



ThinkLab

DESIGN NERDS ANONYMOUS

Navigating what's next in design.

Why Traditional Workplace Metrics Are Obsolete

(Please excuse any grammatical errors in this transcript as it was auto-generated from an audio file.)

Amanda Schneider: Welcome to Design Nerds Anonymous, the podcast that sparks curiosity at the intersection of business and design. I'm your host, Amanda Schneider, founder and president at Thinklab. This season, we're shifting our lens to focus on something critical, the B2B decision making process for the built environment.

Now over the past six months, we've been in close conversation. With the decision makers shaping our spaces, corporate offices, healthcare facilities, hospitality venues, educational environments, and more. We've explored shifts alongside end users, architects, designers, and other key influencers who know just how intricate and layered these choices can be.

This season, we're unpacking how these decisions are made today. What influences them, how they've evolved and how product and service providers can better meet their [00:01:00] clients needs. Time for our next session of group therapy for navigating these decisions. In today's episode, we're tackling a challenge that is quietly, but powerfully, redefining the future of work, outdated workplace metrics.

Traditional measures like people per square foot, which once guided workplace design are losing relevance. In today's dynamic environment, as we shift from rigid input based metrics to more nuanced output focused ones like productivity, it's clear we need a radical rethink of how we define and measure success.

Now, during our research, we played a game of would you rather with participants at our live events. One of the questions was, would you rather A, forge a new path for your organization with no data or B, follow your competitors with a solid set of data? And the response was telling around 80 percent chose [00:02:00] option B.

Follow the data driven path of their competitors, while only about 20 percent were willing to take the risk of blazing a new trail without it. This underscores the deep seated risk aversion in today's business climate and highlights the need for reliable metrics and data to guide decisions. This topic of rethinking the workplace is one that I am personally and deeply passionate about.

As you might know from my recent TEDx talk titled Work is Broken. If you haven't had a chance to listen yet, I highly recommend checking it out. We'll include a link in the show notes. It's a deep dive into my personal journey and ties closely to many of the themes we're exploring today and throughout this season.

That's why I'm particularly excited to share insights from Flex Index in today's episode. Now they're drawing from data from over 13, 000 companies. Over a hundred thousand office locations and 120

million people. [00:03:00] Flex Index is at the forefront of redefining what workplace metrics should look like in the modern era.

Today we have the privilege of hearing directly from Rob Sadow, co-founder of Flex Index. His work is regularly cited by major publications like the Wall Street Journal. And in this exclusive conversation, we'll dive deep into the innovative metrics that are shaping the future of work. So if you're involved in decisions about workplace design, this episode is sure to inspire you.

It's time to rethink the numbers that define our spaces and embrace a new way of measuring success in the evolving world of work. Let's welcome Rob.

[00:03:40] **Rob Sadow:** I'm Rob Sadow. I'm the CEO and co founder at Flex Index. Flex Index is the largest data set and insight platform specifically on flexible work and hybrid work strategies.

We capture policy data, so policy like, are you full time in office for corporate employees? Are you hybrid? [00:04:00] If it's hybrid, is it specific days a week? If so, which days? If it's minimum days, how many days? And so we have very granular detail on how companies are approaching policy around flexible work location.

And then beyond that, I've started to capture quite a bit of data around workplace usage. And so on a per office level, What is the rentable square feet? How many employees are allocated? How many workstations? What are you seeing? Daily attendance and peak attendance to enable companies to not only process that data internally, but benchmark it and say, okay, what am I seeing relative to other companies that also require three days a week in office to be able to inform their decisions or their planning accordingly?

[00:04:39] **Amanda Schneider:** You touched on the people and policy side of this, you touched on the physical space side of this. Talk a little bit about the technology side of this. Do your benchmarks also look into if the technology is really facilitating effective work as well? Is there a technology piece of this at all?

