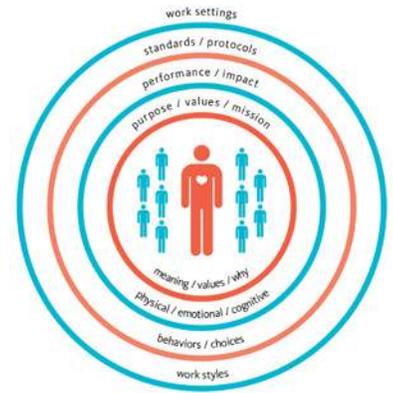


Business Resilience – Design Thinking – Disruptions

A resilient organization can provide an additional anchor to a return to normalcy for individuals in times of disruption; the more resilient individual, in turn, increases the resilience of the organization. Can we apply design thinking to business resilience? In a follow-up article exploring workplace adaptation and resiliency in times of crisis, **Sven Govaars** turns our attention to design thinking and the role it can play in clarifying the resiliency context and developing potential business continuity solutions.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 3...



A 2017 Knoll Reunion

officeinsight Publisher **Bob Beck** recounts a tale many of us in the A&D community know very well: attending a reunion with people who have created lifelong friendships and memories together, at work and beyond. This particular reunion, held at the Knoll showroom in New York City, and its guest list, may remind some of what a meaningful reunion looks and feels like – a true celebration of relationships and work and life.

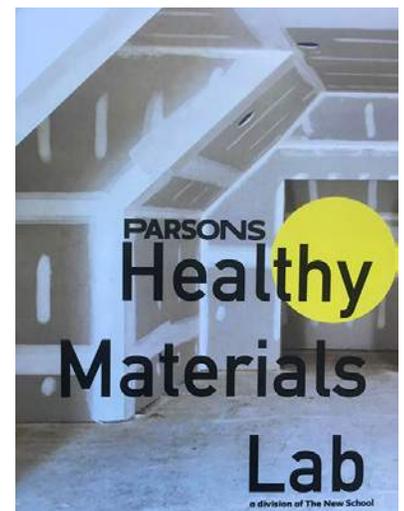
FULL STORY ON PAGE 12...



Healthy Materials Lab at the New School

At the heart of the sustainable and healthy materials movement is research, science and evidence. The information about chemical toxins in our materials and their effects on the environment and humans already exists. But we're all still building up our personal knowledge of these things, and we're still in the process of deciding how we plan to apply that knowledge to whatever we're working on. The **Healthy Materials Lab**, formed at the **Parsons School of Design at The New School**, is creating a space for architects, designers and students to explore their relationships with healthy and unhealthy building materials – and how they might work with healthier materials.

FULL STORY ON PAGE 27...



CITED:

"GO TO HEAVEN FOR THE CLIMATE AND HELL FOR THE COMPANY."

—MARK TWAIN

Business Resilience – Design Thinking – Disruptions

by Sven Govaars

“To succeed consistently, [we] need to be skilled not just in choosing, training and motivating the right people for the right job, but in choosing, building and preparing the right organization for the job as well.” Clayton Christensen, The Innovators Dilemma

When Clayton Christensen wrote “The Innovator’s Dilemma” in 1997, he wasn’t talking about natural disasters like hurricanes, fires, floods or earthquakes. And he wasn’t talking about man-made disasters like political, social or economic events that create panic, chaos and crisis, either. No, he was talking about *disruptive* innovations like emerging technologies, new business models and external competition. He was talking about the forces that rapidly create new opportunities or cause businesses to fail. He was talking about resilience.

As a strategic thinker, I can’t help but see the connection between the volatile events we are facing today and the business disruptions Christensen prophesied 20 years ago.

It’s been a month now since my first article in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey, [“Workplace Adaptation in Times of Crisis – Resiliency in the Face of Chaos.”](#) Since then we have seen momentous disasters and instability that continue to test just how flexible workers and their companies really are in times of disruption.

In this article, we turn our attention to design thinking and the role it can play in 1) clarifying the resiliency context (see diagram) and 2) developing potential business continuity solutions. But first we must be sure we are solving the right problem and that we know the central question. To be successful, we need to surrender our traditional notions of problem solving and embrace design thinking. It provides a

simple structure that is generative and iterative – not linear – to innovate creatively.

Design thinking is an approach to problem solving designers use every day and encompasses many of the same steps used to solve complex issues in other professions.

