

# Activity Spaces

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The relationship between collaboration and innovation is leading to a radical rethinking of the workplace plan.

Research shows that greater than half of work time is spent outside of individual assigned workspaces in places other than the central office and in new kinds of spaces<sup>1</sup>. The new workplace model is a *variety of spaces for a variety of work*. The workplace is becoming less formulaic and static, more adaptive and fluid as it supports the many different tasks, functions and interactions that are the incubator of new ideas.

Office workers no longer lay claim to just a small square of real estate but share ownership of all the spaces that support the multiple tasks they are called upon to perform. In the emerging workplace *the whole office is my office*.

Today's office contains individual assigned workspaces we call **primary workspaces**, and non-assigned spaces that are held in common and occupied with others as needed, called **activity spaces**. Primary and activity spaces may be individual or shared, open or enclosed, depending on their intended function. Both primary and activity spaces require broad connectivity with ready access to power and data, and wifi capability.

Activity spaces may call for specific additional technology tools based on their type and function. Together, the two types of spaces create a total work environment in which spaces are tailored to individual work and group interactions, offering employees choice and control over their work setting.



**Primary workspaces**, center, are assigned to individuals. **Activity spaces**, surrounding, are available to groups and individuals as needed.

Primary spaces, which are typically assigned open plan workstations or private offices, are “home base” spaces. Often configured to support heads-down, focus work as well as short interactions with others, primary spaces may be designed explicitly to support shared

work as in a two-person workstation with a table between; or to support team work, as in a large table configuration.

Activity spaces are “go to” spaces, that is, destinations for temporary group and individual work. They include:

- Refuge** for focus work among one or two
- Enclave** for small group interactions among three or four
- Team Meeting** for teams of five to eight
- Assembly** spaces for conferences, lectures or training
- Community** areas for informal socializing, eating or collaborating.

While layout, furnishings and technology will differ depending on the intended function of a given space, the sizes of activity spaces by type are relatively constant. Whether spaces support individual work, collaboration or more structured group activities, all must have qualities that make them places where people want to go.

Successful activity spaces attract, adapt and engage. They are appealing and comfortable, offer appropriate furnishings and technology, and provide multiple communication tools. Activity spaces permit individuals and group members to shape their work experience by adjusting and reconfiguring elements in the space, and provide opportunities to express organizational culture.

<sup>1</sup> “The Metrics of Distributed Work.” O’Neill and Wymer, 2011

### Activity Spaces Defined

Activity spaces are “go to” spaces — destinations for temporary group and individual work— separated from primary “home base” workplaces.

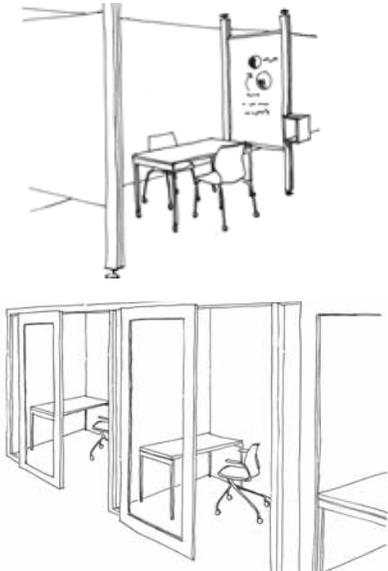
Type	Function	Variants	Participants	Size	Critical attributes
Refuge	Privacy for focus or confidentiality	Open niche, Enclosed booth	1-2	50 sq ft	Separation, voice and network connectivity
Enclave	Sanctuary for small group meeting	Media enclave, Enclosed room	3-4	100 sq ft	Separation, shared display interface, voice and network connectivity
Team Meeting	Strategy space for project team	Open workspace, Enclosed room	5-8	200 sq ft	Separation, multiple displays, voice and network connectivity
Assembly	Communicate with large group	Conference room, Lecture room, Training room	10+	400 sq ft	Enclosure, multiple displays, voice and network connectivity
Community	Serendipitous interaction	Open lounge, Café, Commons	Undefined	Various	Proximity, separation, network connectivity

## Five Types of Activity Spaces

Based on Knoll research and our clients' experiences, we have identified five categories of activity spaces that are relevant to emerging work patterns and practices:

### Refuge (1-2)

This is the “get away” space that enables heads-down focus work. It is typically a small, enclosed room of about 35-50 sq. ft. for 1 or 2 people, with video display, wall mounted whiteboard surface and movable furniture or table and chair.