[00:04:54] **Rob Sadow:** If we were having this conversation in 2019, when you were a workplace executive, the math around [00:05:00] space, it's just not rocket science to go figure it out.

You had a point of view on. Square foot per desk, or maybe square meters per desk, you've got a head count, you've got a growth rate, leases are long, you need a desk for every person, it's just not that hard at that point to figure out roughly how much space you're going to need with some buffer. Today, you just take the one change, which is you take the idea that Everyone who's a corporate employee is in the office every day, which wasn't 100 percent true beforehand, but it was effectively a planning number, right?

And you variabilize that and say, people are in the office sometimes, and it makes that unbelievably complicated because now all of a sudden you're looking at, what are we actually seeing in daily attendance versus peak attendance? And how do I think about, does everybody need a desk or is there a sharing ratio and like some number of employees can share a desk relative to the amount they come into the office?

What work are they actually doing in the office that also has an implication for how we design that space and how we allocate square footage. So almost, if you think about it, horizontally, the number of metrics and the type of metrics [00:06:00] exploded for a workplace executive. And beyond that, it's a sandwich where like, you think about that as the middle or the meat of the sandwich above it, you've got policy because if my policy is one day a week in the office, or my policy is four days a week in the office, Dramatically different answer on how much space I need, how I'm going to allocate that space, how many desks I need, what daily and peak attendance is going to look like.

Right. And then the ultimate question that this is driving toward is, okay, so I've made some investment and decisions around office. What's the implication for productivity or connection or engagement or turnover? Right. And so the complexity here comes from the fundamental simplest question that's being asked is.

How do I think about what the return on investment of an office is, right? That wasn't a question we asked five or 10 years ago. Just take it for granted. We all worked in the office now. How do I think about the ROI of an office? And that's a combination of how much I invest into it in terms of how much time people spend and investment in the space [00:07:00] itself and everything about that.

And then how much do I get out of it? And to your point, that's fundamentally data that sits across. Policy and workplace and finance and HR outcomes and other metrics that's largely disparate and fragmented today And that's part of what makes this conversation so hard

[00:07:16] **Amanda Schneider:** And I think one of the interesting things about our research too is seeing Some of the transition maybe even of the workplace function That's not every company, but we've heard stories of companies like one company who started out reporting directly to the CEO, moved during the pandemic to the CHRO, there was one more stop and now is reporting to the CFO, which effectively makes it a cost center.

So that ROI becomes more important.

We'll be right back. With more DNA after this short break.

[00:07:50] **Cindy Kaufman (Mannington Commercial):** If we can realize that we just need to form connections with one another on a real, authentic level, that provides support, that provides nurturing. [00:08:00] It also provides safety. When all humans feel that sense of safety, they can bring their gifts to the forefront.

That's what our job is. And not just in this industry, but especially in this industry. The reason designers do what they do is to bring their gifts to the forefront. And if we don't create a space where those designers can bring their gifts to the world, then we're all going to suffer for it. So, if Mannington can put more time in their day, support what they're trying to do, educate them, help them, partner with them, all in the service of their customer, their client, the outcome of the space, then, you know, we're really doing a service to the world.

And that's how my company goes into the world is that we are here to serve. That's what our company is about. Mannington Commercial is here to do good. We are here to serve. We take a lot of care in producing, manufacturing in the United States, very high performing products of all [00:09:00] categories. Hi, this is Cindy Kaufman.

I'm Vice President of Marketing. Mannington Commercial is always a proud sponsor of Design Nerds Anonymous, my favorite podcast.

[00:09:15] **Amanda Schneider:** All right. Bye. Bye. And now back to our show, we're also hearing in our research that the average number of decision makers has effectively doubled on the typical building environment committee. So there is more people involved. Sometimes these executives do not necessarily have a background in commercial real estate or workplace or any kind of construction decisions.

And when you put it under that cost umbrella, this is why I think people are just so excited hungry for more data. Tell us a little bit more about what your clients are typically coming to you for and how your data helps them sell up or manage this complexity that's happening around these decisions today.

