The Incredible Shrinking Office: Transforming Workspaces to Empower Collaboration
Introduction
The traditional office workspace is dead.

It used to be that you’d track your career based on the location of your office. From fresh-faced junior in a dimly-lit interior cubicle, you would progress to a private office, then a window, and finally that prized corner office.

But that paradigm has left the building. Chased out by the coalescing forces of mobility, millennials, and modernity, the advent of collaborative technology and the always connected worker have led to a brave new world of shared, open spaces.

Why shrinking the office is (finally) here to stay
Long a dream of facility planners, initial forays into strategies like “hoteling” and shared spaces back in the ‘90s floundered due to the lack of technologies to support them. Today, the dream is back with a vengeance. Only this time, technology and trends are clearly on the side of the planners. Ubiquitous internet connectivity, the saturation of mobile phones and laptops, and the expectations of younger workers for an always connected workstyle make it easier and more necessary than ever, to create small, efficient workspaces that are attractive to both the bottom line and new hires.

That last point is important. Never underestimate the value of the physical environment as a recruitment tool. A clean, modern, progressive space says a lot to a prospective employee about the hiring company’s embrace of current trends and technologies. It can be a deciding factor versus another employment option that feels grounded in the last century.

Of course, the biggest driver of this trend toward small is more basic: the budget. Average utilization for workspace in the US and Europe between the hours of 8am and 5pm hovers around 35-50%. Meaning that, at any given time, over half of workspaces are unused. Given that real estate is the second largest operating expense, that’s not a good investment.

Why an office at all?
While real estate is a major item, people are the biggest investment—one you really can’t afford to waste.

In a knowledge economy driven by collaboration, the focus should be on creating physical spaces that encourage human connection. In other words, it’s not enough to just shrink the office, we need to rethink it in ways that help people do what they need to do most.

Collaboration helps us deal with a more complex business environment, foster teamwork across distributed organizations, and helps drive innovation and brand differentiation. Various studies show that up to 82% of knowledge workers feel they need to partner with others throughout the day to get work done.

In fact, according to an IBM study, capitalizing on the collective intelligence of global teams is a top priority and 80% of organizations say they need to collaborate more. But, at the same time, 78% say they struggle to effectively connect their workplace and help people collaborate—either virtually or face-to-face.¹

Not all collaboration is alike
So why the struggle? It could be because there are three kinds of collaboration, each with its own requirements, as research from Steelcase has identified:

1. Informative collaboration—where the goal is to exchange information and keep everyone on the same page. This might include making a report to executives or sharing a project update.
2. Evaluative collaboration—where teams need to gather the knowledge at hand and make a decision. That could mean greenlighting a proposal, deciding on a venue for an event, or determining which software bugs to fix and which to postpone.
3. Generative collaboration—where you need to build on existing knowledge to brainstorm new solutions. This often occurs across businesses, and comes into play in a variety of industries from medicine to filmmaking.

While all three types of collaboration need to be supported in the work environment, they each come with different challenges and demands. To better understand what each type requires, let’s go back to space for a moment.

¹ Source: Working Beyond Borders, Ibm 2010 HR Study
Redefining the spaces we work in

In work environments designed for effective collaboration you need a variety of spaces to provide workers with choice and control over where and how they work: workspaces for individual day-to-day employees, meeting spaces for teams, small groups, large gatherings and temporary spots for visitors. Each of these spaces needs to be looked at through the prism of the employees who use them, their specific needs, and challenges.

Steelcase has developed a framework for understanding the types of spacial solutions required to provide employees with control over their work experience. They call this a “Palette of Place.” In this model, the y axis represents the continuum between “shared” space and “owned” space—that is, spaces that are either dedicated to a specific owner or owners, versus spaces that routinely get used by different individuals or groups. The x axis represents the concept of “I” versus “we”—one person versus groups. Your organization will have a different need for all of these spaces based on your country and organizational culture.

This results in four quadrants of space based on how the spaces are occupied and used, each with its own unique set of needs and challenges. Polycom believes that true collaboration and productivity happen when employees find each quadrant with the right solutions designed to meet those needs and challenges.

Unique space, innovative solutions

Quadrant 1: I/Shared spaces

The iconic example of an I/Shared space is the open office environment with discreet workstations that aren’t explicitly allocated to any one individual. They can be open areas with long tables, where anyone can sit and work. They can be modern cubicles open to visiting employees, mobile workers, or salespeople who are only in the office irregularly. But they can also be smaller spaces in corners, common areas, and hallways that are underutilized and out of the way, where people naturally gather when more traditional space is at a premium.

