

Making Teamwork Work (Excerpt)

The following is an excerpt from the Herman Miller Research Summary: Making Teamwork Work: Designing Spaces that Support Collaborative Efforts(©2002).

“Designing for Collaboration

In field observations of business teams, Herman Miller research has identified several common facility strategies that companies currently use to accommodate teams:

- **Business as Usual** The organization makes no special provision for collaborative work; teams meet in unassigned conference rooms or meeting areas.
- **Assigned Meeting/Project Space** Teams work together in a “nonresidential” project space or in meeting rooms assigned for the life of the project. Members’ individual offices may be located in adjacent space or with their functional work groups.
- **Group Scheduled Meeting Space** Teams work mostly in the field; at the corporate location, they meet in scheduled conference rooms.
- **Co-located Teams** Dedicated team workspace incorporates collaborative and individual workspaces within team boundaries.
- **Shared Special-Purpose Areas** Teams have shared use of spaces such as labs, workshops, studios, video conferencing, “war” rooms, and magnet areas.
- **Virtual Teams** Teams collaborate mostly through the use of technology.

None of these represents a single, best way to organize space for teams, and new strategies will likely emerge as evolving technologies continue to reduce the constraints of time and location. Within and alongside these strategies, however, the design of the physical environment can play an important role in encouraging and sustaining collaborative effort at key points.

Initiation

The physical setting may have its most significant impact on collaborative work processes before they ever begin. Workplaces designed to encourage casual encounters among people from different areas of the company can set the stage for collaboration. In their book, *Workplace by Design*, Franklin Becker and Fritz Steele recommend designing in “activity magnet areas” that attract people and encourage interaction.¹⁰ Carefully located and designed break areas, mail stations, and copy centers can serve to draw people from various parts of the organization and provide them with shared space and basic tools for initiating collaborative efforts.”

For the complete text of this research summary, please CONTACT Thomas Interior Systems.