



A Quick Guide to

Collaborative Workplace Design

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The Office Blueprint | **3**

Furniture | **5**

Lighting & Mood | **8**

EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION MATTERS

Employee satisfaction often depends on a flexible work schedule and a workplace that's as conducive to collaboration and productivity as it is to comfort and personalization. That satisfaction matters to companies because happy employees are generally more productive than their dissatisfied colleagues.

Nowadays, the workplace isn't so much a designated office or building as it is the place where you choose to work – as long as that place has Wi-Fi. That changes how we think of the workplace and the workday, and it blurs the lines between home and work. As that line is blurred and as the work week lasts longer than 40 hours (on average, 7 hours longer¹), companies must consider the health, comfort and satisfaction of its workforce.

But how do you create a comfortable workplace that inspires creativity and productivity? The cubicle versus the private office versus the open office is a lively debate based as much on company culture as cost savings. We think of long-standing corporations as traditionally having closed offices or cubicles with set work hours, while start-ups invoke notions of the 24/7 workweek taking place in nontraditional places – maybe a dining room, a revamped warehouse or a business center with rentable workspaces.

There is no one right formula. This guide identifies some of the important aspects of workplace design – from office layout to ergonomic products and desk accessories – to help you make decisions that may make sense for your employees and your bottom line.





THE OFFICE BLUEPRINT

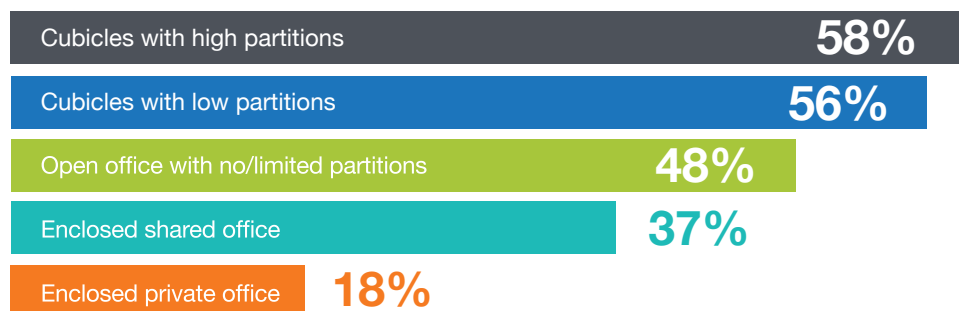
Although some employees embrace the openness and social aspects of the open office, it has experienced some backlash. As Thomas Barnidge, a 3M Marketing Manager, explains, “many find that environment too distracting, making it harder to concentrate and have a space they can customize and call their own.”

Meanwhile, employees who work in cubicles cite noise as an issue. “The open office versus cubicle environment debate doesn’t present an all-or-nothing proposition, but what makes sense for your business, your clients and your employees,” asserts Holly Bohn, Founder and Creative Director of See Jane Work. The solution then may be mixing the two.

Elements of the contemporary office have evolved to include both collaboration areas furnished with comfortable furniture as well as private nooks or breakout rooms for when employees need to work in small teams or to focus on solitary work. “Putting together a team to investigate the issue,” Bohn advises, “can be a great way of getting feedback and ultimately buy-in.”

Noise in the Workplace Is a Major Frustration²

An employee’s environment impacts whether lack of sound privacy is an issue at work. Those working in cubicles may more likely be dissatisfied with noise in the workplace than employees in closed offices.





Chance Meeting Paths

Placing staircases, restrooms and conference rooms in the middle of common areas increases chance meetings that lead to spontaneous discussions and the sharing of ideas that solve problems.



Conversation Wells

Located near chance meeting paths, conversation wells (aka breakout rooms, privacy nooks, etc.) enable the chance meeting to continue without disturbing nearby colleagues.



Conference Rooms



Collaboration Areas

Collaboration remains a key part of doing business, so every workplace needs areas equipped with plug & play technology, comfy chairs, whiteboards and other supplies a team might need.



Workstations at Shared Tables



Common Areas

Kitchens, break rooms and game areas provide space where employees can dine, talk, play and shift focus away from work.



Closed Offices

FURNITURE

In the 1980s, as computers in the workplace became more common, conditions like carpal tunnel syndrome and other computer-related injuries were new and increasing. Businesses scrambled to adapt the workstation to the person, giving rise to ergonomic furniture and office accessories. Today, professionals and companies have a greater understanding of the benefits of ergonomic workstations.

That change, says Thomas Barnidge of 3M, has shifted the conversation regarding workplace design “from ergonomics to exploring how companies can help their employees be more productive.” The right furniture and office accessories help to create a comfortable environment. Happier and healthier employees are more likely to be productive.

TO STAND OR TO SIT?

The companies who understand that happy workers are productive workers also understand that employees value choice. As James R. Jutz of 3M Facilities Management Services explains, this is why the height adjustable (HA) desk is ideal:

“Employees can choose how many hours they sit or stand each day.”



AN UNUSUAL WORKPLACE PERK: THE STANDING DESK

Along with game rooms, free food and gym access, the standing desk is becoming an office perk. In 2015, roughly 25% of companies offer standing desks to employees.³

ERGONOMIC PRODUCTS: DESIGNED TO KEEP YOU COMFORTABLE AND PAIN FREE



Adjust your screen using **monitor arms** to a comfortable height for viewing to reduce eye, back and neck strain.



With **document holders**, you can keep documents upright and improve their viewing position.



