



IMCO REIMAGINES ITS NEW 16 YORK HEADQUARTERS

COMPANY CONSOLIDATES STAFF FROM 3 GTA LOCATIONS INTO 3 STOREYS AND 66,000 SQUARE FEET

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Employers are gradually mandating workers back to their offices, but not without first inducing them with progressive spaces.

Count the Investment Management Corporation of Ontario (IMCO) among a cadre of established corporations in the Greater Toronto Area that have used the pandemic-induced office furloughs of the past few years to reimagine the office experience.

IMCO has consolidated employees from three offices in the GTA into a single location at 16 York St., where it's taken up residence from the 23rd to 25th floors, comprising 66,000 square feet.

That might have seemed superfluous before the pandemic, but that's hardly the case today.

IMCO is taking the open-concept office to another level. Rather than sequestering its employees at dedicated workstations, the vast, capacious office space is designed to encourage interaction, incubate creativity

and, ultimately, cultivate collaboration between otherwise disparate departments.

The space is also sufficiently spacious to proffer privacy at any number of its workstations. There's even a multi-function café on premises.

16 York LEED and WELL-certified

Julie Phillips, president and partner at Flat Iron Building Group Inc. — which constructed IMCO's new office space — told RENX workers have been apprehensive about returning to staid, stuffy offices after several years of working comfortably from home. She's unsurprised.

That's why it is no coincidence IMCO choose the 33-storey, 800,000 square-foot 16 York to house its new offices, because it's both LEED Platinum and WELL Institute-certified. Not only is that important for both a company's ESG score and reducing its overhead, it's a recruiting tool.

And while innovative corporate cultures and office designs are inducements, large companies like IMCO are sweetening the pot by taking advantage of vacancies in prime locations like 16 York.

"It's super accessible to Union Station for people to commute in," Phillips said.

"With these new buildings, from an air-quality perspective and from an amenities perspective — whether that be parking or bike facilities or nearby restaurants — there's a flight to quality right now where people are looking to new buildings, especially with vacancy rates being where they are."

IMCO office decision provides dual benefits

Employers like IMCO have also used the turbulence caused by COVID-19 to make fiscally sound decisions. In consolidating three offices into a single headquarters, IMCO has cut unnecessary costs, Phillips said.

"In addition, it is the way people can flow between departments and share a single lunch room, multiple collaborative spaces and meeting rooms, one reception, one quiet area, rather than separate amenities in three separate places," she added.

A light-filled collaboration area in IMCO's new Toronto headquarters at 16 York Street. (Courtesy IMCO)

A light-filled collaboration area in IMCO's new Toronto headquarters at 16 York St. (Courtesy IMCO)

Moreover, unlike earlier in the pandemic when workers enjoyed leverage afforded by a hiring boom fuelled by low interest rates, labour conditions are no longer as tight, turning the tables back in favour of employers.

However, high interest rates haven't just curbed new job creation. They have also — as seen in Canada's tech sector that shed 160,000 jobs in 2022 and 100,000 more during the first six weeks of 2023 — forced some companies to downsize.

"A lot of companies were told staff who didn't want to go into the office would quit and would be difficult to replace, so that was the motivation to let people keep working from home. That was the case 12 to 24 months ago," Ron Jasinski, senior vice-president of Colliers' GTA office division, told REXX.

And because, Jasinski added, companies still fervently believe employees are more productive working on-site than remotely, they're taking advantage of the economic headwinds. Heading into 2024, it isn't as easy to jump ship and join another company.

"Now companies are laying people off and hiring less," Jasinski continued. "The pendulum is slowly swinging back the other way."

"The Hive"

IMCO requires its employees to be at the office at least three days a week — but it's betting staff will like what they see when they arrive.

The firm hired SDI Design to design the office and conceptualize its culture. Themed "The Hive," IMCO's 16 York head office is inspired by the egalitarian nature of beehives, spurning surfeit executive suites in favour of these types of workspaces.

"Even from CEO down, not having private offices in some environments, it got accentuated even more during COVID," Phillips said.

"Why come to an office if you're sitting with your head down at a desk, crunching numbers? You should be coming to an office because you need to work with a team, because you need to collaborate, because you need to engage.

"It's not as effective to work in an office if all you're doing is working by yourself."