Regardless, they share a set of characteristics. These are dynamic and flexible environments, often used by mobile employees or visiting workers. They need to be flexible enough for the power and charging of laptops, tablets, and mobile phones, and conducive to generative work with the right lighting, attention to sound, and room to maneuver. Ideally, these spaces foster ad-hoc collaboration and they tend to house front-line staff and managers.

That means that you need to look at key consideration:

- How do you find privacy for sensitive conversations?
- What are the landing spaces for mobile workers when they come in to collaborate? Where do they set their belongings?
What are the tools for interacting with people on the road/outside the office?

How do you eliminate background noise and other distractions?

In addition to these characteristics and considerations, the solution should also account for the specifics of your environment. For example, if you have Microsoft® Lync® or Skype® for Business as your phone system, you can outfit the I/shared spaces with business media phones like the Polycom® VVX® line that allow people to dynamically sign into their account in order to access contacts, calendars, voicemail and more, to provide a more personalized experience and then sign out when they leave.

Video in these spaces can be targeted to the individual user:

- Polycom VVX business media phones deliver the privacy of a handset, but can also deliver video capabilities.
- Polycom® RealPresence® Mobile is a simple download onto a tablet/phone that provides video and voice for temporary workers coming into the office, mobile employees, or anyone who wants to use small screen for video collaboration.
- RealPresence® Desktop provides Polycom® NoiseBlock™ and Acoustic Fence™ technologies that reduce background noises and works on laptops for portable, personal collaboration.

Quadrant 2: I/Owned spaces

The I/Owned space is your personal office space. Traditionally, this would be a dedicated office or cubicle where you might spend much of your focus on knocking off the tasks that make up your job. Part of the day might be spent collaborating with a colleague who drops by, taking voice meetings on your phone, or working in isolation. Empowering the I/Owned space today means looking at ways to make collaboration easier and consistent with the experience individuals would have in other types of spaces.

The I/Owned space is a fixed environment personalized to the owner: multiple screens, wired phones, desktops, or docking stations for laptops. The work done here is mostly generative, but some evaluative. The owners of these spaces tend to be mid to upper management.

What are the key considerations you need to keep in mind?

- What are you budgeting for individual spaces—and are those spaces being used?
- How can you best integrate content into the workflow—like calendar integration or integration with sales tools.
- What are the control interfaces—and are they consistent with other environments to reduce friction among your users.
- How is that room used? In some workspaces, meeting space may be at a premium, for example, some private offices double as multiperson meeting rooms for small groups. In open spaces or private cubicles, you may have noise issues to contend with.

To empower collaboration in I/Owned spaces, Polycom offers additional options beyond RealPresence Desktop and the VVX lines noted earlier, though they certainly can be valuable here as well.

- Polycom® RealPresence® Web Suite—a simple, web-based solution that offers click-to-connect convenience from PC, table, or smartphone; and allows you to share multiple content streams simultaneously.
- Polycom® RealPresence® Group Convene™—an all-in-one device ideal for executive offices; it easily deploys on desktops and uses a remote control or RealPresence Touch™ device.
Quadrant 3: We/Shared spaces

We/Shared environments are those traditional conference rooms that are available to all employees. Typically, they need to be reserved in advance and come equipped with some collaboration equipment.

However, We/Shared spaces increasingly include huddle rooms that may only be outfitted in a barebones fashion, if at all. And, across all these We/Shared spaces, customers tell us that a key frustration stems from a lack of familiarity with whatever equipment may be present—resulting in delays from people trying to figure out how to log on, configure the screen to their needs, etc. Even where a conference phone or video system is standard, remote participants may not be fully included in collaboration.

Typically though, you’d see a fixed environment intended for multiple purposes by all levels in the organization that includes a conference phone, some sort of projection, and perhaps video equipment. Meeting attendees will often want to share content from their personal laptops or tablets, and the rooms are used for evaluative and informative collaboration. These spaces are scheduled and the integration of scheduling into the collaboration process is another major pain point.

Ask yourself:

• How will we integrate scheduling into the collaboration workflow?
• Are we effectively standardizing on process and equipment—how do we “launch” a meeting?
• Are we accommodating different sized rooms and meetings appropriately for our work style?
• Do our users have special A/V requirements based on BYOD policies?
• Are we optimizing the experience for every participant, whether in the room or not?

