

How an Open Workspace Can Promote Collaboration

By: Elizabeth Mott

Workplace design can't guarantee employee collaboration. For instance, cubicles and private offices can lead productivity astray and replace face-to-face communication with distancing email. Behind a closed door or cubby wall, a worker's lack of focus can go unseen and unchallenged. But a well-planned open workspace sets the stage for engagement, teamwork and progressive thinking.



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Redefining Privacy for Group Focus

The traditional notion of workplace privacy — the walled office with a door — leads some workers to avoid opportunities for collaboration. Some people feel intimidated when they have to knock, or wait to be invited in. By incorporating an open workplace, the need to share becomes a logical extension of the space itself. When a work group or individual needs a quiet location for confidential planning or deep thought, the best open workspaces provide conference areas and decompression zones in which people can find short-term privacy.

Clustering to Foster Shared Thinking

Long rows of tables set up like high school study halls or the work-lounge spaces in airports or hotels don't capture the essence of work group collaboration. Open workspaces should encourage teams to sit — and work — together in clusters that reflect their shared goals and activities. Those same workspaces need the flexibility to reconfigure easily and quickly when employees need to repurpose them for other tasks. Look for designs and furnishings you can move and shuffle as needed, with a focus on providing plenty of places to plug in computers and charging stations for phones.

Making Every Space Count

Extend your visualization of the open workspace into all the aspects of your office design. To make the best use of every square foot, look for ways to promote functional collaboration anywhere employees gather. That includes break rooms and kitchens, both of which can become collaborative extensions of the eat-together, think-together mindset that distinguishes dedicated teams. Extend the services and facilities — Wi-Fi and network

access, for example — into relaxed and informal parts of your office. This makes it possible to take advantage of creativity at a moment's notice.

Reflecting Corporate Culture

Open workspaces speak volumes about the companies and teams that use them. A collaboratively-focused office reinforces the message of a company's commitment to minimize hierarchies in favor of valuing all employee ideas and contributions. Look for ways to capitalize on the freedom, flexibility and shared work that comes from an office built to emphasize a team concept. Additionally, when employees offer suggestions to fine tune and personalize the space, take action on ideas that make your office a better place to work.