

10 inspiring practices for a successful transition to unassigned seating

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This article is divided into two parts: the first 5 inspiring practices focus on [workplace and space utilization strategies](#), while the next 5 practices relate to [change management](#).

Practices on workplace and space utilization strategies

1. Timing is everything

Timing is a critical factor in implementing unassigned seating because it determines how smoothly employees can adapt to the change and whether it meets genuine organizational needs. **Space reduction** and **significant employee growth** are the primary triggers that typically justify a move to unassigned seating. When either of these triggers is present, it creates a pressure on the space, provides the organization a clear and practical reason for rethinking workspace assignments, allowing employees to understand the need and benefits of the change.

Leveraging space utilization tracking and data analysis is crucial for justifying the timing and need for transitioning to unassigned seating. This approach not only supports decision-making but also reassures employees about their workspace needs, facilitating a smoother transition.

Without a visible reason for the change, employees may see it as unnecessary or disruptive, leading to **resistance and decreased morale**. This can negatively impact productivity, as employees feel their workspace preferences and routines are being altered without a justifiable cause, which is why timing and transparency are essential for success.

2. Forging strategic alliances

Building a strong alliance across key groups—Facilities, Security, IT, IM, HR, and OHS—is essential for a smooth transition to an unassigned workspace. Collaboration at both working and executive levels align broader organizational goals and enables cohesive action. Real Property and Accommodations are often the lead for this type of initiative, with each group playing a vital supporting role, such as OHS adapting safety protocols for shared spaces, Security adjusting access controls, and IT supporting seamless connectivity.

To ensure effective collaboration, establish a cross-functional working group with representatives from each area. Define a shared purpose, clearly communicate the unassigned model's objectives, and discuss the specific operational impacts and potential solutions. By maintaining the group post-implementation, teams can continuously evaluate and adjust strategies to enhance the workplace experience. Unified efforts across these groups are key to a successful transition.

3. Exploring new ways of using space

Unassigned seating can help maximize space by reclaiming workstations and offices left vacant daily for various reasons, but creating a truly functional workspace requires more than simply removing names from offices and depersonalizing workstations. The goal is to move from maximizing space to enhancing its functionality.

Achieving this requires creative [utilization strategies](#) like neighbourhood, booking systems, personal storage, and acoustical zoning for collaborative and focused work. Tailoring these solutions to meet diverse workstyles makes the unassigned model more adaptable and supportive. By aligning strategies with space and user needs, you create an environment where employees can work effectively.

4. Considering low sensory options for diverse needs

Low sensory rooms are an emerging trend in office accommodations, designed to support employees who benefit from quieter, less stimulating environments. Although still in the early stages of experimentation, these spaces have already garnered interest from several government departments as a means of enhancing inclusivity, well-being, and overall workplace experience. Piloting a low sensory area within your space demonstrates a commitment to meeting diverse employee needs, offering a quiet retreat for focused work or decompression.

If implementing this type of space, conducting thorough research is essential. Engage and collaborate with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion groups, as well as Accessibility groups, and Occupational Health and Safety representatives. Begin with a small-scale pilot, adapting over time based on feedback and demand to ensure the space meets employee needs and aligns with broader goals for a supportive work environment.

5. In the event of partial assignment: encouraging depersonalization and priority access

When a fully unassigned workplace isn't feasible, and certain roles or functions require dedicated office space, consider **priority access** rather than permanent assignments to keep these spaces available for others when not in use. Each organization can determine who has access, whether limited to direct reports or open to all employees on the floor.

Maintaining depersonalized spaces—meaning no keys, door signage, or personal items—is a small compromise for retaining an office. It also ensures these workpoints stay accessible and reinforces that the space is a shared resource. By treating these assignments as adaptable and temporary, it helps teams prepare for future transitions, building readiness for a fully unassigned model over time.

Practices related to change management

6. Developing a leadership action plan

It is crucial to have an action plan for executives and managers so that they understand the change, and communicate it to their teams.

The two main objectives with this plan are to ensure leaders:

- Understand and personally commit to the change, overcoming any initial resistance.
- Are equipped to conduct the change within their teams.

This action plan will include regular information and update activities, to be communicated by your [project sponsor](#).

7. Using a pilot project floor to fine-tune the change management plan

Transforming one of your current floors into a workspace with unassigned seating, incorporating some of the utilization strategies from the [SWAG guide](#), such as creating a quiet zone and centralizing personal storage spaces, will greatly enrich your change management plan.

By conducting trials with a smaller group, you can more easily gather feedback and observe whether the integration is smooth and if employees are adopting the expected behaviors. This will also enable you to identify and resolve any irritants before the official opening.

Such a pilot space can also be part of your overall plan to educate employees. You can have teams test the space, for example, by rotating branches and allowing each team a two-week trial period.

8. Promoting employee experimentation while managing expectations

Incorporate language that fosters openness to testing and experiencing unassigned seating. By treating this transition as an experiment, you open the door to dialogue and reassure employees: they will be able to try things out, express themselves, and see that the project team is open to making adjustments. You'll need to provide feedback mechanisms so that employees can have their say.

However, you need to manage expectations realistically with this approach. People should expect a period of 3 to 6 months before adjustments are made, and not all requests will be processed.

9. Focus on community-oriented messages

Fostering a sense of community could be beneficial to your project of adopting unassigned seating. Remind staff to think not just about those around them, but also the next person who will use that workpoint or boardroom.

Emphasizing the importance of community, respect and courtesy will not only ensure a pleasant working experience for all, but also help reduce complaints about behaviours regarding noise levels, cleanliness, room booking schedules, etc.

Consider engaging your human resources and informal conflict resolution teams to address this issue, as it also ties into the organization's values and ethics.

10. Intensifying and diversifying activities as the launch approaches

As the implementation of unassigned seating approaches, you'll need to step up your activities. The four weeks leading up to your launch are a key time. Use all available channels to educate and inform employees, as their attention is at its highest at this time, and this will have a direct impact on the appropriate use of the new space.

Plan walkthroughs, Q&A sessions, distribute the employee toolkit, hold training events. Make sure managers relay information and are engaged in this final sprint to implementation. This will require significant time and commitment from the project team and the change management team, so plan accordingly.

For more ideas, take a look at the [Change management Program in-a-box](#).

