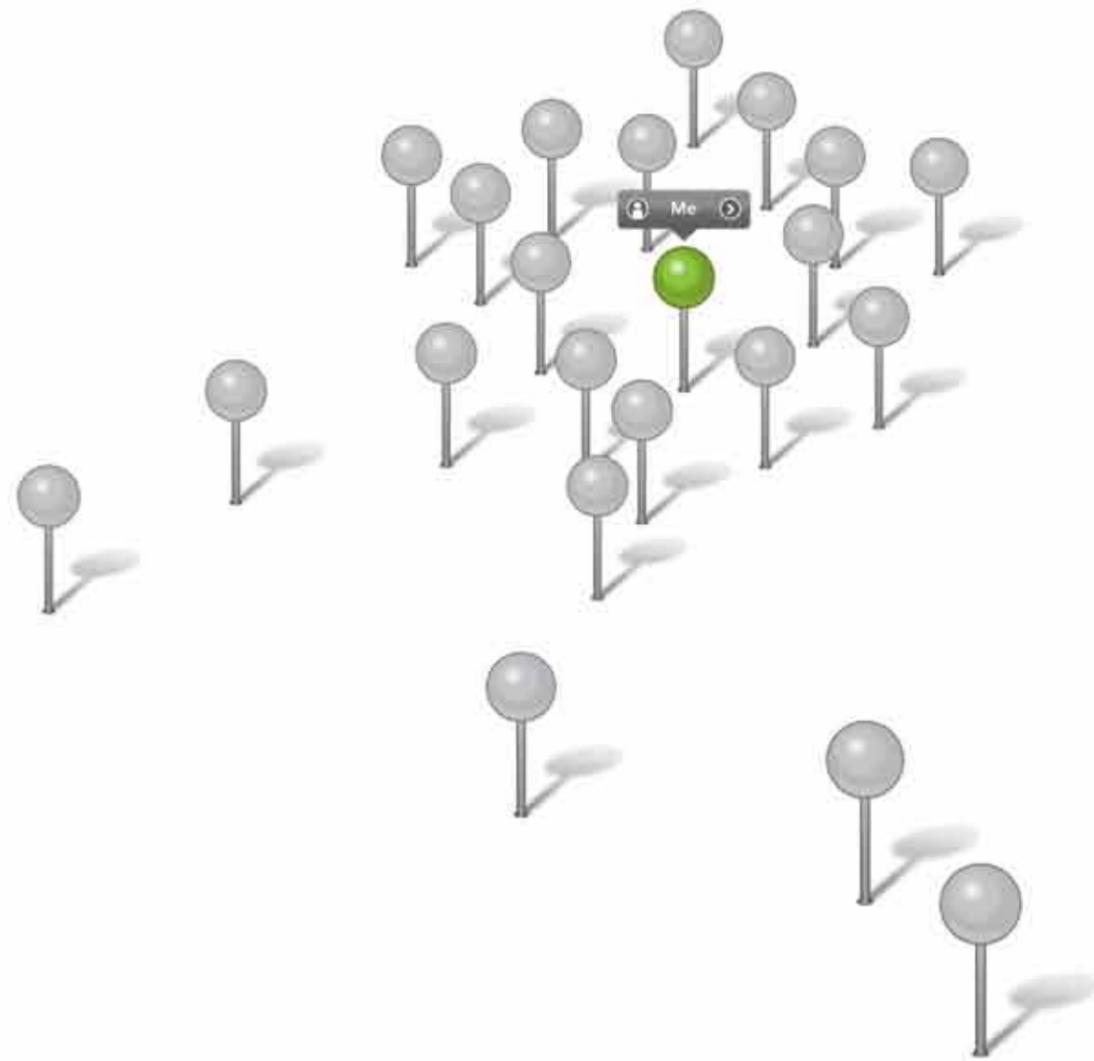


# IN A WORLD OF WE WHAT ABOUT ME?



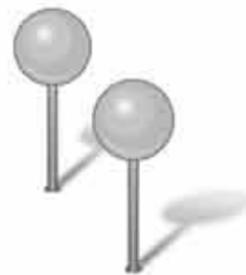
## FINDING BALANCE FOR INDIVIDUAL WORK IN A SEA OF COLLABORATION

by James Ludwig and Allan Smith, Steelcase Inc.

