

## The Evolving Meeting Room: Trends, Types and Supporting Technology



This paper looks at the forces behind the ongoing changes in how we hold meetings, their effects on meeting space design, and the display technology ideally suited to support the needs of today's meetings.

— Erik Willey, 12/09/16

## Introduction

Traditionally a large space dominated by a long table, a whiteboard, and seating for 10+, conference room design is evolving to accommodate today's collaborative work styles. The ways we meet are undergoing a major shift and organizations are adapting their meeting spaces.

## Convening a Meeting: Transformative Trends

Meetings are called daily to brainstorm, collaborate, train and develop strategy. For many years, the basics of the business meeting remained well established and consistent. Today, as with many aspects of our work and personal lives, the business meeting is evolving to leverage new technologies and reflect the changing ways we work. While many of the whys behind business meetings remain the same, the where and how we meet are undergoing a significant shift. This in turn is having a major impact on companies' conference room strategies.

Among the key trends impacting meeting room strategy are:

### The Freedom to Work from Anywhere

Ushered in by the laptop, mobility lays the foundation for a sea change in the way we work. Today powerful mobile devices including laptops, tablets and smartphones, along with sophisticated mobility software and advanced data security, enable an unprecedented level of flexibility in when and where we work. Once the privilege of a few key players, flexible work arrangements are increasingly common, with work-at-home time among the non-self-employed growing 103% between 2005 – 2015.<sup>1</sup> The convergence of mobile device effectiveness and social acceptance have created a climate that no longer requires everyone to be physically present to conduct a successful meeting.<sup>2</sup>

### Shifts in Communication Preferences

The ways in which business professionals choose to connect and communicate began to shift with the introduction of cloud-based personal communication services such as Skype for Business, Zoom, GoToMeeting, and Jabber. The ease of instant messaging (IM) and the use of personal and group video conferencing solutions are fueling a rapid shift from structured, scheduled meetings to short, ad hoc, on-demand or just-in-time exchanges.<sup>3</sup>

### Software-based Communication Solutions

The efficiency of mobile workers and distributed teams has been further increased by the shift in communication solutions from hardware to software-based architectures, which allows for a wider distribution of download-and-install audio, video, and data sharing communication clients.<sup>4</sup>

## A Greater Focus on Collaboration

The benefits of workplace collaboration are far reaching. Included among them are faster, more efficient problem solving; increased innovation, trust, and loyalty; a greater sense of purpose and ownership; enhanced skill development; and improved job satisfaction and employee retention.<sup>5,6</sup> Increased understanding of these benefits and the desire to facilitate greater collaboration has become an important factor in the development of meeting room strategy.

## A Tech-native Workforce Accustomed to Flexibility

The first generation to grow up surrounded by empowering technology, Millennials represent 30% of today's workforce as well as the largest single generation in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> True digital natives, Millennials have distinctly different work styles and expectations than prior generations. Highly motivated by peer relationships and steeped in the interactive culture of social media, Millennials crave collaboration, work best in teams, require frequent feedback, and have a strong desire to work with the latest technologies.<sup>8</sup> With the U.S. Bureau of Statistics projecting Millennials to make up 40% of the workforce by 2020, and 75% by 2025, the need to support a collaborative workplace climate will continue to correspondingly increase.<sup>9</sup>

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## The Open Floor Plan

Steadily replacing cubicles for the past decade, the open plan is now an iconic symbol of the modern workplace environment, with around 70% of all U.S. offices including some type of open floor plan.<sup>10</sup> A natural fit for today's mobile employees, who embrace BYOD and often spend less time in the office, the open floor plan has been recognized as a way to enhance camaraderie, collaboration, and flow of information among workers, management and executives.

## Cost Containment via Space Management

Ongoing financial pressures have put many companies in a continual state of vigilance as they seek out new ways to contain costs and maximize efficiency. Not surprisingly, the use of space has become a focal point of these financial pressures for many companies. Cubicles left vacant by telecommuting employees led first to a rise in hot-desking, next to an even stronger embrace of the open floor plan with fluid seating, which maximizes existing space while minimizing costs.<sup>11</sup> Combined with the open plan trend and hot-desking, mobility-powered flexible work arrangements offer companies a window into reducing their real estate footprint to contain costs and maximize efficiency.<sup>12</sup>

## Beyond the Boardroom

The scope of the changes discussed above is sweeping, with broad consequences for many areas of business. Below, a brief review of the ways in which these changes are impacting the physical conference room.

