

THE CUBICLE MANIFESTO



Change the Way You Work
and Reinvent Your Life

MAINAK DHAR

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About the Book

Welcome to THE CUBICLE. The desk space you occupy for hours on end. Where creativity is dead and stress levels are high. Where you feel guilty for leaving, but reluctant to arrive. Where you eat lunch, plan, strategize and phone home to say how late you'll be tonight.

Is this the place you'd really like to be? Is there a better way to work?

The Cubicle Manifesto is a business parable for the modern age that will transform the way you work. Read this book and join the revolution.

#endcubicletyranny

About the Author

Mainak Dhar is a self-confessed cubicle dweller by day and a writer by night. After graduating from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, he has spent more than fifteen years in the corporate world. At the same time, he has been a prolific writer, with ten books to his credit. Learn more about him and contact him at mainakdhar.com.

THE CUBICLE MANIFESTO

**Change the Way You Work
and Reinvent Your Life**

MAINAK DHAR

Vermilion
LONDON

As always, for Puja and Aadi

Cubicle dwellers of the world unite.
You have nothing to lose but the tyranny of your cubicles.

A Note to Fellow Cubicle Dwellers

How many hours a day do you cubicle?

No, you did not hear that wrong and, no, you should not start worrying about picking up a book whose first line seems to be a murder of the English language. Hidden in my question is a proposal. A proposal that we officially recognize the important role the office workstation plays in so many of our lives by elevating its status to that of a verb. In 2006, 'google' was officially recognized as a verb in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Given that we spend so much more time sitting in cubicles or tucked behind partitions in open-plan offices than on any search engine, it seems only appropriate to officially recognize what it is that we do there. Here is my attempt at explaining what it means 'to cubicle':

The act of sitting in a confined workspace for extended hours, stifling interpersonal communication, creativity and any other expression of individuality, which makes the individual forget life beyond the immediate demands of the job.

Ring a bell? If it does, you can at least take heart from the fact that you are not alone. It is estimated that close to twenty million people in the United States alone work in cubicles, and the total value of the cubicle-making industry may be as high as three billion dollars.

How did this soul-killing invention come to be such an indispensable part of our daily lives?

The cubicle began with the best of intentions. It was invented by Robert Propst in the 1960s as a means to enhance productivity by allowing an executive to have all relevant information readily spread out in front of him or her. Years of cost cutting, the desire to cram as many people as possible in one area and lack of imaginative design by corporations has reduced this vision to the long columns of drab, restricted cubes that dissect the floorplans of many corporate offices today. Before he died, Propst is said to have lamented his contribution to 'monolithic insanity'.

Over time, the humble cubicle has come to be reviled and ridiculed as an object of scorn, and comic strips like *Dilbert* and movies such as *Office Space* have sought to portray the often bizarre side of modern corporate life that the cubicle sometimes symbolizes - a tool that enforces conformity and boredom in offices.

Many of you may not work in a classic cubicle, having instead partitions or your desk boxing you in. It's the same deal: your working life is spent in a small, confined space.

Tempting as it might be, my intention is not to join the chorus of voices mocking the absurdity of cubicle dwelling. The first reason is a pragmatic one - being yet another addition to an already long list of similar books on the same theme is usually a sure ticket to literary obscurity. The second reason is a more philosophical one.

Corporations are also waking up to the fact that they have perhaps pushed things to an extreme and many of them are pioneering interventions like flexible work hours and seating. However, the reality for the bulk of cubicle or other 'pod' dwellers is not likely to radically change unless we also contribute to this change. Whether we like it or not, many of us will have to keep 'cubicling' (another word for the dictionaries to consider) for several years yet. The reason for this is simply an economic one - working helps pay the bills and gets us the lifestyle we desire. For others,