At each stage in our society's advancement — from agrarian economies to the creative economy — technology has played a major role. But never before has technology impacted behavior in the office more than in the last five years, causing a tectonic shift in our notions of how, when and where we work. Collaboration has become a primary mode of work for organizations in pursuit of innovation, and yet in our rush to co-create better ideas, faster it is the needs of individuals that risk being overlooked.

For many of us, work started out as a destination, a place we went to, as in "Honey, I'm going to work now." We went to the office because that was the only place where we had access to the technology and people we needed to do our jobs. And because our bosses expected it. If you were not at work, you weren't really working. But technology changed that. Laptops became the dominant computing device, outselling desktop computers in 2008. Access to WiFi became almost ubiquitous, and mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets permeated the workplace.

**COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL TO AN ORGANIZATION'S SUCCESS, BUT IT CANNOT EXIST WITHOUT INDIVIDUAL WORK.**



**TECHNOLOGY DRIVES BEHAVIOR**

As technology enabled mobility, our behaviors and expectations changed, too. Suddenly we had the freedom to work anywhere, anytime. We voted with our feet, taking our technology devices into meetings and 'third places' such as coffee shops or libraries, and leaving our workstations empty for hours. Choice, not mail codes, became the driver of where to go.

Today, most knowledge workers in developed countries are mobile workers – they do not have to be at their desk to do their jobs – and, by this definition, a full 35 percent of the global workforce will be mobile by 2013. Many of today's workers have varying degrees of mobility. Some have an assigned space, but move throughout the building or campus. Others are more nomadic, choosing where to work based on the tasks they need to accomplish.

The technological advances driving mobility — and driven by mobility — are both an advantage and a curse. We can carry our work with us from place to place, but the spaces we work in haven't been redesigned to support the new ways we work, and the kind of work we now do. The cognitive overload many of us are experiencing is a direct result from the exponential growth in the amount of information we have to absorb. Case in point: all of the information we had available up to 2007 has doubled in the past five years. We are bombarded by e-mails, posts, blogs, tweets, and, in general, information overload is a daily affliction.

Adding to the complexity of work is the increasing trend towards global integration. The "Globally Integrated Enterprise," a term coined by IBM, is a diverse and dispersed organization with different work groups typically united in project work. Workers struggle to bridge cultures and time zones, finding themselves living on video — ranging from informal Skype calls to large telepresence meetings — as they manage virtual connections with team mates distributed around the world. It's not uncommon for teams to be on telepresence in Asia, Europe and the Americas all at the same time, which is physically impossible without someone starting work really early or staying really late. Our workday might not be a full 24/7, but it's easily become 15/6.

As technology advanced and the world became flatter and faster, competition stiffened and organizations felt the demand for more innovation — not as a choice — but a means to survival. Collaboration became a primary work style for many organizations. A Steelcase joint research study with Corenet Global found that two-thirds of organizations collaborate between 60 percent to as much as 80 percent of the time. There's good reason for it — collaboration works. Research has shown that while individual work might sometimes result in a faster answer, collaboration consistently delivers deeper and richer ideas because of the broad perspectives and cross-pollination of ideas that teams can offer. But whether alone or in a group, the drive for innovation requires greater creativity. A recent IBM study of global

**People need a range of settings to accommodate focused, collaborative and social work in both open and enclosed environments – in other words, a palette of place.**

CEOs say that creativity is the most valued attribute of leadership, ranking even higher than integrity and global thinking (<http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/ceo/ceostudy2010/index.html>).

