PRIVACY

WHY IS PRIVACY IMPORTANT TO OUR WELL BEING?

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Privacy has proven to be crucial to the office environment - whether for productivity, confidentiality, or other reasons. Despite the increasing popularity of open offices, some research has revealed its drawbacks. Open offices have proven to **lessen face-to-face interactions**, likely due to the "natural human response to **socially withdraw**" when faced with a large, open space. In regards to physical health, the New Zealand Medical Journal found **significantly more sick leave** was used in open office companies.

Despite the findings, there are ways a company can **increase privacy**, either physical or perceived, in an open office without overhauling the space.

Open Offices Reduce Face-to-Face Contact:

In a 2018 study by Harvard Business School, open office spaces were found to decrease face-to-face interaction by 70%. Employees tend to **self-isolate** either through the use of headphones or avoidance in an effort to reduce interruption.[1]

Acoustically Interrupting Environments Hamper Productivity:

Interruptions are bad for focused work.

If an individual is completing a **focused task**, it is best to give them a **quiet room** or area. If a **group** is meeting, they should work in a **separate space** so as to not interrupt other workers.

Generations Vary in Performance Based on the Type of Work Space:

Younger generations work more efficiently in **open office** spaces while **older** generations prefer **physical privacy**. An office should provide various types of workspaces to **accommodate** different workers.
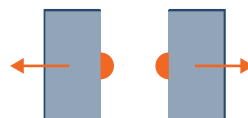
Creating Privacy in Open Offices

Identity - consistent and personalized workspaces promote a sense of agency and autonomy.

Confidence - areas for private meeting allow groups to share information discreetly.

Shielding - configuring furniture to minimize interruption provides people visual privacy.

Solitude - providing areas for individuals to reset helps to improve mental health and reduce stress.

MEETING SPACES

Separate spaces for smaller and larger **meetings** promotes office harmony:
- **Confidentiality** between specific employees,
- **Quiet** workspace for a focus group,
- Lack of interruption as compared to the larger open office space.

PERSONALIZED WORKSPACES

- **Assigned** workspaces facilitate productivity by **reducing adjustment** time.
- **Personalized** workspaces provide **structure** and **control** to employees.
- Arrange workspaces to **minimize interruption** between employees.
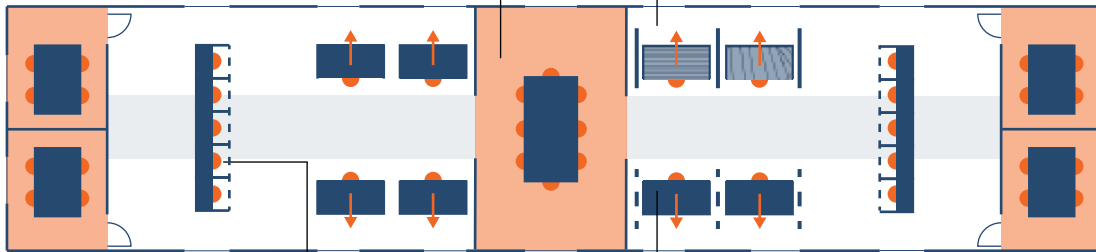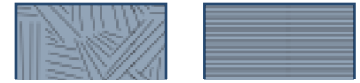
FOCUS AREAS

Giving individuals **private** spaces that can be **closed off** works well for individuals who need to complete **focused tasks**.
- These "**booths**" can be small and don't require major renovations to the office.

DESK TYPE

Provide different types of workspaces within the office to allow for employees with varying ages and preferences to work efficiently:
- Some employees prefer higher **partitions,**
- Some desks may need to be **adjustable** for height.

"Our research shows that the real challenge for today's open plan offices comes when workers don't have the freedom to move, and spaces to move to, when they need privacy"

- Steelcase, *Is the Open Office the End of Privacy?*[4]

1 Bernstein, Ethan S, and Stephan Turban. "The Impact of the 'Open' Workspace on Human Collaboration." The Royal Society Publishing, 2 July 2018.
2 Sarkis, Stephanie. "How Your Open-Plan Office Is Killing Your Privacy and Safety." Forbes, Forbes Magazine, 28 Jan. 2019, www.forbes.com/sites/stephaniesarkis/2019/01/27/how-your-open-plan-office-is-killing-your-privacy-and-safety/#6b8c4a334e99.
3 Richardson, Ann, et al. "Office Design and Health: a Systematic Review." The New Zealand Medical Journal, vol. 130, no. 1467, 15 Dec. 2017.
4 Redman, Melanie. "Is the Open Office the End of Privacy?" Steelcase, 11 Oct. 2018, www.steelcase.com/research/articles/open-plan-office-doesnt-mean-end-privacy/.