[00:09:55] **Rob Sadow:** Our clients typically are large enterprises, companies that have participated in some of the [00:10:00] benchmark work we've done are companies like TD Bank and Southwest and other companies that are Fortune 500, Fortune 1000 companies, that style of company, and typically they're running into a couple of different problems they're trying to think through.

One is they generally know they have too much space. And the question is, okay, I know I've got too much space. What is the right answer on space? And that's actually a pretty hard question to answer just with internal data. Part of it is internal data, but the example I give is think about it almost like from a compensation benchmarking perspective, right?

And imagine you're trying to hire for a particular role and you keep getting offers turned down and the offeree is basically saying, look, you're not paying enough. If you only had internal data, how do you answer that question? You can just start paying people more and waiting to see if they accept, which is a bit painful and trial and error.

You could look at other roles in the company and be like, they accepted an offer at that price point. So maybe I should pay that, but it's pretty imperfect in terms of you probably leave money on the table or probably take you longer. The whole point of comp benchmarking is actually gives [00:11:00] you a sense of, Oh, this is where the market's paying.

And if I move to there, I at least have a reasonable expectation. I'm going to close offers at some rate and it makes it more efficient. The whole thought process around it. In workplace, we're headed to a similar place. And I think a lot of workplace executives are starting to think through it. Okay. I've got my internal data and I know I need to make some changes, but what are other people doing?

What sharing ratio are we seeing in market as other companies or industry? Are they at 2, 3, 5. If I set this ratio and I plan around it, it's going to cost me a lot of money. I'm going to change the space and desks, et cetera. So can I at least get some sense of what the world around me is doing to help get context?

The second piece beyond that is, That helps me report out internally on the way I'm thinking about my strategy and what I need to do. If you come as an executive with a fact base to your peers or to your board, you say, Hey, look, this is what's happening in our data today. This is where the market is around us.

Our strategy is here. And as a result, I think we're going to go in this direction and we're going to make these investments. The [00:12:00] likelihood of getting that business case approved or having people feel comfortable with that is substantially higher. Those are the two things that we see the most is how do I get the right answer here, but both from internal and external perspective, and then how do I convince others that's the right answer with some confidence that I don't go through a lot of red tape and slower decision making in the way that you described.

[00:12:19] **Amanda Schneider:** That makes a lot of sense. That comp example, I think that's an excellent way to help people just visualize why it's important to have outside data, even though every company is different and balancing that with that internal data that you mentioned, I'd love for you to zoom in a little bit and talk to us about what they'll find when they go to your website, where do they go, what type of information will they find, how will this help them?

[00:12:40] **Rob Sadow:** So if you go to our flex index website, you're going to find a couple of things. One is. All of the policy information that we have. And again, when I talk about policy, I mean, work, location, flexibility, where our corporate employees allowed are supposed to work, um, all of that is searchable and freely available.

So you can actually search the index. You can filter it down and [00:13:00] say. I only want to know what policies are for financial services firms that have 250 to 500 employees that are headquartered in California. And it will pull up a list of companies that you can click into and get as much detail as you want to around that.

So all of that is available. A lot of people use that, especially job seekers who are trying to think about companies that have policies they're looking for, or companies that want to very quickly look and say, okay, there are three other companies I care about. What's their policy and find that quickly.

You can also find a lot of reports. So we will write trend pieces on how things are evolving. So for example, what is the average number of days required in the office last quarter versus this quarter in the U S and so all of that is available for free. Also on the website, we put a lot of research out for benchmark specifically when you create an account on flex index as an administrator of a company, and there's no cost to create an account on flex index.

It will bring you to the option to get office benchmarks. The way that works in practice is it's give to get, which means that for your company, you can fill out basically a [00:14:00] template that is one row per office. And for each office, you give certain information. What's the address of that office. What's the rentable square feet, how many employees are allocated, how many individual workstations, what do you see in daily attendance over the past 30 days, peak attendance.