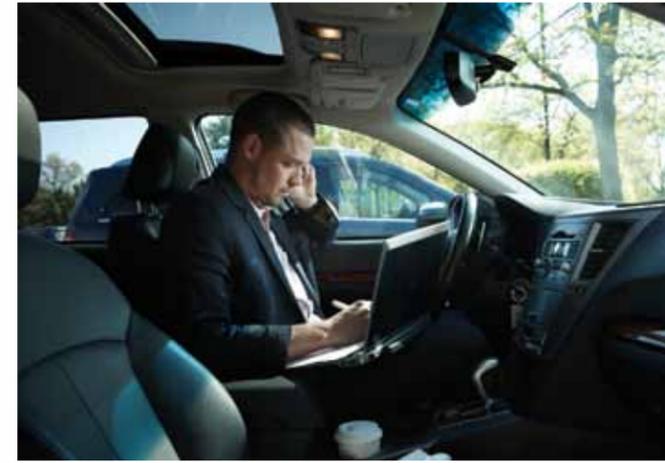
Whether creativity and invention happen in groups or individually is a subject of much debate. Author Susan Cain argues in her best-selling book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, people are more creative when they enjoy privacy and freedom from interruption. Cain struck a nerve within the corporate world by drawing attention to the needs of introverts and challenging the notion that creativity and innovation come exclusively from boisterous socialization, replete with exuberant team mates high-fiving each another. She notes that even extroverts need time for contemplation and focused, individual work. Our research at Steelcase corroborates this point – we all need time to ourselves. To read. To think. To reflect.

As a result of the changes in technology and behavior, knowledge workers are facing greater demands and experiencing higher stress. Our day used to consist of a series of individual tasks, punctuated by a meeting or two. Today, we move between meetings, projects and individual work, shifting between different workspaces throughout the day.

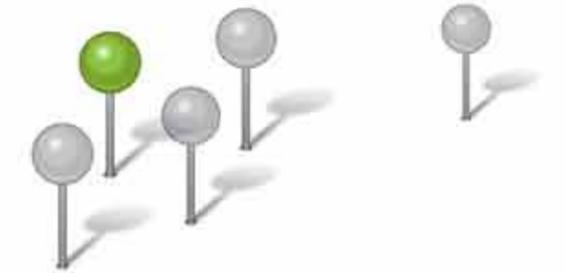
# OUR RESEARCH

At Steelcase, we've studied how to enhance and augment the collaboration process for years. As a byproduct of that research, we observed individuals struggling in their environments, working around obstacles, unable to work effectively. We decided it was time to study what it means to do individual work in this changed landscape; to see how we might create spaces designed for a better experience for all the modes of work – alone or together. Our teams began following mobile workers throughout their day to observe how they work, where they work, how they interact with others and how they focus on their individual work.

One of the first things we found was the difference between people's perception of what they do and the reality. We tend to visualize our day like a pie chart, divided into meetings, blocks of time for solo work, email, projects. Yet for most knowledge workers it's not that simple. What actually happens is we move around so much that we have to squeeze more things into smaller slices of time. We sit in a meeting and when the topic doesn't relate to us we check email, answer a text. We take a phone call or squeeze in a quick chat with someone we see. When the group adjourns we stay in the room to work on our own — until the next group comes along and we get kicked out. Our days have become a blur of transitions.



**We followed mobile workers throughout their day to observe how they work, where they work, how they interact with others and how they focus on their individual work.**



## BALANCING 'I' AND 'WE'

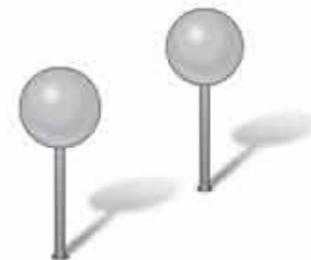
The shift toward collaborative work has dramatically changed the topography at many workplaces. More than half of the companies in the CoreNet/Steelcase study say they're reconfiguring individual workspaces to make more room for team spaces. Because innovation requires collective 'we' work, it's critical to design spaces that not only support collaboration, but augment it. Teams need places designed around their social, spatial and informational needs, where they can bring their individual work to the group to evaluate it, make decisions or co-create new solutions. The result: many organizations are investing in collaboration spaces that bring people and technology together in a way that promotes eye-to-eye contact, provides everyone with equal access to information, and allow people to move around and participate freely.

