicon Valley – such as Pixar, where an atrium serves as a place for social activities and continuous learning. He identified new typologies of workspaces that are designed to engineer serendipitous meetings like 'The Living Room', 'The Library' and 'The Workshop' – spaces that encourage people to cross paths and hopefully interact.

A discussion on the future of work and the workplace would not be complete without covering the topic of co-working. Experts spoke about the

different approaches, emergent new models, and where corporate real estate would stand in the era of co-working. On the last point, the general takeaway was that both had a place in today's corporate world.

At the start of the day, Ross had cited American science author and media theorist Steven Johnson's argument that "innovation springs out from the adjacent possible," expanding boundaries as you explore them and inviting new possibilities. It appears to ideally sum up the outlook of the future of work.

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