And you provide those raw inputs on a per office basis. So companies do that for offices around the world. When you fill that in, you then will get two things. One is you'll get a summary of your data. So it'll say, Hey, look, this is a snapshot of what your offices look like. And here are some key ratios that we calculated based on the inputs that you gave.

And the other is it will give you an option to look at benchmarks. And the way that benchmarks works is if you ever seen comp benchmarking, where you actually think about, you've got a role and you've got percentiles, it's built very similarly to that, where you can say, look, I want to benchmark all of my offices or a particular office or maybe a group of offices, like only leased space or only own

space, for example, you can filter those benchmarks down and say, I only [00:15:00] want to look at us benchmarks where I want to look at financial services, or I only care about offices that have, you know, 100 to 500 employees in them so you can filter it down to the granularity that you want.

And then it has a set of metrics and the metrics are things like how many square feet do you have per employee and you can look at yours and then see what 10th percentile, 25th, 50th, 75th, 90th percentile is beyond that we have a bunch of desk metrics like sharing ratio. Daily attendance, percentage of desks, peak attendance, percentage of desks.

We have a bunch of attendance related to employee type metrics. So what are you seeing in daily attendance relative to the employees allocated to the office or peak attendance relative? And all of that is comparable. And that way you can actually see, okay, we're at 25th percentile here. We're at 90th percentile here.

And the goal of that is to stimulate some discussion or intentionality around the way you think about your space. Oh, we're at 90th percentile in employees per square foot. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Inherently, it's neither. Could be great, could be terrible [00:16:00] depending on what you're seeing in attendance and your culture and the way you operate, but it should lead you to then ask some really specific questions or do some digging to make sure that's where you want to be and that's a really helpful step forward in terms of the way you think about the evolution of your own space and the intentionality

[00:16:15] **Amanda Schneider:** I think it's really interesting that you use that people per square foot as an example, because I think that's one of the ones that we're hearing.

Again, is it good or bad that I'm at the 90%? I don't know. It depends on what your goals are. I'm curious as you look at all of the different things that you're measuring from peak attendance, desk sharing ratios. This is the American in me trying to get to a magic pill that tells me what's the next. If it's not people per square foot, what are the most critical new office benchmarks or what do you see the most successful companies really focusing on today?

[00:16:46] **Rob Sadow:** Look, I would broadly say this is a journey and different companies are going to be in different stages of their journey. I wouldn't describe it as maturity because I think a lot of companies have been thinking about this stuff for a long time. It's just some of it is new and there's a lot of innovation of the way to think about these [00:17:00] metrics in space.

A lot of companies start with basic design metrics like how many square feet do I have? How many employees do I have? What does that look like? That's an important place to begin. Where a lot of that is shifting is more into occupancy. I really shouldn't use the word occupancy cause that means a hundred different things to different people.

But how do I think about going from total space to the allocation of that space to whether people are coming into that space and that's the thought process in my mind. And so you go from how much square footage or square meters do you have into. Okay, based on certain patterns, do I have one desk per person?

Should it be more than one desk per person? I need to look at that in conjunction with daily attendance and peak attendance. And that helps paint a picture for me around, okay, what does my

space usage look like in practice? That feels like the space where the bulk of companies are right now, in terms of how do I think about that in practice.

In time, I think that will start to give way into, and what are the productivity outcomes of that? And one of the things that we're thinking about a lot is like, how do we start to [00:18:00] integrate engagement, performance, other type of HR data into it over time to say, Hey, look, is there a relationship between attendance, And what your last rating score was, or do we see turnover rate look different based on if you require two days a week versus three days a week versus four days a week in the office to help inform policy?

So I think we will get down that curve, so to speak, over time. But right now, the bulk of people are like, Hey, do I even have the right setup of my space relative to what's actually happening in my space?