All of this is good. In fact, it's great. But in our enthusiasm for spaces to support team work, some organizations have taken the 'either/or' approach and focused on collaboration. Individual work is neglected. We believe a better approach is one we call 'and/both'. It's all about balance. Rather than a shift from I to we work, we see a continuum of I and we work. Our research shows people

need a range of settings to accommodate focused, collaborative and social work in both open and enclosed environments – in other words, a palette of place. It's important to think of the entire company campus as an ecosystem of spaces, where individuals have choice and control over how to work in a range of spaces across the company, not just within a floor.

We also found that people come to the workplace with an activity in mind and filter it through a number of other variables: the tools they need for their work, the degree of connection they need with others, the amount of sensory stimulation they want, and even their mood. Some days when we have individual work to complete, we prefer to do it in locations where we can feel a buzz of activity and see other people around us. At other times, we need spaces that are quiet with less stimuli.

People need places that let them concentrate on a problem. Let their minds make subtle, insightful connections between obstacles and inspiration. They need spaces that thoughtfully consider both collaborative and individual work. Our research suggests five things to consider when designing spaces that consider the needs of the individual in today's highly collaborative environment.



## 5 THINGS TO CONSIDER:

### 1. BE A GOOD HOST

### 2. ANTICIPATE NEEDS

### 3. INSTANT FIT

### 4. PEOPLE. PLACE. THINGS.

### 5. AMP UP. AMP DOWN.

#### 1. BE A GOOD HOST

*Organizations need to think like good hosts and make people feel welcome the minute they walk in the door.*

Design spaces that help people feel connected to the organization, and allow them to quickly see what's going on within the company. At our new WorkCafé, one of the first things employees encounter when they enter the space is a coffee bar and a concierge to help them locate the right spaces or tools for their work. A media wall highlights news and events at various company locations around the world, so people can get up to speed quickly about what's happening in the company.

#### 2. ANTICIPATE NEEDS

*All spaces should offer what people need to be immediately effective, and to lessen the burden of carrying everything with them.*