IDEO defines design thinking in the following way: “Design thinking is a process for creative problem solving. Design thinking utilizes elements from the designer’s toolkit like empathy and experimentation to arrive at innovative solutions. By using design thinking, you make decisions based on what future customers really want instead of relying only on historical data or making risky bets based on instinct instead of evidence.”

IDEO CEO Tim Brown continues, “Design thinking is a human-centered approach to innovation that draws from the designer’s toolkit to integrate the needs of people, the possibilities of technology, and the requirements for business success.”

As a strategy consultant to organizations facing change, I have seen the power of design thinking to shift managers and leaders from average problem solvers to exceptional solution finders. It is not a natural way for a manager or leader to think because they were taught to think about management differently. At first, they are put off by the “black box” of design thinking and feel it is more appropriate for design than business. Once we turn the black box into a simple process model we can work together to solve even the most complex organizational problems. Let’s explore for a moment the shift needed to adopt a new way of thinking.

So, what is the problem we are trying to solve? What is the central question around business resilience?

RESILIENT WORKSPACE



Choice & Freedom

Work however, whenever, and with whomever in a range of environments.



Connectivity

Dependable tools to support movement and build relationships.



Zones & Settings

Access to clear areas for individual, team, and community work.



Flexibility

The ability to personalize, adjust, and hack space to meet unique needs.