[00:18:31] **Amanda Schneider:** Which is so interesting to me because things are moving so quickly. And aside from people accessing, you know, your database that obviously is very comprehensive.

I know it's referenced by Wall Street Journal, Forbes, a variety of other different entities. Can you tell us a story about one key client and how they've leveraged your data for maybe a new kind of success?

[00:18:49] **Rob Sadow:** I can give you lots of stories, but I'll give you one. This company has got big footprint across the U.

S. and Canada. Lots of office locations and had never put it together before to actually be able to look at [00:19:00] daily and peak attendance ratios and compare across portfolio in terms of what it looked like. And when they put the data in and looked at benchmarks and looked at their own analysis of it, daily attendance typically was somewhere between 30 and 40 percent of employees that were allocated to the space.

And peak attendance never exceeded 70 percent in any space that they had in all of their footprint. And so it led immediately to a host of questions strategically, right? What is, okay, what do we do about that? There's some options. One is, do we have too much space? Are we heavy by 10 or 20 or 30%? Which immediately kicks off a, well, what's our growth plan look like?

How much more space do we actually need in practice? Which is really useful because it leads to immediate cost savings as leases come up in terms of thinking about that. The other was, if we're at 70 percent at max in peak attendance, 30 40 percent on daily attendance, Then we got a lot of space that's not used in an optimal way right now.

And so immediately lead to discussions around, Hey, let's rip out some desks and that's who put in some different collaborative [00:20:00] space and maybe that's actually going to drive higher attendance. So it led to not only a point of view on cost savings, but also point of view on what are the experiments that we need to go run.

And how do we think about those spaces differently when you've got a big footprint like that? One of the fun things you can do is pick an office or two and start to experiment with it. And so those are the type of conversations that are happening all the time and trying to help stimulate that thinking.

It's an overwhelming topic. And a lot of real estate executives are like, where do I, where do I start? And the answer is, if I can point you to an insight or to one thing that doesn't look maybe quite right. And that allows you to come up with some specific ideas. That's a great way to start to get more intentional around your space and find some

[00:20:36] **Amanda Schneider:** And I think we're hearing a lot about this experimentation.

I'm curious in that story, you just told, have they, are we still in the process of that? Have they been able to put those experiments in place and make some decisions after that? Is there any resolution yet to that story or is it still in its infancy?

[00:20:51] **Rob Sadow:** Yeah, still in process. And I think it will be for a while, honestly, because I don't think a lot of these experiments are binary.

It's not like either it's a success or a failure as a result. I think [00:21:00] you iterate based on it. One of my favorite conversations I had recently was with Lauren DeYoung at Allstate, who is responsible for a lot of their future work, ways of working type stuff. She talks a lot about the, effectively has set up a lab internally on this, and we'll set up a space, and have people use the space, then give feedback, and a great example that she gave was people are saying that in theory, they're like, Hey, we just want space to be collaborative because that's the point of coming into the office.

I'm not going to go into the office just to do the same work I was doing at home. So let's make a space that's predominantly collaborative conference room type of thing. But then when people actually start using the space, they're like, but I still have an hour or two within that day where I have to go do like heads down email or go take a call.

So they're like. Give us some communal quiet space. I don't need an individual desk, but I need somewhere to be able to go for the one meeting that fits in that day. That's a Zoom meeting or my heads down work. And so they redesigned it again and they run the experiment with it. And I think that's what some of the best in class companies are doing is they're like, Learn, iterate, test, do it [00:22:00] again.

And especially if you're fortunate enough to have lots of offices, if you're a scale company, that's got lots of different locations, you can run multiple experiments, different places and learn really fast around it. I think that's a really smart approach, just given how fast things are changing at the moment.

[00:22:17] **Amanda Schneider:** We'll be right back.