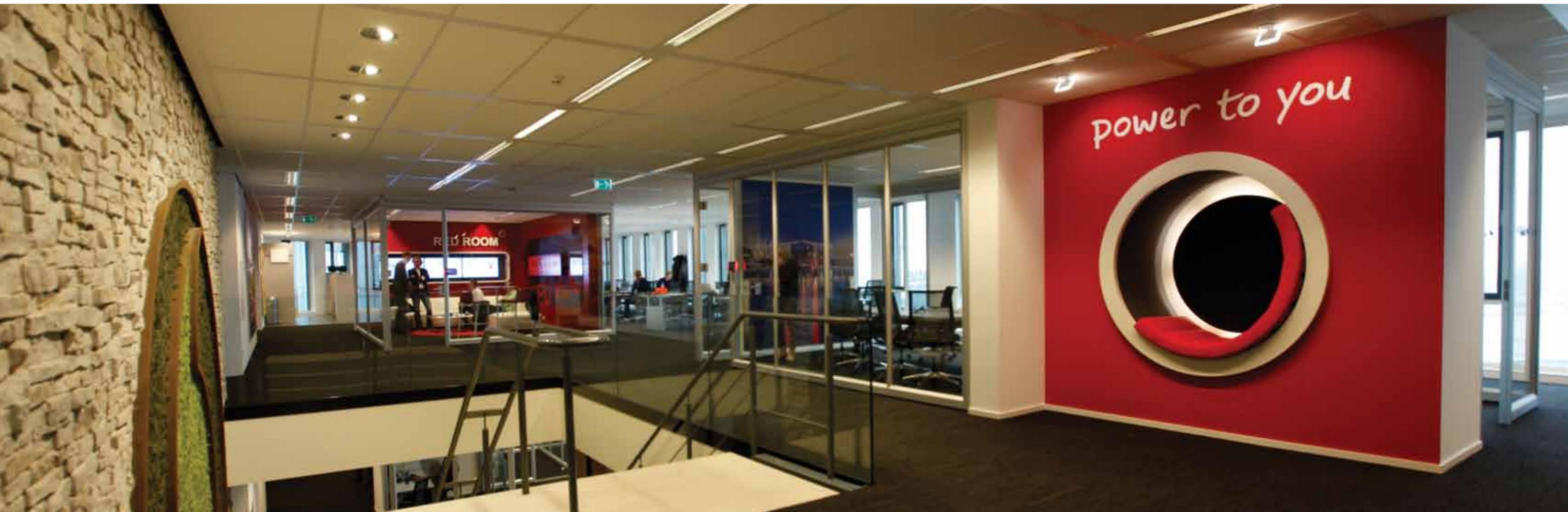
Nomadic workers need spaces that anticipate what they need when they arrive: easy access to power for recharging devices, a choice of spaces with varying degrees of privacy they can control, and a range of I and we spaces near each other so it's easy to transition between individual and collaborative work. People generally need group space within 60 feet of their primary work area. If it's close, it's more likely to be used. If the group space

is further away, usage falls off dramatically. The workplace should include small huddle rooms, quiet niches outside of conference rooms, and acoustically-controlled booths or enclaves for home or video calls. At Vodafone's new Netherland headquarters in Amsterdam, the staff has access to a range of open and enclosed spaces with options in between. None of them are assigned to any individual, including the president. With few exceptions, people can use workspaces in any manner that suits them.

In our WorkCafé a number of small workspaces adjacent to the open eat/meet/work areas are

in constant use for phone calls and focused task work. These spaces are located in a quiet corner that functions like a cul-de-sac; there is no access to other parts of the building, so traffic and interruptions are minimal. The space includes a range of technology to support the diverse types of work happening: WiFi, plenty of power outlets, videoconferencing equipment, and several media:scape units to support small group discussions. Nearly half of our WorkCafé users say they choose to work there because of the tools available to them.





### 3. INSTANT FIT

*Shared spaces should be designed to quickly fit individual needs, while helping minimize the transition time from one task to the next and from one space to the next.*

Observing people trying to work in cafes while sitting – and squirming – in hard, wooden chairs that were not designed for comfort or easy adjustment — caused us to think about something we call a ‘palette of posture’: a range of space options that allow people to work comfortably in the various postures they assume while moving through the various tasks they do. Adjustable-height worksurfaces, moveable monitor arms, keyboard supports and lighting tools should be provided in order to be positioned precisely by the individual to make it easier for them to get comfortable quickly.

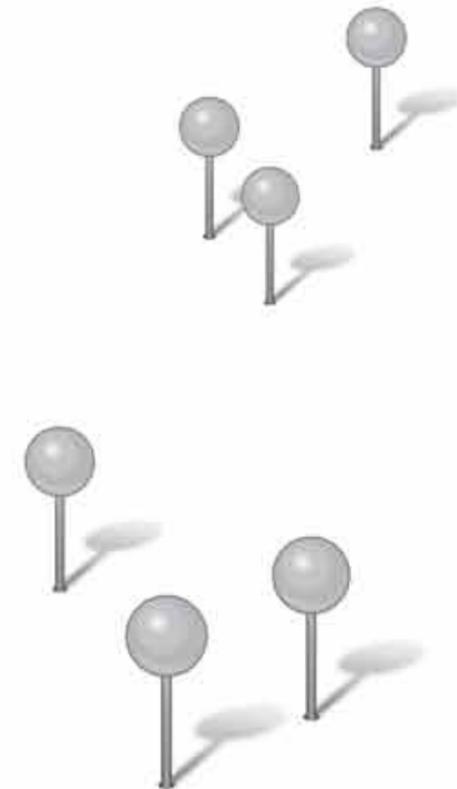
### 4. PEOPLE. PLACES. THINGS.