Experience

Creating intuitive environments for better well-being.

research

officeinsight

For the most part, companies are built for stability, predictability and control (see [“Workplace Adaptation in Times of Crisis – Resilience in the Face of Chaos \(officeinsight\)”](#)), and this is important for business continuity. Business leaders are trained to put systems and processes in place limiting variation in operations and results. The problem is that what makes this work so well for achieving revenue and lower costs gets in the way of innovation and creativity, which are important when thinking about the future organization. To add to the difficulty, the decade-old models for business and work are evolving. In times of rapid disruption and volatility you lose predictability and control, which is not comforting for the manager or leader that has placed trust in a replicable, supply chain-based business model.

This is where design thinking can help. Contrary to what business leaders are taught about organizational management and the need for control, design thinking allows managers and leaders to continue deploying their business model and, at the same time, apply design thinking to alternative strategies for the future. If finding better solutions for business resilience are important to the organization, then current thinking must change.

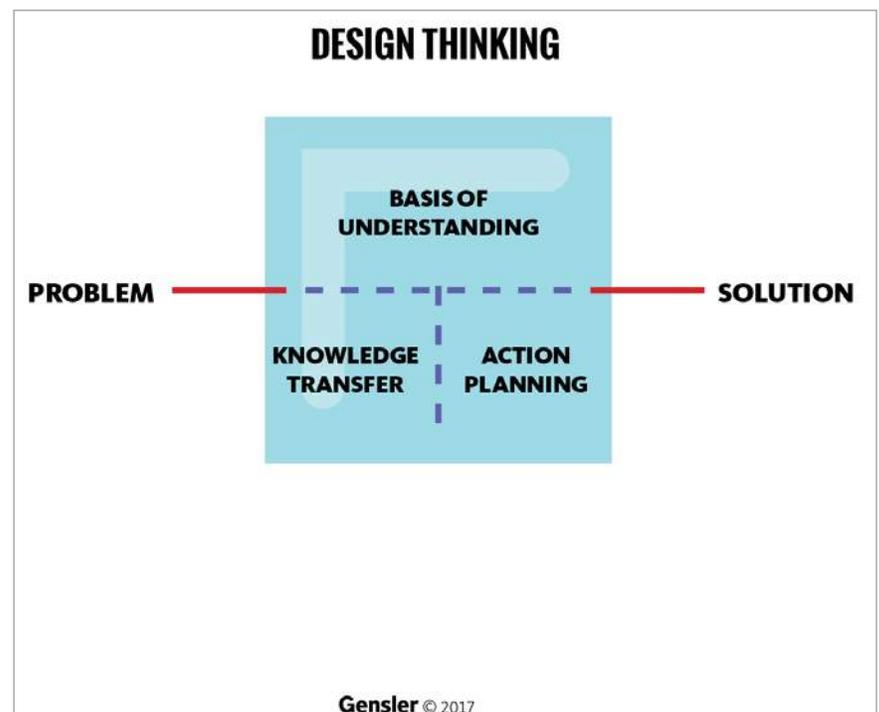
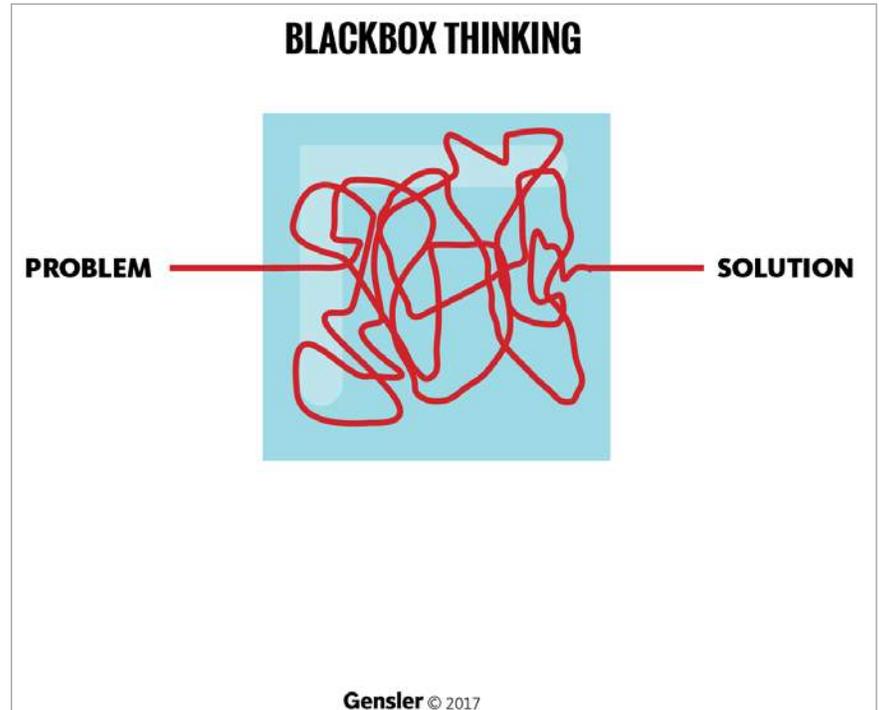
Disruption and volatility are proving to be a “new normal” that demands rapid recovery and business continuity strategies prepared in advance. The organization needs to be “in solution” and not seeking solutions when time is of the essence. Moving quickly will ensure fewer lost work days and lost revenue with a business resiliency strategy in place.

