PLANNING FOR COLLABORATION
Collective intelligence studies show that it’s not the IQ of individuals that matters most when it comes to innovation. It’s the ability to harness the intelligence of a team that is a much better predictor of success. Harnessing that groupthink takes a commitment to actively fostering a collaborative culture in your office.

Lucky for you, that’s what this eBook is about.

Collaborative culture doesn’t magically appear out of thin air. It springs first from a work environment that is conceived and curated with teamwork in mind. The workspace itself communicates an attitude about the work being done and the people doing it.

In the pages that follow, you’ll find tips for rethinking your space, planning for serendipity, and keeping your hive buzzing.
A collaborative workspace is something you can see, hear and feel. It’s reflected in everything from the location of the bathrooms, to the quality of the coffee in the kitchen. As you read through this book, embrace the opportunity to take an honest audit of your own office. Does it pass the sniff test as a collaborative haven, and if not, what changes can be made to get you there?

SECTION 1: 
BUZZ
If you walk into a silent office, something is awry. Office buzz signifies that people are communicating, ideas are developing, and things are happening.

SECTION 2: 
WE SPACE
The corner office is out of style, and for good reason. “We space” jumpstarts collaboration and brings your team together.

SECTION 3: 
FLEXIBILITY
There should be a variety of spaces to work in the office, including not always working in the office.

SECTION 4: 
SERENDIPITY
Leaving chance to chance is a thing of the past. Successful companies make space for run-ins and informal interactions.
If you read “buzz” and thought “bee,” we’re on the same page. Meaning, if your office is the hive, you should be able to see, hear and feel the energy of the workers.

Few things are less inspiring than the sound of “crickets” when you walk in the office door. Collaboration takes movement, debate and conversation. Laughter, excitement and music are vehicles that can play into this as well.

In addition to creating a space that is communal and functional, facilitating employee happiness is an integral component of a creative, collaborative environment. Happy people buzz.

Businessweek recently reported on the positive correlation between happiness and quality of work. Conducted by Gallup, the study found, “people are more productive and creative when they have more positive emotions.” In fact, the same study found that in corporate workplaces lost productivity due to employee disengagement costs more than $300 billion annually in the U.S.

Small changes can make a difference. The University of Miami teamed up with a group of IT workers and found that people listening to music while working completed their work faster, and with better results than those who didn’t. Reason why: music improves your mood.

The happier your team is, the better they’ll get along and want to work together.

Happiness begets collaboration. Collaboration begets success. Good vibes and good tunes keep the hive buzzing along.

5 IDEAS TO BOOST BUZZ

• Keep the kitchen stocked with your team’s favorite snacks. That should include fantastic coffee.
• Make your common areas comfortable and inviting
• Play great music, and take turns being DJ
• Professional or social off-sites give your team a chance to build relationships. Sushi and beer can work wonders.
• Celebrate small victories. Reward hard work.
WE SPACE

The traditional office model kept the senior team in their ivory towers, while middle management worked independently in Cubicle-ville. By keeping people apart, this set-up can create a hierarchy and separation within the office that slows information sharing and impedes collaboration.

Thankfully, as many as two-thirds of American offices now use some sort of open-space office arrangement. When it comes to team building and brainstorming, “we spaces” make sense. They support the group interaction that is integral to a collaborative environment.

Jim Hackett, CEO of Steelcase, a company that creates work environments, was interviewed by Forbes about why communal spaces are so important. He said: “Innovation requires collective ‘we’ work. To this end, it’s critical to design spaces that not only support collaboration, but augment it (with) spaces that promote eye-to-eye contact, provide everyone with equal access to information, and allow people to move around and participate freely.”

Kayak founder Paul English echoed Hackett’s sentiment in an Inc. article exploring, “where a CEO should sit,” He said, “our general philosophy is that an open environment facilitates intellectual intensity.” In addition to maximizing engagement, sitting together speeds up the problem-solving process. As a group they can identify and solve without missing a beat. That’s the power of being together.

Because, let’s face it, technology has evolved to the point where most of us don’t actually need to work from an office. One of the main reasons to go to work at all is to work with others. Therefore, having dedicated “we space” or a planned place for people to work together on a level playing field is essential. Without them, we might as well be sitting at our respective dining room tables in a bathrobe and slippers.