### Enclave (3-4)

This is a “get together” space: generally a small open or enclosed space of about 100-120 sq. ft. for secluded collaboration by 3 or 4 people. It is generally equipped with a desk height or low table, wall-mounted whiteboards and a video display. Video displays encourage off-site participants to join work sessions.



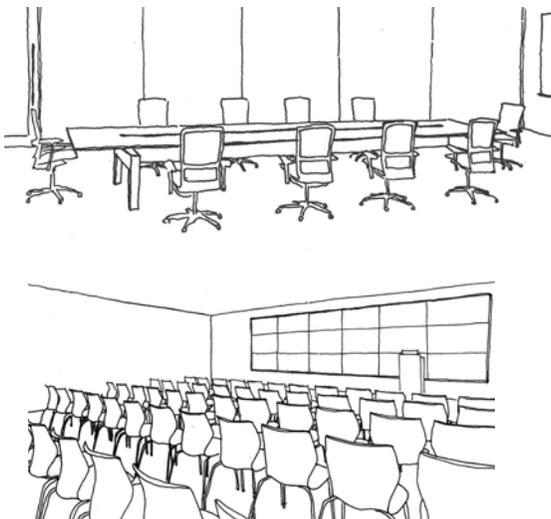
### Team Meeting (5-8)

The team meeting space is a dedicated workroom for a project team of 5–8 people. Usually about 200 sq. ft., either open or enclosed, it is typically furnished with a large table or clustered tables, one or more video displays, mobile and wall mounted whiteboards, and flexible seating options.



### Assembly (10+)

An assembly space is an enclosed group space for planned interaction, usually about 400 sq. ft. or larger and equipped with multiple display surfaces (tackable, whiteboard and video), credenzas for storage, and counters for refreshments and catering. Assembly spaces, sized for groups of 10 or more, include formal meeting spaces for presentations and training.



### Community Spaces

Community spaces are the “town center” of the workplace, open to all and designed to encourage both serendipitous and planned interactions. Furnishings in these spaces range from informal seating and small tables, to lounge furniture groupings, to standing height counters with stools. Commons and café spaces are examples of community spaces that are used for social events and activities.



Recent Knoll Workplace research revealed some interesting findings about what makes interactive spaces successful.

Spaces intended to foster collaboration rely on three key physical and social aspects for their success: proximity, privacy, and technology.

**Proximity:** spaces must be located near employees' home bases and other frequented spaces to increase the chances for encounters and interaction. However, convenient distance isn't the only factor. Proximity to traffic flow and entrances, restrooms, and photocopiers should also be considered.

**Privacy:** spaces must provide sufficient visual and acoustical privacy that people don't fear being overheard or interrupted. True privacy is characterized by the ability to control

others' access to you so that you can choose whether or not to interact.

**Technology:** activity spaces of any type or scale attract users and are effective at promoting collaboration only if they are equipped with appropriate technology and communication support tools. These include wifi, convenient access to power, video, fixed or mobile whiteboards and tackable surfaces.