### Conference Rooms Are Getting Smaller

Meeting rooms have been shrinking for some time, and the trend is on the verge of rapid acceleration. Today, medium-sized spaces that seat up to 10 participants account for 44% of all conference rooms. Small spaces that seat up to four (including offices used for meetings), and the largest rooms that hold 10+ participants, respectively account for 26% and 30% of all conference rooms. This represents an ongoing trend toward smaller spaces, with data from a large 2011-2013 study clearly documenting the rapid rise of small-to-medium-sized spaces.<sup>13</sup>

### Comfort and Coziness Promote Collaboration

Comfort and approachability have become key attributes of the modern meeting space, with designers working to create a relaxing atmosphere to promote participant comradery, comfort and collaboration. As one designer put it, "Gone are the long tables and high-backed chairs. Enter the couches, coffee tables, easy chairs and pillows."<sup>14</sup>

### Meeting Space is Still Essential

Although mobility and personal collaboration solutions continue to shape workforce strategies, the provision of on-site meeting space remains important, as indicated by a study revealing that 60% of conference attendees today join audio, video, and/or web conferences from a conference room rather than their workplace desk, home office, or mobile device.<sup>15</sup> Walled meeting space can also be critical for privacy and meeting focus in environments with open floor plans.

### Hello Huddle Space

The disappearing conference room is giving way to small, convenient meeting places that enable a few employees to quickly get together without the need to reserve a conference room. Huddle rooms – or huddle spaces carved out within open floor plans – facilitate informal closeness and easy collaboration and provide an ideal environment to facilitate the type of interaction preferred by the growing Millennial workforce. They are a logical response to the ongoing changes in work-life dynamics and workspace management discussed above – and their use is growing.

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## Evolving Meeting Room Technology

The changing meeting modalities and conference room configurations discussed above are likewise shaping the types of technology used within meeting rooms. Technology deployment trends indicate an ongoing shift from traditional white boards and projectors toward new collaborative technology. Chief among these technologies are:

"Many companies are moving from projection technology to the use of large format displays (LFDs)."

### Bigger, More Plentiful Displays

Many companies are moving from projection technology to the use of large format displays (LFDs). In a recent rundown of future meeting room tech trends, conferencing firm Oblong Industries listed multiple screens as its number one prediction. Stimulated by decreasing prices, the firm foresees multiple screens being employed more frequently to create an enhanced interactive presentation environment.<sup>17</sup>

Predictions for the well-equipped conference room:

- **Multiple screens** – deliver a more interactive presentation environment
- **Sharing from afar** – new conferencing tech will connect multiple remote devices
- **The death of PowerPoint** – move away from the linear presentation of PPT with tech that lets users stream content from smartphones & other devices
- **Freedom from notetaking** – camera capture of display board notes will be the norm
- **Get greener** – cut costs and spare the environment with products that monitor and control power consumption
- **Design-integrated wireless charging** – find it in furniture from Ikea, Aircharge trays, handy Powermat products and more
- **Get your game on** – gamification will increasingly find its way into many aspects of business; meetings and presentations aren't far behind<sup>18</sup>

Large format displays offer a range of meeting room benefits that include:

- Full HD 1080p / 4K resolution
- Brightness and clarity
- All-in-one solution
- Wall- or cart-mount for cost-effective resource sharing
- Easy installation and reduced maintenance
- Greater reliability
- Longer lifespan – at least 2-3 times longer than a typical IWB or projector
- Lower energy consumption
- No shadows or glare introduced by projectors
- Quiet, fan-free operation

Smaller meeting spaces benefit from the inclusion of all-in-one displays with integrated webcam, dual speakers, and mic and headphone ports, for easy-to-use video conferencing.

### Interactive Displays with Embedded Annotation Software

The addition of interactivity further boosts collaboration and meeting engagement by enabling multiple users to write or draw on the display just as



they would interact with their smartphone or tablet. Pre-Installed annotation software like ViewSonic's ViewBoard® makes it easy to write, highlight, edit, and transform documents and images on-screen in real-time as well as enhance content by easily importing documents or media files. Saving and distributing screen content helps preserve attendee attention by eliminating the need to scribble notes – another predicted wave of the future available today.

## Collective Collaboration via Simple Software

The usefulness of meeting space displays is exponentially increased by the ability of participants to easily display content from their devices. Traditional “pass the cable” laptop connectivity saps time, fragments focus and constrains sharing to a single user. Today's best solutions wirelessly enable an unlimited number of users to simultaneously share and control content on a conference room display from any Windows, Android or Apple device. And when companies standardize on this type of sharing solution, users gain the ease of walk-in interactive sharing after a one-time app install. Look for solutions that offer multiple use modes for presenter-controlled sessions along with ‘equal-access-for-all’ collaboration as well as the ability to integrate with existing in-room AV control systems like Crestron, Extron and AMX and centralized IT administration.

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## Conclusion

Changing demographics, new technologies, social trends and financial imperatives are making their mark on the ways we meet. Although workers are no longer constrained to the formal, scheduled conference room, effective meetings remain critical to business productivity. The provision of meeting space likewise remains an operational imperative. To address today's needs, conference rooms are becoming smaller, more comfortable and more adaptable. Technology to facilitate effective meeting collaboration includes large format displays, interactive displays, all-in-one videoconference-ready monitors, and easy, wireless content sharing software.

**For more information, contact ViewSonic sales at [salesinfo@viewsonic.com](mailto:salesinfo@viewsonic.com) or visit [www.viewsonic.com](http://www.viewsonic.com)**

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