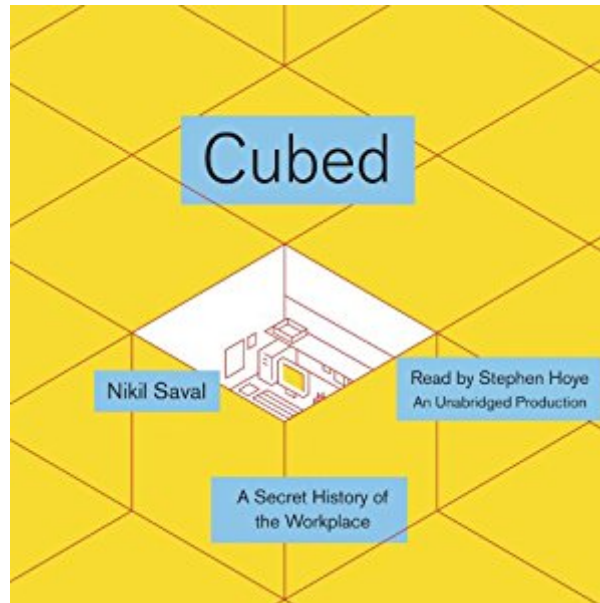


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# Cubed: A Secret History Of The Workplace



## 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

Saval's book is a "must-read" for anyone interested in the world of work. For one thing, the author chose a topic that's gotten little attention from researchers or popular writers. He takes us through the history of the office, going back to the days of all-male offices with male clerks. He traces the development of office equipment - not just typewriters, but even desks and filing cabinets. We also get reminded of past workplace trends. Remember Gillbreth's Cheaper By The Dozen? This family dynamic was fueled by an offshoot of Taylorism, a system of measuring productivity that seems cruel to many of us today. And then remember the 40s, 50s and 60s? The world of Mad Men and the movie The Best of Everything? Women dressed up in dresses, hose and heels (girdles, too!) sitting at rows of typewriters. Katherine Gibbs School was the female Harvard MBA, an entry to the most elite secretarial positions. Cubed then fast forwards to the present, where companies experiment with a variety of formats, including open offices resembling coffee shops and coworking spaces. Cubed is best read as a series of loosely themed chapters. My only quibble is that the focus of the chapters (what social scientists call the unit of analysis) shifts. Clerks, secretaries, engineers, call center workers, and software developers might work in similar spaces, but their perspectives will be different, as they have widely divergent opportunities for promotion, marketability and day-to-day flexibility. An engineer sitting in a cubicle probably can take off a couple of hours to get a hair cut or run an errand; a clerk or call center worker probably cannot do the same. That's huge.

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