To help you get better performance out of conference rooms and provide a much better user experience, Polycom leads the industry with solutions that change the way people collaborate.

Many open plan environments now have small meeting spaces called “huddle rooms” for brainstorming or video collaboration. However, too often we’ve seen that these forlorn spaces are equipped with little more than an electrical outlet, which has led to a host of ad-hoc outfitting that can lead to inconsistency, frustrating quality, or missing pieces. Polycom offers several great options that provide both ease of use and enterprise-grade audio and video quality.

• RealPresence Debut™ is a simple, all-in-one solution that brings video to smaller rooms. It’s easy to deploy—just plug into a monitor and it rests on top.
• RealPresence Trio™ is the first smart hub for group collaboration—combining voice, content, and video options that share a simple, consistent experience.

For more traditional, larger rooms, Polycom has proven technologies with industry-leading features to ensure the quality of the experience.

• Polycom® RealPresence® Group Series—offers robust collaboration systems that provide high-quality, customizable video experiences. Systems include multiple zoom and camera options that work with your monitors and in most spaces. High definition video and content ensures people are seen and heard (with expansion mics available) and the system integrates with a range of Polycom, Microsoft, Cisco and open standard platforms.
• Great audio coverage using expansion mics

RealPresence Group Series can also be expanded with these popular add-ons:

• Polycom® Concierge enables participants to use their smartphones as a control device to dial in, adjust volume, add/remove participants, and other functions.
• Polycom® Visualboard™ turns monitors into a whiteboard that accepts input from a finger (touchscreen), pen, or mouse (standard screen).
• Polycom® EagleEye™ Producer/Director uses facial recognition to automatically focus video and audio on the faces of participants for a better overall experience.
• Polycom RealPresence Touch control provides a simple interface to replace the awkwardness of traditional remote controls.

Polycom also provides the power of the RealPresence Group Series solutions in the all-in-one RealPresence® Medialign™ solution that offers the same features in a sleek, attractive form that requires no room remediation or tools for assembly.
Quadrant 4: We/Owned spaces

We/Owned spaces may be the least prevalent today, but they are fast becoming a top priority for all types of collaboration. These spaces are dedicated to specific project teams and not used by anyone else. This means the team does not have to worry about anyone disrupting their configuration, erasing their whiteboards, etc. These dynamic spaces host scheduled and unscheduled meetings and are often used for generative collaboration. The most challenging work happens here and sessions may be long which means teams need to be comfortable and the space conducive to prolonged engagement.

Think about empowering your teams:

- What project teams could benefit from dedicated spaces?
- Are your current room configurations suitable?
- How can you ensure that remote attendees in long, challenging meetings have an “equal” experience to those in the room?

To help you achieve this, we offer Polycom® RealPresence Centro™, the industry’s first collaboration hub and game-changing solution that puts people at the center of the experience. Rather than look up at a screen at the end of the table, people gather, as they do naturally, in a circle around the multi-screened, video-equipped RealPresence Centro. In this way, everyone—whether in the room or on screen—has an equal presence and voice.

By design, RealPresence Centro:

- Creates true face-to-face communication between local and remote participants, so everyone is on a level field.
- Creates a natural, empowering dynamic as people work on equal terms.
- Placed in the center of the room, it avoids the “bowling alley affect” where remote participants fight for presence at the end of the room.

When your teams use RealPresence Centro, they will feel as close as possible to the experience of being in the same room. Some of the features that enable this include:

- 360-degree camera that intelligently provides a full visual and audio of what is happening in the room, even as people move about.
- Four touch displays that keep eye contact with both local and far-side participants for the most natural experience.
- Simple to deploy and simple to operate, with the same calendar integration and workflow integration capabilities as our other solutions.

Conclusion: the traditional workspace is dead, long live the future

The office may be shrinking, but it’s not going away anytime soon. If anything, the rising demand for more teamwork and collaboration makes the configuration of workspaces more important than ever. The workplace of the future demands getting it right, today. That means understanding the different types of collaboration your people need to perform, and then building the spaces to meet their needs. By doing so, you will be better able to defy distance, break down barriers to effective collaboration, and maximize your most valuable investment—the knowledge, talents, and expertise of your people.

To learn more, visit www.polycom.com.