Anti-glare filters protect against interfering lights to make reading on your monitor easier.



To enhance comfort and productivity, position your keyboard and mouse to their ergonomically correct positions with an **adjustable keyboard tray**.



A properly lit workstation with **task lights** can reduce glare and improve reading efficiency.



Save effort by lessening your reach to click and drag by using a **wireless mouse**.

COST VERSUS PRIVACY

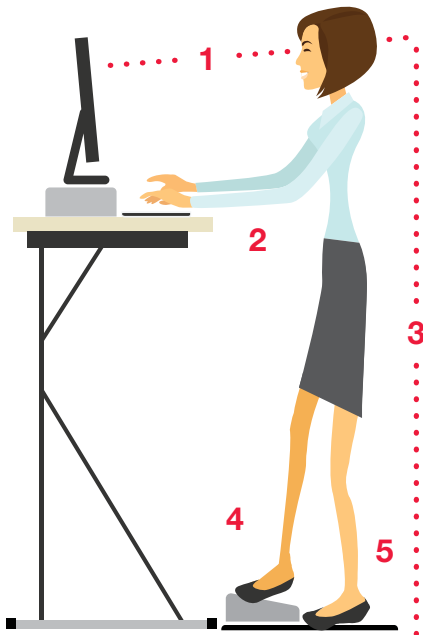
The significant cost savings the open office environment provides is largely driving the push toward this workplace trend. A company can fit more employees within the same amount of space in an open office versus a workplace divided into individual offices or cubicles. This makes sense, when you consider that a traditional office is becoming a thing of the past as the workforce becomes increasingly mobile. Over time, explains James R. Jutz of 3M, the amount of space allotted per employee has shrunk from roughly 200 square feet/person to 150. A worker's smaller personal space, in turn, has created the need for certain desk accessories, such as task lights and keyboard trays, to be designed in a compact, clean-looking style to reduce clutter.

STANDING VS. SITTING: THE DO'S AND DON'TS

Research today is focusing on how sitting for long periods of time, day in and day out, could be responsible for an increase in certain health risks. There is much discussion about how it may also affect productivity. Standing desks have been credited with helping people feel more alert and focused, and therefore more productive.⁴

You burn roughly 30 more calories each hour you stand instead of sit.⁵ But standing for several hours has its downsides, too.

The solution? Alternating between sitting and standing throughout the day.



- 1 Position the screen slightly below eye level to help reduce neck strain.
- 2 Adjust the height of the desk so that your forearms are level.
- 3 Stand in a relaxed stance with proper posture; don't slouch.
- 4 Use a foot stool to rest one foot (and then the other) while standing for long periods.
- 5 Wear comfortable shoes and/or stand on a padded mat.
- 6 A mobile chair enables you to easily center your body in front of the keyboard.
- 7 An adjustable tilt-back chair supports the lower back.
- 8 A padded rest provides support for hands and wrists.
- 9 Sit with your feet flat on the floor, using either a height adjustable chair or a foot stool.
- 10 Adjustable armrests keep your forearms in a level position (or angled slightly upward).



LIGHTING & MOOD

Office layout and furniture choices are only two areas that can affect the professional workforce's well-being. Also important are lighting, personalization and even natural elements, such as plants.

We've long understood that plants generally make a space feel more home-like and improve air quality, but we now know they can help reduce stress and noise.⁶ Workplaces that incorporate more natural light have been shown to help improve mood, as well as enhance the ability to focus.⁷

Low-privacy workspaces may increase emotional exhaustion. One study found that employees working in low-privacy and undecorated workspaces are known for

experiencing the greatest amount of emotional exhaustion. Workers who are allowed to personalize their workstations, however, may take comfort from items they choose to place around them and thereby experience decreased emotional exhaustion and increased productivity.⁸



PERSONALIZING YOUR WORKSPACE

Holly Bohn of See Jane Work offers these tips to personalize your space while keeping it professional:

Decorating your personal workspace is akin to dressing yourself each morning, so think about the message you want to send.

If family is important to you, displaying family photos is a great way to highlight that part of your personality.

Anything that could be construed as offensive or passive-aggressive should be avoided.

Incorporating your favorite color into your workstation is a great way to personalize your space, but adding items can increase clutter; instead, find office supplies in your favorite color—such as a blue stapler.



CHOICE CAN BOOST MORALE

Bohn cites a scenario where an assistant was given the freedom to organize the office with See Jane Work products. The resulting increase in overall office morale happily surprised the boss, who wished she had made the change sooner.

BUILDING A HEALTHIER WORKFORCE

When a company promotes a healthier office environment, they show employees they're in tune with their work habits and care about their health and well-being. Part of that healthier environment is devising a workplace design that makes sense for a business.

When making those decisions, the importance of a company's culture can't be underestimated. Neither can the importance of giving employees some freedom of choice. Employees feel more satisfied at work when they have choices – whether that freedom comes in the form of choosing how to decorate their own workspaces or to work occasionally at standing desks.

These efforts together make for a healthier workforce, who is more likely to be satisfied, stay with the company longer and be more productive.

THANKS TO THE CONTRIBUTORS

Office Depot would like to thank the contributors who gave their time and expert insights to this guide:



Thomas Barnidge

Marketing Manager, 3M Stationery
and Office Supplies Division



Holly Bohn

Founder and Creative Director,
See Jane Work



James R. Jutz

Project Specialist, 3M Facilities
Management Services

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