



Empowering Employees for Change

Herman Miller Retail Headquarters, Stamford, CT



See what happened when Herman Miller used a research-based approach to transform its Retail HQ into a place where people can easily work together—in the office and beyond.

Project Goals

1. Build team culture to energize people for the future.
2. Create an engaging destination for distributed workers.
3. Strengthen the team's connection to their work and foster new product development.
4. Increase the flexibility of the space so employees can easily evolve it over time.

In the summer of 2020, Debbie Propst, President of Herman Miller Retail, decided the time was right to help her team begin working in new ways. With all Retail employees working remotely, she reflected on how her team could work together more effectively—both within and beyond their Stamford, Connecticut headquarters—to achieve even greater business results.

Capturing New Opportunities

The unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic presented new opportunities for Herman Miller's flourishing Retail business. In addition, other Herman Miller Group companies such as Hay and Design Within Reach saw an increased demand for products that enhance the experience of living and working from home.

Case Study



In the redesigned Retail HQ, you'll find a mix of settings for work and socializing. Above, a residentially inspired café invites people to relax and gather. Below, a workspace with OE1 Micro Packs and Cosm® Chairs allows collaboration to happen safely.

To help people keep pace with increasing demand and cut down on lengthy commutes, Propst and the Herman Miller leadership team wanted to empower employees to decide where they could do their work. So they updated the company's flexible work arrangement to include multiple options for working at home. They also instituted an enterprise-wide work-from-home program, which gives employees access to furniture and technology for outfitting an efficient home office.

Recent research from Gallup—a frequent Herman Miller partner on engagement strategies—highlights the benefits of distributed working. It enables employees to choose where they'd like to work on a given day and can lead to increased engagement and productivity¹.

“We've added new team members this past year, and we're in a growth mode, expanding our retail presence and accelerating the pace of new product development. To enable our team to meet new market demands, we need to help work happen in new ways, both during the pandemic and beyond.”

— Debbie Propst, President, Herman Miller Retail

With all the benefits of a comprehensive work-from-home program in mind, Propst and team turned their attention to transforming the Retail HQ into a place that better supports distributed work and offers more value to both employees and the organization. The space would no longer need to function as an office where employees would be expected to work each day. So the Retail team, in partnership with Herman Miller's internal design team and Workplace Performance Services team, began to reimagine how the facility could become a desirable, empowering, and engaging location where the team could build culture and boost innovation.

Case Study



Anyone can sit down, plug in, and get to work at these Renew™ Sit-to-Stand Desks with Eames® Softpad™ Chairs. A nearby Framery Office Phone Booth offers people a quiet spot for private conversations.

Says Gretta Peterson, a Workplace Consulting Lead for Herman Miller, “We knew that evolving our workplaces would be one critical piece of success, but a truly transformational work experience would depend on the people. Change management was pivotal to getting our people engaged and prepared, especially during this time of perpetual uncertainty. Without it, we would have risked our most valuable asset—our people—before the doors even opened.”

In addition to change management, Herman Miller leveraged the expertise of its Workplace Services Group to develop and implement a strategy that would better support the changing needs of people, work, and the Retail business over time. Before, during, and after the Retail HQ transformation, consultants are measuring the effectiveness of the workplace and work experience to continuously evolve in response to change.

Workplace Research at Retail HQ

1. Ongoing sensor-enabled data collection
2. Employee focus groups and surveys
3. Testing of post-occupancy design improvements

Adapting the Design Process

Moving from a design brief to a finished space in the midst of a pandemic was no easy feat. With travel restrictions in place, the design team was not able to visit the location and had to work with one another and the Retail team remotely. This wasn't the only challenge. The work activities and expectations of the Retail employees were also evolving day-by-day. But instead of shying away from these ambiguous and evolving needs, the design team embraced uncertainty as a design constraint.

Their plan for the facility offered maximum flexibility so employees can adapt the space as they use it over time. To achieve this, Herman Miller outfitted much of the facility with OE1 Workspace Collection™. These agile furnishings include desks, storage, screens, and more—all designed to help people experiment with a space, discover what works in the moment, and quickly make changes on their own. OE1 also helped create a design that could support a diverse range of individual and group activities in a modest spatial footprint.

Case Study

“This approach not only reinforced our core message to the Retail team members—that they are empowered to work where and however they believe is best—but ensures that the investment being made in the facility is maximized by enabling higher levels of change and agility than in the past.”

— Tim Wykeham, Director, Global Branded Environments, Herman Miller

Improving Work Experiences

The new Retail headquarters supports a much wider array of experiences than it once did. The building is a three-story space, and the team primarily occupies the second and third floors. In the past, both floors were dedicated to individual, assigned desks with surrounding conference rooms. But in the new plan, the third floor has a wide array of highly interactive team settings to support informal social connection, project-based teamwork, and a host of collaborative activities associated with new product development.

“The light and open nature of the third-floor design promotes interaction, offers more end-user choice and flexibility, and has a more domestic feel,” says Wykeham. “Who doesn’t want their workplace to feel more like home?”

