

Reinventing Five Essential Spaces: Before + After

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Our designers tackled common problems facing employees and organizations today. They've identified five essential spaces that can help build community at work. Reimagining underperforming spaces through the lens of Community-Based Design gives people access to more options and better experiences that meet their needs at work now.

The Underused Conference Room

Transform a single, large conference room into four spaces where people can collaborate, focus, learn, socialize and rejuvenate.

BEFORE

What's not working: A traditional, large conference room designed to seat 12 or more people is often unused or underutilized, yet it takes up significant square footage.

AFTER

What to do: Adapt a single large room into four spaces that give people more ways to get different kinds of work done

HOW IT HELPS CREATE COMMUNITY

Large board rooms cause more formality in how people interact and the scale feels intimidating. This new range of spaces provides social infrastructure that encourages people to interact more and to include co-workers with diverse needs and preferences. When designed together, furniture and technology create a more equitable, engaging, eye-to-eye experience where people feel like they belong, whether in the room or remote.

Different types of collaboration need different types of spaces. By providing a range of postures and analog and digital tools, these smaller spaces can be used differently based on how people need to work together.

- People collaborate more often in groups of three to five. Adding video-enabled huddle rooms allows teams to include remote participants with a more equitable experience.
- Enclaves give people a place to prepare for a meeting or debrief afterward.
- A curved table cues people where to sit, improving sight lines for people and content, whether in person or remote.
- Creative sessions to generate ideas and solve problems can benefit from stool-height seating that encourages people to stand, move around the room, use markerboards or screens and actively collaborate.

The Overexposed Bench

People spend 63% of their time doing work on their own. While having an assigned space is important to many, people also say they struggle to focus in the open plan. Recent Steelcase research shows as many as 50% of employees take video calls at their desks, which creates even more distractions for nearby teammates.

BEFORE

What's not working: Rows of benching, with people oriented to face one another, create visual distractions and provide little, if any, acoustic properties to mitigate noise.

AFTER

What to do: Add a variety of solutions to give people additional levels of shielded privacy to mitigate visual distractions or create comfort with individual boundaries.

HOW IT HELPS CREATE COMMUNITY

Mixed-use team areas combine individual spaces where residents can focus and not feel overexposed with communal places to gather. This helps meet a fundamental need for privacy while the right density level creates a feeling of energy. Having neighbors in close proximity allows people to ask for help and support each other.

- Greater access to privacy, acoustic boundaries and in-office sound masking will help prepare the workplace as advanced AI-voice assistants become more common.
- The orientation of the desks allows people to not face each other directly and minimizes distractions.
- By creating shielded, individual spaces, organizations can more easily reconfigure the workstations or move them throughout the floor plan if there are changes on the team.
- People shift from individual to team work throughout their day. A nearby spot to share content makes it easy to switch between different activities.
- Introduce nearby enclosed spaces to give people a convenient place to go when they need acoustic privacy.
- Adding the center screen onto the workstations' spine gives people more privacy and provides access to helpful worktools, such as markerboards or storage elements.
- Higher, curved privacy screens block visual distractions, more clearly define an individual's space, absorb sound and more clearly define an individual's space.

The Low-Performance Lounge

Beautiful spaces too often sit empty because they don't have what people need to get work done. Create desirable high-performing spaces by designing for privacy, posture, proximity and presence.

BEFORE

What's not working: Lounge spaces are often underutilized because furnishings lack key performance elements like privacy, power, laptop tables in close proximity to seating and the option for an upright posture.

AFTER

What to do: Provide performance elements in social spaces, so these settings can be used for more than conversations. A well-designed social space can support focus and mixed presence collaboration, as well as socialization and rejuvenation.

HOW IT HELPS CREATE COMMUNITY

Social spaces encourage people throughout the organization to have planned or impromptu meetings. Informal settings foster more authentic connections between people, create a sense of belonging and encourage engagement. People build trust which boosts collaboration and innovation.

- A well-designed social space can support focus and mixed presence collaboration, as well as socialization and rejuvenation.
- Steelcase AI-driven data analytics shows more companies are adding privacy, power and laptop tables to social spaces so they can be used more often for more types of work.
- Adding screens to a social space gives people visual and territorial privacy so they can collaborate or focus.
- Shelving that supports technology and a markerboard provides visual privacy to minimize distractions and lets people share content or brainstorm on the fly.
- A lounge with an adjustable back lets people choose an upright posture or adjust seating depth depending on their preference.
- Embedded power in the lounge ensures people can work as long as needed.

The Inflexible Meeting Room

Update team conference rooms to encourage creativity and innovation by keeping in-person and remote participants equally engaged.

BEFORE

What's not working: Typical conference rooms can limit how teams collaborate and inhibit creative problem-solving.

AFTER

What to do: Mobile furniture, technology and light-weight markerboards make it easy for teams to adapt the space to their needs.

HOW IT HELPS CREATE COMMUNITY

Spaces that create equitable experiences between remote and in-room participants help everyone feel more engaged and that they matter. Encouraging movement supports physical wellbeing, and solving problems together helps build a shared sense of accomplishment and team cohesion.

- Steelcase AI-driven data analytics shows more organizations are adding performance elements such as markerboards, modular walls, flexible furniture and digital mounts to collaboration spaces. These performance elements have grown from 30% to over 45% in two years.
- Vertical surfaces for writing, drawing or pinning up content encourage teams to immerse themselves in their work. Keeping information persistent helps teams quickly get back into flow after a break.
- Technology that encourages virtual and in-person participation, such as the Microsoft Surface Hub, lets people on both sides of the conversation engage with content.
- Modular walls like Everwall keep noise out or inside the space, preventing distractions. Fast wall installation makes it easier to reconfigure spaces using the same kit of reusable parts if the setting needs to adapt.
- Mobile single tables let teams reconfigure the space on demand. Teams that consistently use a collaboration space are more likely to take advantage of flexible furniture and digital tools.
- Movement boosts creativity. Stool-height seating and places to perch give people a way to change postures and be ready to move when an idea strikes.

The Typical Team Space

Replace single-purpose areas and monotonous patterns with mixed-use spaces that let people find where they can do their best work throughout their day.

BEFORE

What's not working: A neighborhood focused on uniformity doesn't consider the ebb and flow of work in which people must toggle between working alone or together and has limited options for people.

AFTER

What to do: Create a range of experiences to give people variety and support throughout the day for different tasks. By reinventing this space, people can now access eight different work experiences.

HOW IT HELPS CREATE COMMUNITY

Team neighborhoods are where people build relationships, trust and a sense of shared responsibility. The variety of spaces encourages people to move around, interact when they want and retreat when they need to. When people have choices for how they work and their needs are being met, they feel more connected to each other and the organization.

- Steelcase AI-driven data analytics shows more organizations are designing for variety. By reinventing this space, people can now access eight different work experiences.
- A diverse range of open, enclosed and shielded spaces give people places to work besides a desk. Lounge seating in a shielded area offers individuals a place to read or rejuvenate during the day.
- Enclosed spaces near workstations give everyone in the neighborhood access to acoustic privacy when needed.
- An open communal table along the perimeter allows people to gather and collaborate near their team while limiting distractions.
- Teams can customize the space and add personal touches so their neighborhoods connect to their work and purpose.
- Lockers give people a place to start their day and stash their stuff even if they don't have an assigned space.

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