Let's dive back into the episode. As you look at all of the companies you have access to, all of these stories, all the data that you're looking at, what has been your most interesting aha or your most interesting discovery in the last, let's say six months?

[00:22:39] **Rob Sadow:** Ooh, that is such a good question. I think probably the most interesting thing is this question of how do I think about the return on investment of an office is such a big question and it's so unusual.

Real estate for most firms is like the second biggest expense item on the P&L behind people. And [00:23:00] historically, you're talking about an asset that is Really expensive and really illiquid. I have to make decisions on this. And my lease is 10 years long and I can't really do a lot with it. And that was fine.

When it's a cost of business, everybody works in the office. And as a result, it just wasn't that level of scrutiny on it. You change this one thing in the world and all of a sudden this whole thing looked at differently. And now you're saying, wait, I've got a high cost asset. That's pretty illiquid. I should be really.

Thoughtful and have a lot of scrutiny in terms of the way that I apply that, but that's a big change and it's a big change for an industry that I think is historically not necessarily been on the cutting edge of testing out new analytics concepts and thinking about application of technology. What's been interesting for me, the AHA, I've watched how different companies are in terms of their life cycle around this and how even the companies that have thought about this deeply forever and ever still struggle with how disparate the data is and living in disparate systems and how hard it is to pull that together in one place to make decisions and so.

If there's one thing I've learned over the last six months, it's in five years, 10 years time, this [00:24:00] industry is going to just look entirely different in terms of every real estate executive in the world in five years time will be able to tell their board or CEO or CFO exactly how they're using their space and how that compares to peers and what's the relationship with.

Productivity or employee impact. And therefore we should tweak our approach in this way. The maturity around this is just going to continue to grow in a really interesting way. It might be the most interesting lasting impact out of the pandemic in any asset category.

[00:24:26] **Amanda Schneider:** Oh, I would wholly agree. And I think that is a huge call to action for our whole industry.

A big challenge is we do these beautiful designs. We do these beautiful spaces, but there's not always budget for post mortem analysis. We're built on capital expenditures, right? So we finished the execution of the space and it was X million dollars to build it out. Now there's no more money left to make changes.

How should we be thinking differently?

[00:24:51] **Rob Sadow:** It's important to pull some of that stuff in, because your point on like the real estate executive that's gone through the journey and now reports into the CFO, like CFO is like now much more [00:25:00] closely involved in a lot of this stuff than maybe they were five years ago.

But now they're really looking at the numbers around this. And so you think about the math, you say, Hey, look, these are historically big investments. Look at a fortune 500 company, you want to add a space, million dollar plus investment. You want to remove a space, million dollar plus investment. You want to change a space, million dollar, like these are big dollar decisions and they're not made fast.

The prevailing thinking within workplace executives, especially on the occupier side is there is pressure to figure out how do I get more flexibility out of this asset? And there's a number of ways that's starting to materialize. One is. Can I drop term instead of having to sign 10 years? Can I be at seven or five or three even because the world is changing so fast?

I don't know what I need. The other is how do I get more flexibility out of the space itself? It's really hard to go in one direction. And then you learn a year later that actually you need to do something different. And then you're at a new million dollar decision, redesign the space. And so I think if folks who are supporting commercial real estate industry can keep that in mind, which is everyone [00:26:00] knows a lot is changing, and so people are hesitant to think about signing up for huge investments in a space that maybe they're not going to be in as long as they were before, or are going to maybe want to tweak again.

How do you find the right balance between investing in space, but doing it in a way that has some flexibility to it as you learn or pull data in? That's going to be some of the holy grail. It's not easy to be clear, but I think that's like where we're at.

[00:26:24] **Amanda Schneider:** And I think it's going to push us to really rethink some of the way things have always been done.

I look at even service firms, let's say an architecture design firm, maybe instead of one project and done and you're moving on to the next, if they are your partner through and through for the next X number of years in a subscription like model that might change the way they think. It might change the way our product manufacturers think, if you think about furniture, if it's got to transform so that you can maximize that space and move it around a little bit more in a way that you don't have to call facilities in and spend X amount of dollars just to reconfigure those walls.