3 TIPS FOR BETTER “WE SPACES”

• Sitting is for conversation, standing is for action. Make a space for both.
• Keep technology in easy reach, but out of hands. It should enable, not distract or hinder.
• Have the right tools. “We space” is about democratizing the creative process. Make sure you have enough markers for everyone who wants to participate.
There is no universal office layout that works for everyone. Therefore, your space should be differentiated enough to support all styles of work. “We spaces” come in all shapes and sizes; large conference rooms, smaller lounge areas, even small closed offices for one-on-one discussion.

To counterbalance all these “we spaces,” there must also be “me spaces” where employees can retreat to get work done. Effective collaboration requires time for individual thinking as well as group thinking.

An ideal environment mixes and matches well. Hackett calls it a ‘palette of place,’ a range of settings in which to work alongside each other and individually. Along with different physical settings, variance in seating, and sources of light are helpful, too.

Flexibility doesn’t stop inside the office. It should also inform company policy. In an article entitled *The Future of Working From Home*, writer Ariel Schwartz cites Citrix Systems’s recent study on the trend of at-home and off-site working. Citrix concluded that approximately 29% of people will work remotely in 2020. At that time, in the United States, they estimate that the average office will have only six desks for every 10 people.

Organizations that put an emphasis on WHAT gets done, rather than WHERE it is done will find their employees empowered to make decisions that allow them to be more productive, happier, and more creative.
There is one recurring theme in almost all of the research we do about workspaces: the importance of chance encounters and informal interactions. Time is spent discussing how best to design for it, and then dollars are put down to ensure those designs come to fruition.

So, why all of this planning for what is, at the end of the day, serendipity?

Beyond creating a communal room for people to rub elbows and enjoy a cup of coffee, the brick and mortar of your space can be used to influence behavior and increase the odds of an a-ha moment. Steve Jobs did this devilishly well. When drafting the blueprint for Pixar’s new residence in 2000, he made a point to create a place for people to gather away from their desks. He didn’t stop at that; he devised a plan to get them all there.

The central space Jobs envisioned as his melting pot was the atrium of the Pixar building. To increase traffic and chance encounters, a single set of bathrooms was located directly adjacent to the atrium, as was the mailroom, the café and a fitness center. In his biography, Jobs explains, “If a building doesn’t encourage [collaboration], you’ll lose a lot of innovation and the magic that’s sparked by serendipity. So we designed the building to make people get out of their offices and mingle in the central atrium with people they might not otherwise see.”

Brad Bird, director of The Incredibles and Ratatouille, said of the space, “The atrium initially might seem like a waste of space … But Steve realized that when people run into each other, when they make eye contact, things happen.”

Jobs isn’t the only one who believed this. John Malnor, VP of Growth Initiatives at Steelcase, said this about their new offices, “One of the core design elements [of this building] is this idea of happy accidents.”

Even if it seems counterintuitive, proactively create the opportunity for informal interactions. It will help jump start collaboration and creative problem-solving throughout your organization.

**PLANNING FOR SERENDIPITY**

- Put the marketing team’s printer in the sales area, and vice-versa.
- Pick one day a week when you bring in coffee or special treats for your employees, and set up in a new location each week.
- Try “free desking.” Think musical chairs for the office.
CONCLUSION

In a great *Entrepreneur* piece entitled “Why Collaboration is Key,” Erika Napoletano writes, “Ideas alone aren’t worth squat.”

Truer words were never written. Ideas need help. It’s our job, and your job, and your bosses’ job to facilitate the transition from the highly individualized beginning of an idea to its more evolved state after it has been tweaked and refined by a group of people.

As we’ve outlined, how this happens is fair game. Choose a tip or two of ours and you’ll be well on your way to an environment where people want to work and ideas start to grow.

This eBook is based in part on research by Amanda Schneider, LEED AP Interior Design + Construction, and workplace design expert for IdeaPaint.
In 2008, IdeaPaint launched with one goal in mind: to improve the way people work. Just four years later, over 75,000 of the world’s most innovative companies including Apple, Google, NASA, Amazon, Nike, Autodesk, Yelp and Adobe use it to help their teams communicate and collaborate effectively.

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