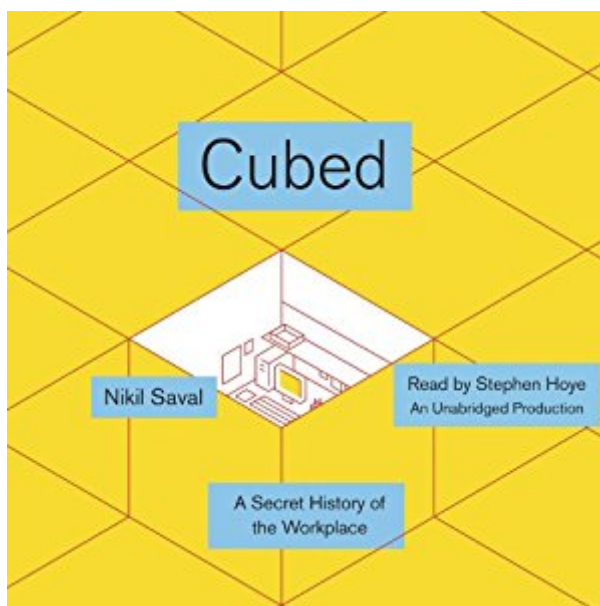


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# Cubed: A Secret History Of The Workplace



## Synopsis

You mean this place we go to five days a week has a history? Cubed reveals the unexplored yet surprising story of the places where most of the world's work - our work - gets done. From "Bartleby the Scrivener" to The Office, from the steno pool to the open-plan cubicle farm, Cubed is a fascinating, often funny, and sometimes disturbing anatomy of the white-collar world and how it came to be the way it is - and what it might become. In the mid-nineteenth century clerks worked in small, dank spaces called "counting-houses." These were all-male enclaves, where work was just paperwork. Most Americans considered clerks to be questionable dandies, who didn't do "real work." But the joke was on them: As the great historical shifts from agricultural to industrial economies took place, and then from industrial to information economies, the organization of the workplace evolved along with them - and the clerks took over. Offices became rationalized, designed for both greater efficiency in the accomplishments of clerical work and the enhancement of worker productivity. Women entered the office by the millions, and revolutionized the social world from within. Skyscrapers filled with office space came to tower over cities everywhere. Cubed opens our eyes to what is a truly "secret history" of changes so obvious and ubiquitous that we've hardly noticed them. From the wood-paneled executive suite to the advent of the cubicles where 60% of Americans now work (and 93% of them dislike it) to a not-too-distant future where we might work anywhere at any time (and perhaps all the time), Cubed excavates from popular books, movies, comic strips (Dilbert!), and a vast amount of management literature and business history, the reasons why our workplaces are the way they are - and how they might be better.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is one of those books that ended up getting a good bit of press because it was a novel way of looking at something that is an everyday thing. The way that white collar workers do their work didn't just happen that way, but it was a result of deliberate choices from the architecture of the buildings that the work is done in to the furniture that the workers sit on. I hadn't thought too deeply about it, thinking that the way things are was just a bit like the way things were, only with computers. I was wrong, and Saval tracks the changes, focused on the United States from the industrial revolution on. The white-collar worker has not been devoid of the standardization and alienation that the blue-collar worker had and rebelled against. The white-collar worker just never saw their white-collar chains; instead, they looked up, hoping to move up the ladder (no matter how false that metaphor is or was). The potential for striving has, writ large, been the barrier to class to recognition of the white-collar worker for generations. The lack of upward mobility except for into the white-collar ranks is what led to unionism and workers improving their lots. The myth of upward mobility in white-collar terms is a form of social control that is not readily seen. Saval tracks this, and it makes me think if this has been a deliberate move. As production has been mechanized, there are fewer production workers and more support staff in ancillary roles to production. As more workers move out of production and the workforce is more and more professionalized, white-collar membership is the mass of workers. It is the cube that keeps them apart and alienated. Maybe it is a prison of sorts. I'm not part of this at all. My office has a door.

Interesting read, but the author goes off on difficult to follow tangents from time to time. Saval's choice of words can be a bit obtuse. If I wasn't currently a college student accustomed to reading academic literature, I would have found this book unmanageable at times. Regardless, interesting content overall.

Cubed is really about people, their motivations, their successes and failures. It spends a lot of pages on why people, both men and women, wanted to become white-collar workers and how they coped with the office landscapes that organizations built for their employees. Read this book and you will never look fondly at any skyscraper of any vintage with admiration again, for in one way or another too many offices were, and too often still are, dehumanizing. Saval ranges widely. The author is well

read on a large variety of subjects that are important to his overall discussion. He

Heard an interview of Nikil Saval on 7th Avenue Project and knew I HAD to check this book out. I was NOT disappointed. It's a fascinating accounting on the evolution of the office, its design, and the varied influences (social, economic, etc.) that cross-pollinated to get where we are today. Excellent treatment, especially on design elements and open-concept (open-source) workspace. Kudos!

Nikil provides a wonderful narrative examining management philosophy, architecture and design, and culture over time. As a business school professor I appreciated learning more about how important the physical environment of the office is to the organizational culture that emerges, and visa versa.

I'm incredibly frustrated with this book. the story the author is trying to tell has the potential to be so incredibly compelling. I love the concept of it. However, the writing is disorganized and very difficult to follow - overall fairly inaccessible to the everyday reader. It almost reads like an academic white paper at times. I feel like the author is trying too hard to sound scholarly by using flowery, excessive prose instead of communicating his POV clearly and succinctly. A single paragraph can go back and forth between his own thoughts and quotations or citations making it very difficult to follow. I gave up after 90 pages. I don't want to work this hard while reading a book for leisure.

A good history of a subject that I would not have originally thought would be so interesting. It is more than just about the office cubicle. It is about the history of office work, city architecture, labor relations, changing business structure and much more. If like me you have spent much of your working career in an office cubicle, you will find much to relate to.

Great use of both accessible and entertaining examples, primary research , and secondary sources. The historical overview of white collar work was a phenomenal addition, as well as the analysis of power and class in the design and functioning of white collar workplaces

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