I think there's going to be real implications as I state some of those examples. Any thoughts about [00:27:00] how our industry should be thinking differently?

[00:27:02] **Rob Sadow:** I think that's exactly right, to be honest, which is what are ways to both prove concept on things faster and more cheaply in order to then say, okay, it's worth going and pushing the full investment against that as a way of proof versus saying, Hey, look, I already know in a pretty staid way what this is going to look like.

So I can build out and be comfortable with the next 10 years of what this is going to look like. And I think experimentation again, is a huge part of it. Can you. Pick a location to try something in that's relatively inexpensive to prove out a point and then use that as a test case to then replicate across lots of other locations.

So you feel like you've got some validated learning in the approach. It's gonna be much easier to digest that. I think from a budget perspective over time, it will speed up decision making versus, Hey, we've got a point of view and now we're going to go make all of these big changes. It's just, it's a hard thing in a world that's changing so fast.

[00:27:50] **Amanda Schneider:** And I think it's going to be on all of these serving these decision makers to figure out how they can help them reduce risk because between inflation, all the change

that's [00:28:00] happened, all the metrics in the world, still there's an element of risk as they're getting out there to do these experiments.

[00:28:06] **Rob Sadow:** Yeah, and frankly, this is why we're trying to bring some of the data we are through Office Benchmarks is if I can at least help give you some guardrails in terms of, hey, what's happening in your industry, or here's what you're seeing other places, maybe if that becomes a rough sense of design parameters, or you're very intentional and saying, I'm going outside of benchmark because we believe strongly in this thing, the likelihood of being way wrong, Comes down a little bit, at least relative to pure set.

It's going to speed up your decision making internally. And that has to, whether you're a corporate real estate executive on the occupier side, that's using this to inform internally, or you're supporting that industry. And you can actually bring data forward to be able to say, Hey, look, this is what we're seeing broadly.

And as a result, this might be a good approach to the space or a way to do it. I think that stuff's going to be very helpful.

[00:28:48] **Amanda Schneider:** So maybe that's your new tagline. Your likelihood of being way wrong reduces with flex. Yeah,

[00:28:54] **Rob Sadow:** very eloquent the

[00:28:56] **Amanda Schneider:** Good. So I know our listeners are going to want to discover how they can [00:29:00] stay in touch with you.

How do they get more information if they want to dive in and figure out how your data can benefit them?

[00:29:06] **Rob Sadow:** Yep. So a few different things. One, our Flexindex website has all of our benchmark data in terms of how to access and sign up and subscribe, et cetera. And so check that out on our website. Search for office benchmarks for Flexindex, you'll find it.

The second is if you want to reach out to me directly, I'm happy to chat about it. And so you can email me at rob at flexindex. com and that information, anything that I talked about, or do you want to hear more about? I'm happy to share. The third is I write quite a bit on this topic on LinkedIn. And so if you follow me on LinkedIn, I got lots of good content around this stuff.

And then. Fourth, we put out lots of reports and data and a lot of that stuff we make available for free. And so you can find on our site, we have a weekly newsletter that we do through Substack for Flex Index that has a bunch of stuff in it too. So there are lots of ways to immerse yourself. I'm happy to have a conversation.

I would certainly encourage everybody to check out benchmarks and see if it can't be helpful to you.

[00:29:54] **Amanda Schneider:** And I know you said give to get knowing that our audience is not only these corporate end user decision makers, but also [00:30:00] maybe some architects and designers that might be working on a project of a specific industry, a specific region, a specific size.

Do they have access to this as well?