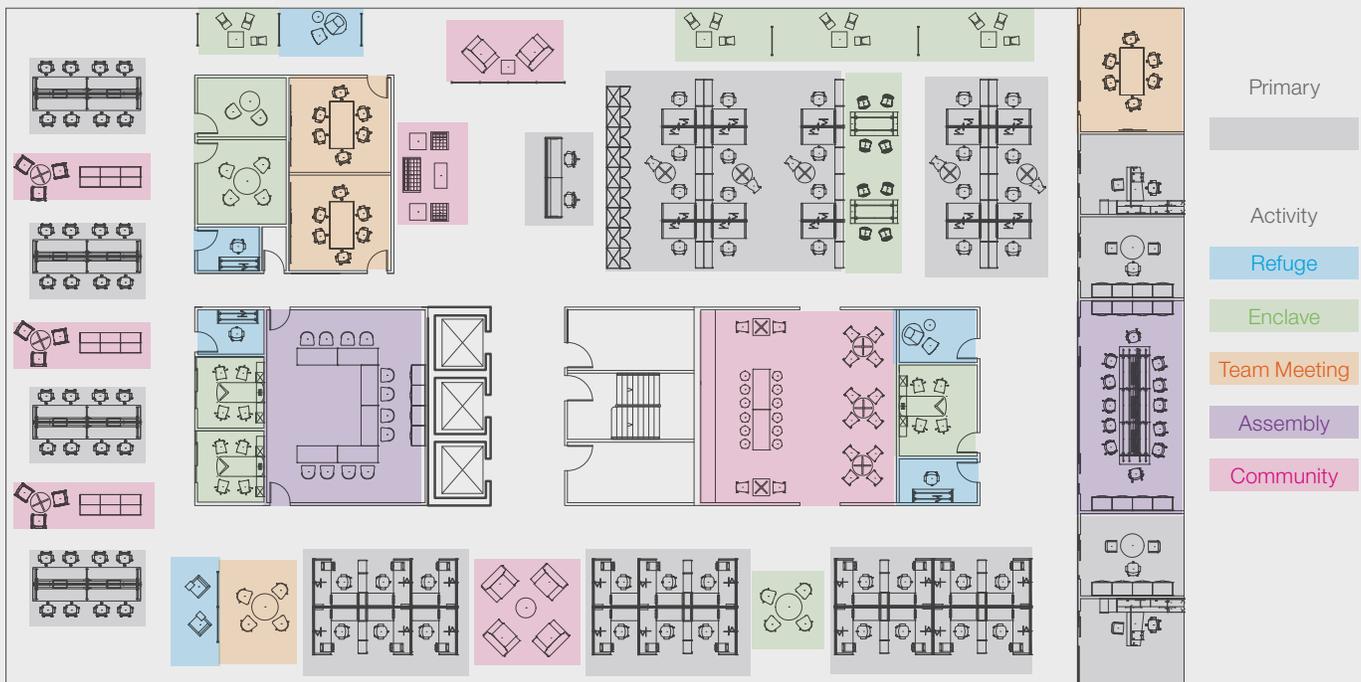
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Activity spaces are vital to the success of knowledge work today — a necessity, not a luxury. Primary and activity spaces complement each other and work together to create the total office environment in which everyone takes ownership and everyone takes part.

Activity spaces support the collaboration at the heart of innovation. They complement primary spaces by “filling in” workspaces that support essential functions and roles. Unlike primary spaces, they are not permanently assigned to a particular person or group and thus offer flexibility of use with opportunities to optimize space utilization. Activity spaces support a wide range of collaborative tasks and interactions; can be configured in space reallocated from reductions in primary workstation footprints; eliminate the redundancy of providing collaborative space in every workstation; and contribute to a more responsive and appealing workplace. •

## The Whole Office Is My Office

This prototypical office plan is an example of how the variety of primary and activity spaces work together to support a variety of work.



### Some Thoughts on Planning Activity Spaces

A challenge for planners is to create an appropriate balance of space types that takes into account scale, quantity, degree of enclosure, flexibility and culture.

Keep in mind:

- The ratio of primary and activity spaces has been typically about 70% primary to 30% activity, but progressive organizations trend toward 50/50.
- Primary and activity spaces can be open or enclosed.

- Activity spaces are often enclosed to provide more privacy and protection from interruption.
- Activity spaces generally lend themselves to greater flexibility in use and furnishing than primary spaces, but vary across types: conference rooms are typically

more formal and static, while meeting or training rooms more informal and dynamic.

- Cultural differences are extremely important. Spaces take on forms and styles that reflect the personality, image and goals of the organization.

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