5 TIPS FOR
ALTERNATIVE
WORKSPACES

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Work, how we work, and what employees expect of work, has been transformed. Spaces built to enhance hybrid, flexible, and alternative work have outperformed more traditional spaces over the last several years, and leading organizations are doubling down on flexibility and alternative space planning as a strategic recruiting benefit and embracing square-footage reduction as a cost savings. New generations view hybrid and flexible schedules as the norm. Hybrid, or at a minimum, highly flexible workplaces are going to continue to be leading and preferred options, calling for a greater investment in alternative workspaces and flexible design choices. But where to begin?

LEVERAGE DATA
Until now, some organizations approached facilities with assumptions, or through trial and error. In a modern, flexible workplace, organizations must be deliberate when selecting the types and number of alternative workspaces that will be made available. Analysis, user-feedback, prototype use and space concept testing, data driven design and real estate utilization studies, (already common for some organizations) need to become the norm for alternative workspaces to deliver on the promise of a next generation workplace.

NO PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS
For the organizations leading their industries, the desire to bring people back to the office is about creating the collaboration and connection that drive innovation. Rather than forcing schedules or solutions, we encourage clients to analyze and understand their workplace and how their people work.

To coax people into the office and encourage innovation, alternative work models should be carefully planned and selected to fit the work being performed, suit the culture of the organization, and create connections and encourage social interaction. If the office helps people perform their work rather than just acting as the setting their work happens in, and makes them feel comfortable and connected, enforcing policies won't be necessary.

Companies should seek answers to questions like: "What type of space are we using? What is the quality level? What's effective?" to find their balanced mix of:

The Hub Kitchen in HED's Los Angeles office offers an island kitchen with booths, small tables, and can be reconfigured against a large technology-enabled meeting room.

Open Collaboration Hubs
Creating ambiance and energy, these large, open, spaces are vibrant and flexible. A hub is perfect for large events and promoting social interaction. It can be used as large meeting space, training space, and gathering place.

Flexible, Multi-Sized Spaces
Offering the opportunity to focus while being hub adjacent or nearby a more open area of mixed seating, these can take the form of booths, small tables, or other flexible seating for solo, dual, or small group collaboration. These allow for fast ideation, focus, or rapid collaborative work by allowing small groups to rapidly form and break apart as time demands.

The tenant amenity space in the U.S. Steel Tower in Pittsburgh PA spreads a variety of seating and collaboration options across an open floor to suite user needs.

Large Meeting Rooms
For large group collaboration, spaces should be technology enabled and acoustically private to accommodate distant collaboration.
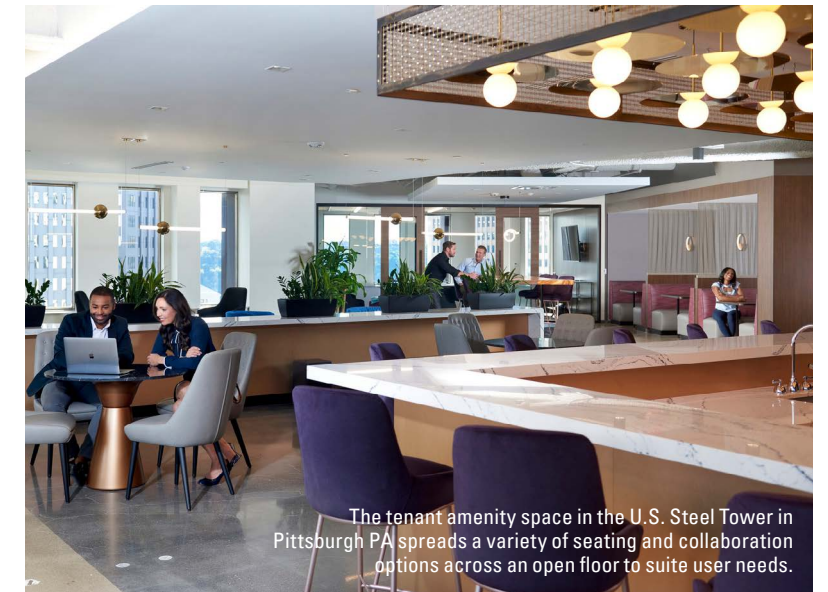
Small Meeting Suites
For small group collaboration, smaller group spaces should be just as technology enabled and acoustically private as a larger meeting space.

Single Occupancy Suites or Tucked Away Nooks
Tucked farthest from the main collaboration area for acoustic protection, these spaces can be booth-like single occupant suites or open space designated for heads down focused work. It is important to have at least a few quiet areas and s handful of spaces specifically to take conduct distance-collaboration calls without distracting others.

Warner Norcross + Judd LLP offices in Detroit, MI feature a large technology-enabled meeting room.

EMBRACE THE VIRTUAL

Expecting the stars to align for every team member to come into the office on the same day is unrealistic. With hybrid work comes hybrid teams, and in the office the need to bring remote team members (or partners from across the country or globe) into the discussion must be accommodated. Incorporating technology suites with multiple and shifting displays to transform the in-office into a virtual experience is a must. Small meeting suites must be equipped with technology that fits your team's technology (i.e. rapid video/audio connectivity to their laptops and tablets) to host or attend an engaging virtual meeting. This will help employees be able to work together consistently while being in different places. Robust in-office Wi-Fi is essential to the movement that will allow teams to utilize the entire space, and strategic video/audio resources should be made available.