[00:30:07] **Rob Sadow:** Yes. Because anybody can pull the policy data for free for the office benchmarks. You can't pull benchmarks unless you share specifically for your company. So there's two ways to get at that. If you're supporting one is. Share it for your firm. Even if you're an architecture firm, share that and that'll give you access to benchmarks that you can use in other ways.

The other is we've done lots of partnerships to help architects or others bring their client on and we can do discounts for that, especially if you're bringing in lots of clients. And so help us help bring them the data and then you can work with them on it. It's been a really good strategy that I think a lot of people have gotten some benefit out of too.

[00:30:40] **Amanda Schneider:** And then my last question is one that we're asking every one of our podcast interviewees, which is looking ahead. What is one word to describe what most excites you about the future?

[00:30:50] **Rob Sadow:** Intentionality. I think that's the one that I'm most excited about. I love when industries evolve in a way, say, Hey, look, we used to do something a certain way [00:31:00] because it just was done that way and it was easy, but all of a sudden you're like, okay, now I get to apply fresh thinking and approach and data.

And I think that leads to like really cool outcomes and there's some pain in that process for sure, but I think space and space investment and design is going to become much, much more intentional over the coming years. And I'm excited to see some of that stuff come through.

[00:31:18] **Amanda Schneider:** I know that I said that was the last question, but given that intentionality, given your platform, everything you've done today, what most excites you about your business and where do you hope to take this to continue to evolve with these mindsets?

[00:31:30] **Rob Sadow:** Look, my hope and my goal is that we can support every real estate executive in the world and thinking through how to approach their space and the way that I think about it in a comparison sense is 50 years ago, if you were trying to figure out how to compensate your people, you just pay them based on whatever you negotiate, and you have no idea what the company down the street is paying or what other companies or industry are doing.

And now I would challenge you to go find a HR executive at any meaningful scale company that is not using comp benchmarking to inform the way they think about their [00:32:00] compensation strategy. I think we're headed to a similar place with workplace in terms of a combination of rich internal analysis and understanding the market.

And I love the idea of being able to support that. And if that helps people feel more confident in their decisions, make better decisions, get more out of their space and deliver amazing experiences and productivity, I get a lot of energy out of that. So that's all of our focus going into the future.

[00:32:20] **Amanda Schneider:** Today's episode tackled the evolving metrics, redefining workplace design and strategy. We explored why traditional metrics like People per square foot are increasingly irrelevant in the dynamic landscape of hybrid work and how new benchmarks are setting the stage for a more intentional and data driven approach to space management.

As we heard from Rob Sadow, the CEO and co founder of FlexIndex, embracing new metrics is not just about space optimization. It's about understanding how these choices impact productivity, engagement, and overall business success. I hope this discussion inspires [00:33:00] you to think differently about the numbers that matter most for your organization and encourage you to start experimenting with modern, relevant benchmarks.

If you're looking to dive deeper, of course, we'd invite you to visit Flex Index's website for more on their groundbreaking work and how their data insights could benefit your next project. You can also stay connected with Rob on LinkedIn. Where he frequently shares thought provoking content about the future of work.

But we'd love to hear from you here at Thinklab as well. Which workplace metric do you think needs to be redefined? You can send us a direct message or join the conversation on LinkedIn or Instagram. Find us at Thinklab.design. For more on this topic, visit Thinklab.design. Make sure to subscribe to Design Nerds Anonymous, wherever you get your podcasts.

You can find past episodes, show notes, and additional resources at Thinklab.designbackslash podcasts. And as always, your [00:34:00] feedback means the world to us. So feel free to reach out on social media. We'd love to hear from you. Design Nerds Anonymous is up to date. Proud member of the Surround Podcast Network by Sandal.

This is a network dedicated to exploring the most intriguing aspects of architecture and design. Check out more of our partner shows@surroundpodcasts.com. This episode was produced by the talented Hannah Viti, with support from our production team, including Rachel, Senator and Rob Schulte. We'll be back next week to spark new ideas at the crossroads of business and design. I hope you'll tune in.