If we apply design thinking to business resilience we can change the conversation.

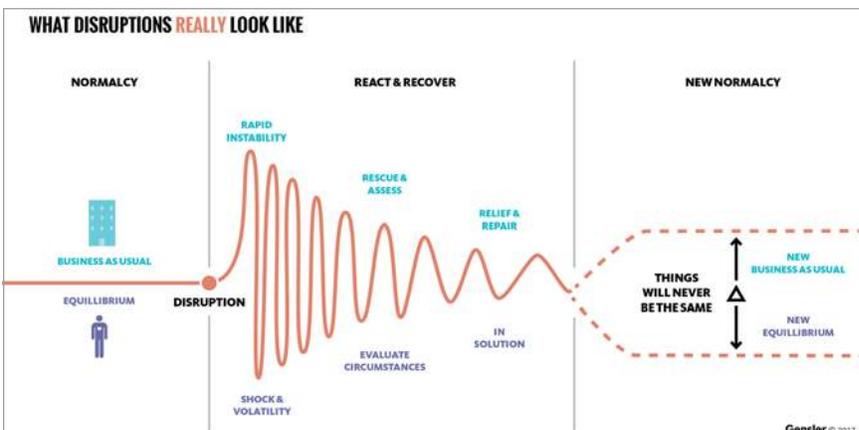
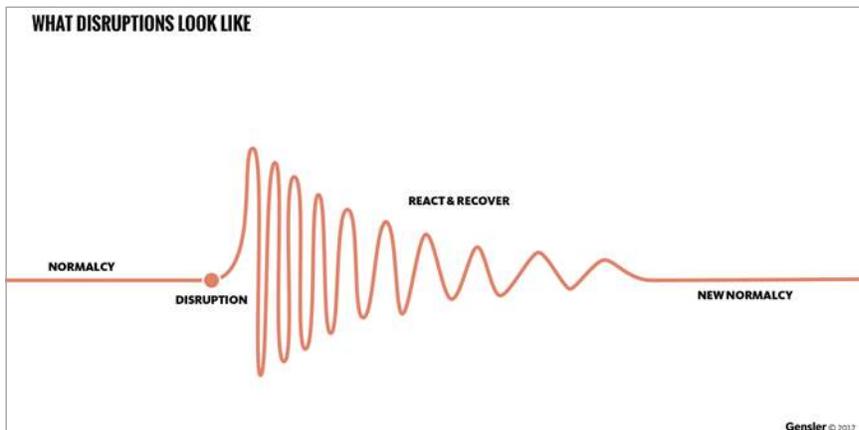
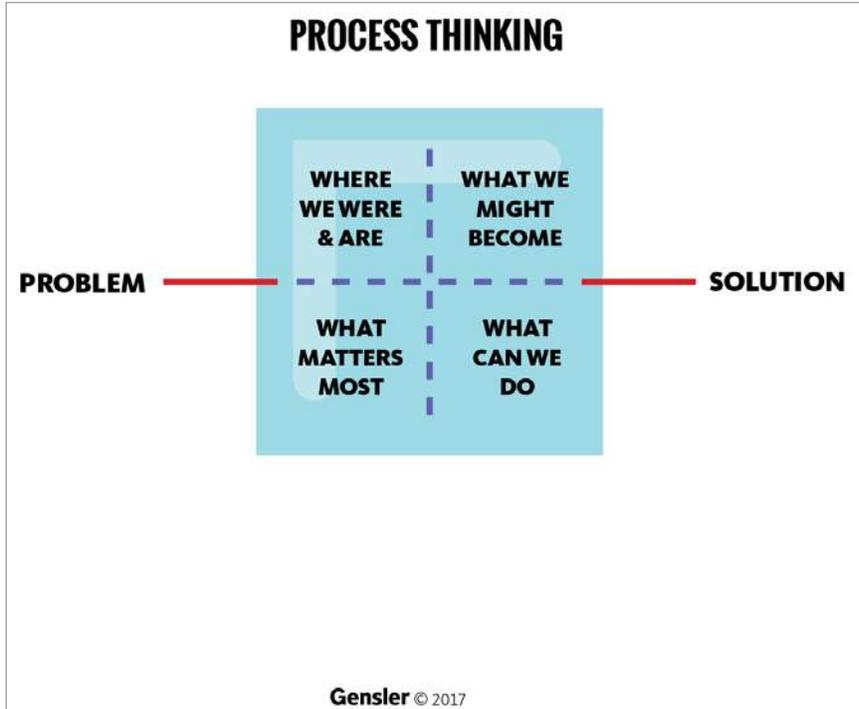
“It is better to know some of the questions than all of the answers.” – James Thurber

Most designers are familiar with design thinking, and there are good resources available for research and training just by searching the internet. Simply, we use a series of state-

ments or questions in a preset order to move from problem identification to possible solutions and implementation. We use three broad categories to hold five statements:



research



1. Basis of Understanding (How things were – How things are today),
2. Knowledge Transfer (How things might become – What matters most), and

3. Action Planning (What can we do – How do we get there)

A similar approach is one outlined in “Designing for Growth: A Design Thinking Tool Kit for Managers” by Jeanne Liedtka and Tim Ogilvie:

- 1) What is,
- 2) What if,
- 3) What wows, and
- 4) What works

When using these four questions for business resilience, we begin with “What was” to capture relevant information before the disruption and then explore current reality.

It’s imperative to understand that design thinking cannot solve every problem, and it is helpful to separate the complicated from the complex. If you know the solution to a problem that is easily definable – you should go ahead, solve it and move on; that is an example of a complicated problem. If you are not sure you have all the information you need, if you are not sure you are even solving the right problem, or if no one can agree on what the actual problem is, let alone jumping to solutions without the possibility of implementation, design thinking is the tool to use. These are examples of complex problems.

In times of crisis, business resiliency is complex because the organization and the people need to be aligned.

Imagine the following discussion to illustrate. Around a conference table sits a facility manager, an ecologist, an engineer, a psychologist and a business leader. The facility manager defines resilience as the speed with which critical systems are restored after a major disturbance. The ecologist suggests resilience is an ecosystem’s ability to keep from being irrevocably degraded. The engineer says resilience

is the degree to which a structure like a bridge or building can return to a previously set baseline after being disturbed. And lastly, the business leader asserts that resilience means putting into place data backups and resources to ensure continuous operation in the face of disaster. All are reasonable definitions and all, from their respective points of view, could yield viable solutions (adapted from “Resilience”

by Andrew Zoll).

