



Team Workspaces

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COLLABORATION WHITE PAPER
CHANGING NATURE OF WORK AND TRENDS
WORKSTYLES

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Teams have been getting a lot of attention lately, but teamwork is not a new organizational tool. Although there has been a major resurgence of formal support for the roles teams play, good teamwork has always been key to organizational effectiveness.

Two things have worked together recently to give teamwork added importance — the trend toward flattening organizations and the renewed focus on quality.

Today's organizations are heavily populated by people with advanced degrees or training. These workers' allegiances are to their professions, not necessarily to particular jobs. They take responsibility for maintaining their skills and for determining what to do and how to do it. They also assume responsibility for managing their time, schedules, and work relationships to reach common objectives.

Well-educated workers need less supervision to perform daily tasks than had been assumed in the past. They can, to a large extent, train and guide each other. Work teams that are closest to customer issues and have the most technical knowledge are often more qualified to tackle problems and opportunities than formal supervisors, and it makes sense to allow them to work with minimal hierarchy.

The total quality management (TQM) emphasis has also encouraged teamwork. The TQM approach looks at the complete range of activities that lead to a satisfied customer. Tasks done to the satisfaction of a specific department's standards may not mesh within the entire process of producing the customer's order, making the patient well, or providing a service. Organizations have to connect the dots with overall quality and speed in mind. That often leads to increased use of cross-functional teams.

Teams have been making significant contributions to the paid and unpaid endeavors of society for a long time. As a way to organize activities, teaming has survived because teams work.

What Is a Team?

Teams are differentiated from other types of work groups by the way team members have a common purpose and mutual accountability for achievement of their shared objectives.

Many types of groups may act like teams, but each one is subtly different.

Self-directed work teams are common in office, factory, and medical settings. These groups are assigned to carry out specific work processes and have authority in determining how daily work will be done. They can also make improvements in work processes, such as error reduction, waste elimination, and so on. These teams are a fixed and permanent part of the organizational landscape, although individual membership in them varies over time. Team members are often drawn from different departments or functional specialties. For example, a customer service team may co-locate members with functional expertise in production, order processing, credit, and other areas involved in the overall process of servicing the customer. Rather than being cross-functional, these teams actually blend functions for an improved overall result.

In the office environment, self-directed work teams need accommodations that allow individuals to perform concentrated work while maintaining easy access to one another. The ongoing nature of their assignments makes dedicated personal workstations a practical long-term solution.

These groups also need easily accessible meeting spaces with small tables that can be flexibly rearranged as needed, or a large table with markerboards nearby for frequent discussions. If possible, allowing room in individual workspaces for other team members to drop by with questions can speed workflow.

Task teams (or task forces or ad hoc teams) are commonly assembled to attack a specific problem or achieve a certain goal within a specific timeframe. They normally disband upon completion of the assignment.

Members of these groups may meet regularly then return to their primary offices and department groups to complete individual assignments. Task teams with highly complex assignments or tight deadlines may set up as a full-time effort, requiring team accommodation in a dedicated space for the length of the project.

Co-location helps groups get to know each other and the issues specific to their project more quickly. Dedicated team space also saves time because meetings do not need to be formally scheduled. It allows flip charts and markerboards to retain information, so team members can return to discussions or study information at length. A dedicated space, separate from other work areas, can also be used to convey that a project or team has special status.

Wireless phones and computers, or pre-wired team spaces, help team members move quickly between regular and special assignments.

Cross-functional teams bring people from different parts of an organization together to work on process improvements. These assignments are not typically full-time in nature, although members may meet over long periods of time. Team members retain their functional affiliations with finance, marketing, and other departments.

These teams look at processes, collaboration between groups, cycle-time reduction opportunities, or other specific issues. They may be involved in implementing changes and monitoring progress.

Cross-functional teams need access to large meeting spaces with room to put up charts, process maps, etc. Because many of these team members retain their regular assignments and workstations, not all cross-functional teams require dedicated personal workspaces near the team meeting area. Meeting support and visual display spaces are the priority.

A community of practice is an informal group of people who learn together, mostly by voluntarily sharing common tasks, knowledge, or problems. The linkage is social and professional, not something organized or supervised by a manager. These are people who drop by one another's offices to bounce ideas around or get advice. While most of these groups are very informal, some companies do try to organize them as intrafunctional teams.

For example, at Nynex, an anthropologist was brought in to find out why different areas of the company implemented new data services at varying speeds. The anthropologist found that workers did not always understand common problems or the need to work together. When workers were assembled in one room, natural groups formed around shared purposes and shared ideas. Implementation times went from as many as 17 days to three days.