The second floor has individual workspaces, but they are used differently than in the past. Team members share workstations, but the design team added design elements that allow people to personalize their work experiences. These include storage for personal items and ergonomic equipment including adjustable chairs and monitor arms. To give people places where they can accomplish concentrative work without leaving the facility, the design team dedicated a portion of the floor to quiet space.

When it comes to settings for group work, Herman Miller’s utilization data indicated that the average meeting size was three-to-four people. In the past, most meetings were in-person. Moving forward, meetings will include a mix of people working together in-person and remotely. It’s also easy for employees to

schedule both individual and group shared spaces with technology that helps people find and reserve the best places to do their work.

That’s why the redesigned HQ includes tech-enabled conference rooms, right sized for the people using them, that ensure a seamless and engaging experience for all employees.



Employees checking in to work at the Retail HQ have their choice of spaces to do focused work or collaborate with colleagues. Above, people working in close—yet safe—proximity can easily share ideas. Below, a spacious forum hosts large gatherings and training sessions.

Case Study

Future Proofing the Office

One of Herman Miller’s goals for the Retail HQ was to increase the flexibility of the space so it could easily evolve over time. Live Platform™, a smart office system, empowers the Retail team to continually learn about the space and gain insights to inform future design decisions. All desks and seats on the second and third floors of the building have sensors that measure when they are being used. This continual information feed helps the team modify the space to better suit their needs and to ensure that they aren’t wasting precious space.

In the new space, it’s also easy for people to find open desks—improving efficiency. The design team specified workstations equipped with Live Platform. These feature lights that indicate when a workstation is available for use.

Taking a Look at the Numbers

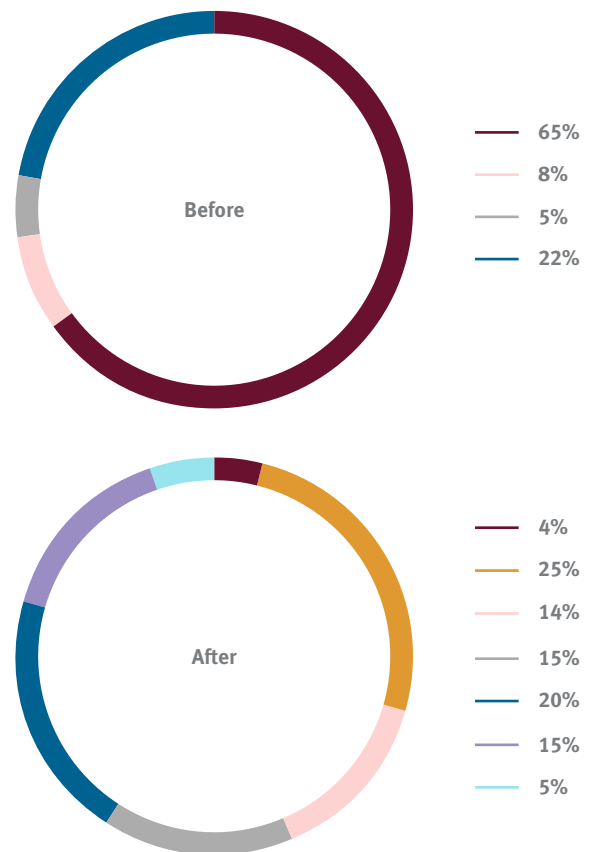
One of the most significant takeaways from this project is that the Retail team was able to add more employees to the space, create more spatial variety, and do all of this with minimal changes to the building’s architecture.

Prior to March 2020, the space was only able to support 212 people with 289 workpoints (or total seats). Today, the office can support up to 368 people who split their time between the office and home, with a total of 366 workpoints. That’s an impressive 73 percent increase in the number of people the Retail HQ is able to accommodate, and a 26 percent increase in total workpoints.

Additionally, the retooled facility has a wider variety of settings. This reflects insights from Herman Miller’s research indicating that people working remotely often crave more time socializing and connecting with coworkers, need comfortable spaces for concentrative work, and require settings for more intensive team collaboration.

+ 26% increase in workpoints (seats available for use)

Shifts in Space Usage:



- 94% decrease in dedicated seats **+ 173%** increase in group and community seats

decrease in dedicated seats

increase in group and community seats

- Assigned Seat
- Enclosed Meeting Space
- General Unassigned Seat
- Open Meeting Space
- Focused Unassigned Seat
- Forum
- Community Space

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Most elements in this meeting space—OE1 whiteboards, tackable and writable partitions—are light and easy to move as needs change. This applies to the Eames Shell Chairs too, which can easily be used in other settings throughout the office.

Achieving Success for Employees and the Organization

As the Retail team at Herman Miller continues to grow and meet heightened market demands, the headquarters—in combination with a flexible, distributed working strategy and work-from-home solutions—empowers people to embrace new ways of working. The workplace strategy also enables the Retail team to add new employees, either locally in the Connecticut or New York area or in other parts of the world.

With fewer assigned individual work areas and more shared individual and group spaces, the Retail HQ can flex to accommodate a far greater total population than in the past and act as a destination for employees, regardless of their location. And with a space that can be easily adapted to people's ever-changing work patterns, the team is empowered to be more innovative and capture new market opportunities.

¹ <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/283985/working-remotely-effective-gallup-research-says-yes.aspx>

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