The issue is each person came to the table with a unique solution, and it was difficult to find a common starting point for shaping real choices. Without a translational definition that encompasses the range of viewpoints, we cannot develop a common vocabulary (basis of understanding) to move forward. And, without an agreed upon lexicon, we weaken our sense of purpose, limit our

trust, and challenge our ability to communicate effectively. The good news is that design thinking will surface solutions for agreement and deployment with transparency and integrity.

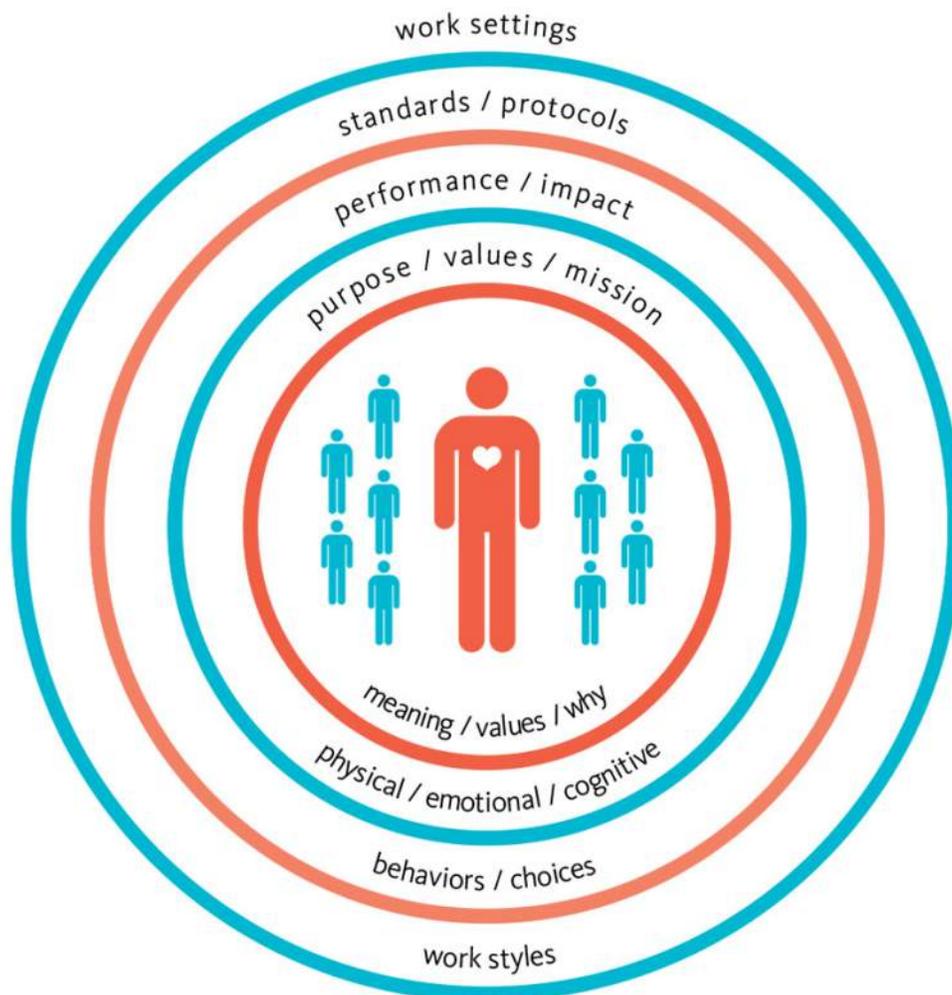
The core of any organization is the sum of its workforce. So how do we determine how to support or provide the physical and/or emotional help needed during times of crisis? Which can the employer provide? Which can the team provide? Which can the community or even government provide? While physical and emotional needs are intertwined, how best are they approached? How can we harness the collective energy of the workforce to help individuals bounce back?

This is traditionally done through the push and pull of information, but resilient people and adaptable organizations share certain characteristics: 1) they bounce back from major disruptions, 2) they are proactively flexible to react to changing circumstances, 3) they respond well under pressure when prepared ahead of time, and 4) they focus on what matters most for business continuity of the organization – the people.

Workplace design may not encompass the range of solutions necessary for adapting in times of disaster, disruption, crisis and chaos, but it certainly can enable more adaptable work environments for training resilient workers and clients. Maybe as business leaders, strategists, designers and managers, we should be leading the conversation. It is clear we each have our own point of view and role to play. Yet time and time again in the face of disruption, we see barriers dissolve, we see hands extend, and we see the energy of the collective summon to help the individual. This is no different than business resilience.