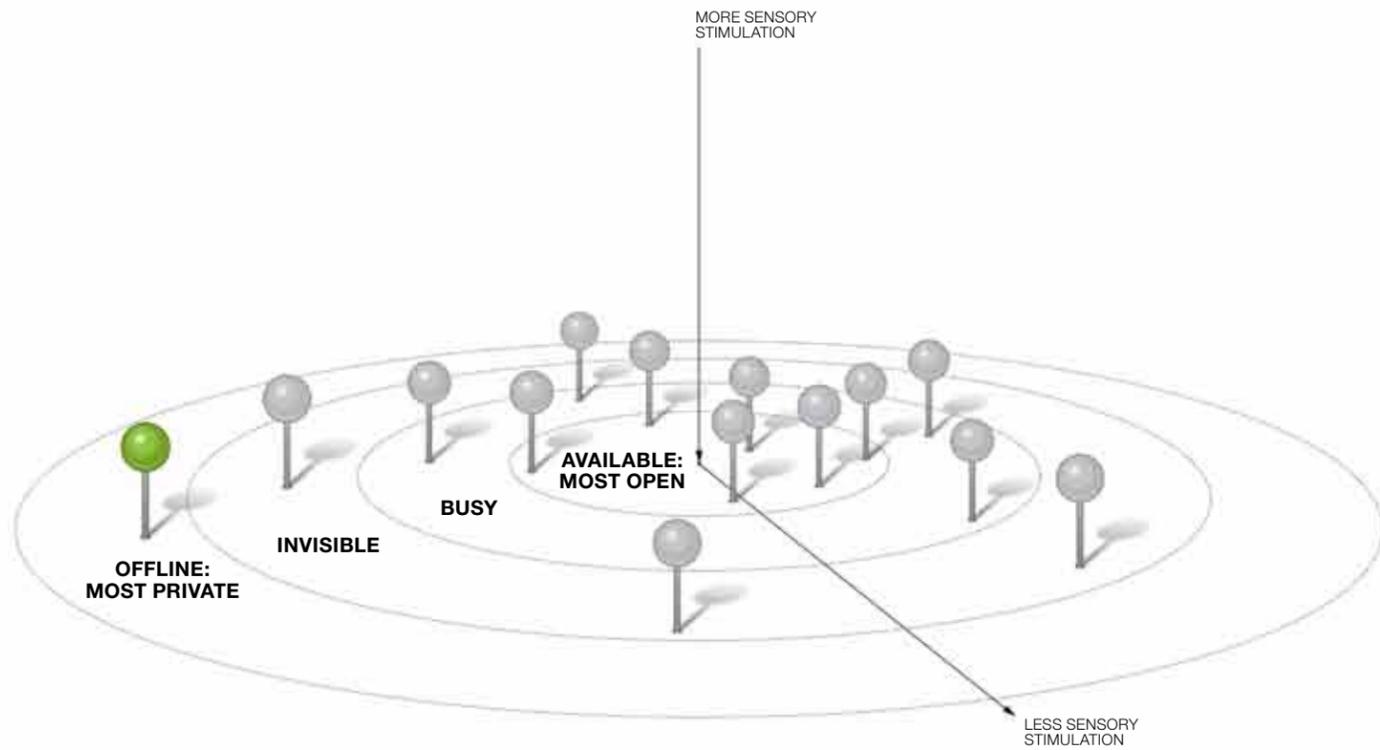
*Spaces should be designed for visibility - making it intuitive for workers to recognize the kind of spaces that support the work they're doing (boisterous collaboration vs. quiet contemplation), and provide the tools they need, while making it easy to identify available spaces.*

Designing for a ‘palette of place’ makes it evident to users that they have choice over where and how to work, depending on the type of work they are engaged in. Technology-enabled devices should be utilized to make it to find the right space is available, both in advance or on demand.

