

5 inspiring practices for a successful transition to unassigned seating: Workplace utilization strategies

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This is the first of two articles presenting 10 inspiring practices for a transition to an unassigned workplace. Also read [5 inspiring practices on change management](#).

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.