One of the significant findings in the Gensler 2016 U.S. Workplace Survey was that workplaces can be character-

ORGANIZATIONAL ALIGNMENT



research

officeinsight

ized as an ecosystem comprising three factors: 1) diverse spaces, 2) community empowerment and 3) investment in the individual workers (see www.gensler.com). These factors are the same whether we are talking about innovative workplaces or resilient workspaces (see workplace fundamentals diagram). While the look and feel may differ from space to space, the concepts, settings and organizational components are similar. The fundamentals that drive innovation and creativity are the same fundamentals that strengthen resilient workspaces.

It might be useful to think of the business resiliency conversation in the context of everyday organizational and workplace strategy. Disasters focus our attention on what matters most now – taking care of people, how they feel, and if we get through recovery okay then how do we get the business running smoothly. Flexibility and agility are key traits of both, and we should adapt our work environments today. Every day organizations are faced with disruption and chaos, and it doesn't require a catastrophe to desire resiliency. Our attention is acute now,

like a microscope. Disasters, natural or man-made, may or may not repeat but we should be prepared, pull back a little – think telescope – to view options for recovering quickly and continue the business of the business.

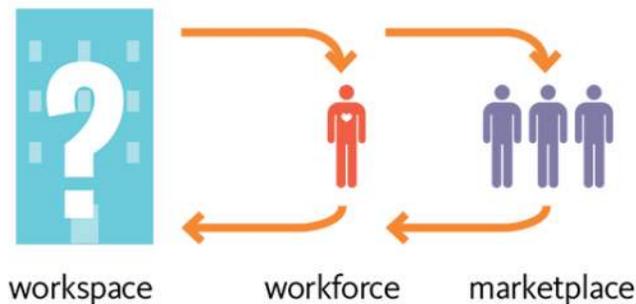
Business continuity depends on resiliency, agility and mobility. If we are going to navigate unforeseen changes, we must find ways to train our people and create transition workspaces for training to insure business resilience before we are faced with disruption. These are the same skills we use when moving from assigned workplaces to

WHEN OUR WORKPLACE IS COMPROMISED

PLACE-BASED



PEOPLE-BASED



unassigned or activity-based environments. The fundamentals used to create flexible work environments today are the same ones required to create workspace resiliency.

The evolution of workplace and workforces has been a seven-year study culminating in the “free range” concept (please see Bradford Powell’s [“A Random Walk: Gensler Houston at NeoCon – The Idea of Progress”](#) in officeinsight) and the NeoCon Chicago seminar this past June (please see [“Don’t Fence Me In: A Neocon Presentation by Gensler Houston”](#) by Mallory Jindra in officeinsight).

What we discussed then as a change in work styles and work settings to further wellbeing and profitability for a company is also the basis of a resilient organization. The “free range” concept is a useful stepping stone to alternative, resilient workspaces. Since laptops, cloud computing and other mobility tools are in place as part of the daily infrastructure, they would be readily used in times of disruption and volatility. We know this would not be enough; even coworking locations could become part of the solution if they are accessible. We need to put

our best minds on the resolution of crisis situations for businesses.

We are all aware of the argument that facility design is integral to health and wellbeing. We also know that space optimization reduces real estate costs for an organization. What is not as well known is that providing choice in work settings for people to work where, when and how they need to meet their work style and work outputs can serve as training for resiliency in times of disruption. We can promote alternate work arrangements for many reasons, and business continuity in times of change should be a critical driver as a critical success factor for organizational resilience.

If we empower our workforce to work wherever they work best during times of disruption and keep in mind that work is what you do, not where you do it, then we are promoting business resilience. An agile workforce combined with adaptable workspaces prepares an organization to be mobile and flexible.

A resilient organization can provide an additional anchor to a return to normalcy for individuals in times of disruption; the more resilient individu-

al, in turn, increases the resilience of the organization.

To foster business resilience, the design thinking approach clarifies when a system or process should be stable and when flexibility should be integrated, to help people know the difference so they can make better choices, support the organizations stories of business resilience success, and provide tools to strengthen everyone in the organization.

“If I had an hour to solve a problem I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions” – Albert Einstein ■

Sven Govaars is an organizational design and change strategist at Gensler creating highly productive work environments. He actively works with leaders facilitating transformation in their organizations. He is known for generating insights and amplifying the strength of high profile teams. Sven has a proven ability to solve complex problems using collaborative methodologies that inspire, teach, and inform successful outcomes. Go to [Free Range Workspace](#) for more on Sven’s work or to reach Sven email him at sven_govaars@gensler.com.