CONSIDER ACOUSTICS

Noise was already a top complaint from organizations which had embraced open office designs of the past. Prior to the pandemic, the trend for workplace design was to open the space with minimal private offices to take advantage of density and drive better access to daylight and establish a more connected workplace. The results were noisy open offices with people sitting at tables with headphones on if they needed to concentrate.

Now with hybrid schedules, inter-office teams, and the necessity of virtual calls and meetings, the office is still a noisy place. You can bet at least one participant of any meeting is going to be attending virtually, so create auditory privacy wherever you have established an area for virtual calling or meetings.

Be purposeful in how you orient shared or collaborative hub spaces against more private working or focus spaces, carefully plan acoustics throughout, and make ample use of private booths for individuals taking virtual calls.

All this needs to be balanced with how much distance collaboration your teams engage in daily to prevent the space being bogged down with people sitting all day on headphones creating distractions by talking to people on their screens. As we evolve, workplace cultures will need to help self-govern the importance of acoustic awareness as people continue to find new ways of meeting and working virtually.
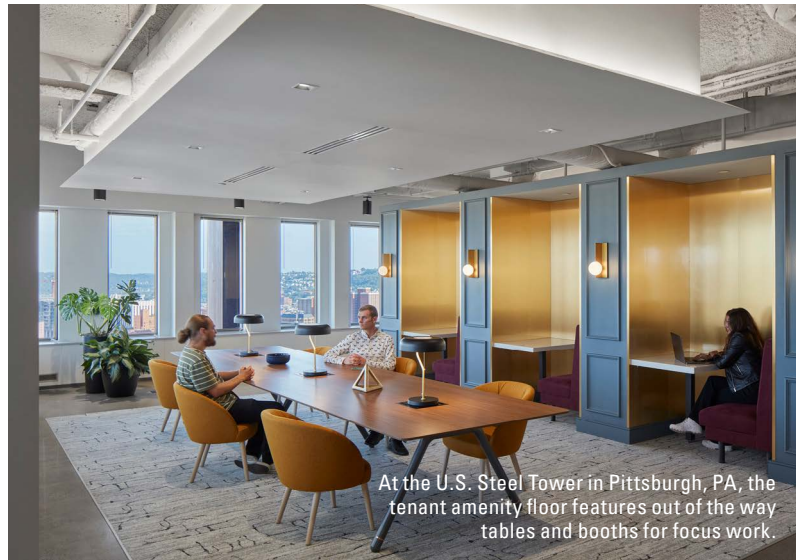
At the U.S. Steel Tower in Pittsburgh, PA, the tenant amenity floor features out of the way tables and booths for focus work.

IT'S NOT ONE WORKSPACE, IT'S MANY WORKSPACES

Lastly, it's important to remember the workplace is no longer one setting where everyone comes to do work. It is a collection of settings where people come to perform lots of different work. If you think about the average office-worker's week, they manage a shifting tide of local collaboration, distance collaboration, focused work, reporting or supervisory check ins, and client/vendor/consultant management. No one day is the same, and it isn't feasible to say that all of someone's focus work can or will take place on the 2-3 days they work from home, just like we can't say that no inter-office or international calls will occur on an in-office day where we'd prefer everyone collaborate with their local team. The optimal way to conduct in-office days must be mobile, autonomous, and adaptive to the tasks and personalities at hand. Some individuals are never going to feel at their most comfortable or creative in a bustling open environment, and others will not feel effective in a quiet, atomized coffeehouse atmosphere. Striking a balance takes an informed and careful plan.
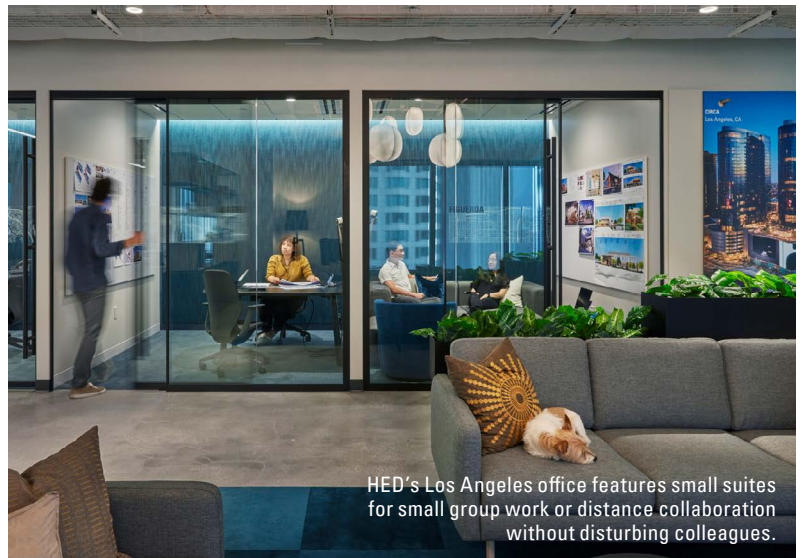
HED's Los Angeles office features small suites for small group work or distance collaboration without disturbing colleagues.

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