Often, communities of practice are not task focused. They tend to meet informally and stay acquainted over long periods of time. They are more social and learning centered, and usually do not have a specific group goal or assignment. Areas to meet informally, such as lounge areas, suit these teams well. Data port or wireless access is also beneficial to information sharing in these informal spaces.

Many groups within organizations are not teams. Although they work together, departments are not usually teams. Department members who perform individual work for individual evaluation by a supervisor are not team members in a true sense.

When teams work on team goals and individuals work on individual goals, the difference between a team and a department is clear. However, when a department head wants all workers to support one another and take pride in the whole department's accomplishments, the word team is often used to describe the desired behavior and may influence office layout.

However, unless the nature of the work requires extensive interaction, employees may be happier in individualized work spaces that allow concentrated effort. A team workspace without team work is a mismatch that can distract workers.

What Do Teams Mean for Facilities?

Facility planning becomes more complicated when the needs of different

team types are considered. However, a facility planned for accommodation of teams that naturally occur in business can lead to far fewer, and less costly, physical changes over time. Planning for teams also brings the facility closer to the strategic goals of the business by better supporting the teams which bring out new products, reduce cycle time, improve service, cut costs, and so on.

How to start planning for teams:

1. Identify the types of teams your organization supports, starting with self-directed work teams. Because these groups are a fixed part of the organizational structure, they need well-planned spaces that can support them over time. If these teams regularly interact with other teams, those groups may need to be located on the same floor or otherwise nearby for accessibility.

The size of the teams also needs careful consideration. Will the teams grow in size over time or not? How could people be added quickly in case of growth or short-term project assistance? Next it's important to determine whether to accommodate small meetings in individual work spaces or to set up public meeting areas throughout a workspace. The key to speeding team work processes is allowing people to quickly get together as issues and questions arise.

A ten-minute meeting may be all that's needed to solve a problem, but finding a conference room through a formal reservation system can take longer than the conversation itself. Meeting spaces that don't require prior reservation are an excellent way to support team workstyles. However, if individual workspaces are reduced in size to make room for more impromptu meeting spaces, be sure to plan for quality acoustic support through walls, acoustic panels, ceilings, and sound-masking systems.

2. The next step is to find out how many

task teams are expected to be in place at any time. Does the organization tend to dedicate people to these teams full-time or assign people to them in addition to their regular work? Are both methods used in combination? It may seem like a luxury to set aside spaces for yet-unknown hot projects. But the alternative is to have to find space in a full facility for a project that cannot wait.

For task teams, flexible space works well. Small tables that can be pushed together for conferencing or used separately for small groups or individuals can help make optimal use of the space. Markerboards, flip charts, bulletin boards, and other tools help make information accessible. Storage units stocked with markers, paper, and other much-needed supplies save groups time. And because task-focused groups can have long meetings, room to move around and serve food are necessities. Access to daylight or windows also helps.

The IT department should also be involved in planning these spaces to accommodate network access, video conferencing, teleconferencing, special presentation equipment, and anything else that might be required. These teams are working on deadline — they don't have time to re-plan the space. Furniture they can rearrange and full-service technology support are worthwhile investments in their success.

- 3. For cross-functional teams, large conference rooms often work well. If a cross-functional project is being run more like a task team, the spaces described above would be preferable. Cross-functional teams typically need rooms that can be reserved for extended meetings of two hours or more. Significant amounts of display space may be needed and the IT department should also be involved in planning for teleconferencing, video conferencing, running presentations from computers, and

other possible needs.

- 4. A community of practice is more likely to meet outside the office or over lunch than to have a formal meeting at the workplace. The best way to tap into their abilities to teach each other while at work is to allow spaces for impromptu meetings throughout the facility. In highly-specialized groups that do work together, such as research labs, the community atmosphere can be encouraged by adding flexibility within office spaces. For example, coffee bars with places to sit nearby encourage short conversations and mentoring. Professionals with high-level skills appreciate flexibility in time and place.

A difficult but important distinction to make before planning a facility is to determine which groups are departments, not teams. Departments are made up of individuals who may need and value privacy and acoustic support. Although they may appreciate easy access to other department members, their primary objectives are personal. Being able to see and hear other members of the department may not add to their ability to perform their job the way it might for a true team. These groups often prefer more traditional workspaces.

What all teams have in common is a growing need for flexibility. Personalized storage, multi-functional furniture, adjustable furniture components, stackable panels, and mobile furnishings can make any team's ongoing changes faster and easier.

When designed with an understanding of team types, team spaces can help teams work even better together.