A device like RoomWizard® allows a simple glance down a hallway to see a green light that indicates the space is available. The information display confirms the topic of the meeting; who’s in it and how long it will last, so you don’t have to disturb people mid-meeting.

Accenture made extensive use of RoomWizard in their Houston space to not only make it easier for employees to find meetings, but to also quickly reserve a space for their individual work, and release the space for others when they were done. Vodafone’s Amsterdam space incorporated wayfinding into both the architecture and furnishings. The glass walls combined with RoomWizard make it easy to see where people are, and what’s going on.





## ONLINE. OFFLINE.

Zoning allows mobile workers to situate themselves in spaces that provide the right tools and sensory stimulation, while signaling to others their degree of availability - similar to status indicators in virtual space.



## 5. AMP UP. AMP DOWN.

*The workplace should be zoned to provide workers choice and control over the degree of sensory stimulation desired, and their level of availability.*

Employees need to feel like they're connected – to other people and to the organization. They also need quiet times when they can focus, reflect or recharge. When they are in the workplace they sometimes want the energy and buzz of working near people; other times they need a space for heads-down work. We call this “amping up or amping down,” and every workspace should signal the kind of work it supports to help people determine the best place to work. Providing sensory control is a key element of wellbeing in the holistic view, which includes the psychological and sociological aspects of work as well as the physical. It's important to integrate spaces that encourage people to retreat from the structure of the day, to renew and rest or gain fresh perspective. Employees should be able to control lighting, sound and temperature, work in relaxed lounge or resting postures, and be free of interruptions. It's equally important to provide spaces that allow workers to feel a

physical connection with others, even when working alone. The post occupancy study we conducted on our WorkCafé shows 80 percent of people choosing it for individual work. They know they might be interrupted but they prefer to do focused work near others. Vodafone created a space called Club 11 that offers food and an outdoor terrace, and after 5:00 p.m. they play upbeat music. It's fun, chic and serves a number of needs, but you wouldn't mistake it for a library or choose it for the times you need quiet focus. The space for that is actually called the library, on another floor in another zone, and one of the few places with rules about how people can work in the space. Talking and phone calls are not allowed. It's a perfect place for amping down and doing quiet, reflective work.

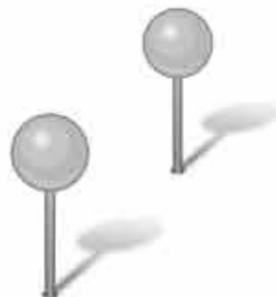
At Skype's Palo Alto, California, offices, collaboration is nurtured, and workers sit at benches that allow for easy exchange of ideas. Headphones are the respected way of signaling “leave me alone, I'm thinking,” but the company also makes sure to offer a variety of small, private places for individual work throughout the workplace.



↑ turnstone, Grand Rapids, USA



↑ Skype's Palo Alto, CA offices



## THE BOTTOM LINE: IT'S A BALANCING ACT

Collaboration as a business strategy is critical to innovation. And so is individual concentration and contemplation. As Susan Cain notes, we tend to believe all creativity and all productivity comes from the group, when, in fact, there is real benefit to solitude and being able to go off and focus and put your head down. The workplace needs to support that. It needs to help both mobile and resident workers achieve a balance of collaborative and individual work, in places where they can amp up or amp down, with the tools they need, alone or together.

The best workplaces are the ones that give people the opportunity to choose what they need, when they need it. ●

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