

## Flex Space

*Choosing the "right" furnishings and technology makes the most of any meeting space.*

By Dave Meneely and Pat Tobin

While in years past, conference rooms were used for face to face meetings and required little to no infrastructure beyond standard power, advancements in technology and changing business styles have resulted in multifunctional, interactive conference spaces for many organizations. When conference space is at a premium and staff members are jockeying for reservations in every available room, facility managers (fms) face the challenge of providing an effective combination of furniture and equipment to meet a wide variety of user needs.

### Flexibility Is Key

Organizations, large and small, are able to accommodate conference needs with less space requirements through the creation of highly flexible rooms. With the right infrastructure, a single room can accommodate numerous functions, including board meetings, videoconferencing, training, seminars, staff meetings, and client presentations.

Flexible furniture solutions can make the most of limited space. Folding walls can be used to divide one large boardroom into two or more smaller conference areas. This ensures that a space is available for more infrequent, formal meetings with a large group, while the divided smaller rooms can be used for daily, informal staff meetings.

Individual conference tables for the smaller divided spaces can be pushed together to create a single large boardroom table when the folding walls are removed. There are furniture manufacturers that provide table styles designed to function this way in order to provide a finished, formal appearance.

In many modern boardrooms, technology requirements include power and data access at each seat for executives using their laptops during meetings; videoconference and presentation capabilities are often also required. While infrastructure for presentation and conferencing equipment is typically hard wired in one location, data sources integrated with movable tables require convenient and flexible cabling solutions. For

videoconferencing needs, wireless microphones with high quality sound resistant to the radio frequencies from cell phones can be placed around a table.

Raised floor systems can be used to provide flexible wiring configurations for projector and flat screen displays as well as laptop connectivity. Using a disconnect plate with multiple connections around the room, staff members can easily move their laptop connections from one location to another.

### Knowing The End User

To ensure that each conference space features the right technology and equipment, it is important for fms to understand their users' needs. Knowing the full spectrum of ways a conference room will be used helps to define the technology and furniture requirements. Knowledgeable consultants can provide expertise on available products and how they will meet an organization's specific needs. For example, note capturing technology that transfers handwritten notes to a USB drive, Web page, or printer may be useful for companies that use whiteboards for meeting notes.

The requirements for a client presentation room may be very different from those used for internal meetings. The size and shape of the table, for instance, should fit the size of the audience. A small round table will function well as interactive meeting space for three to five people, while a 16' boardroom table is better suited to formal presentations and videoconferencing with large groups.

Once the needs of the room are defined, fms should consider how the technology must be configured in relation to windows and other light sources, the entrance, the shape of the room, and other physical structures.

Thoughtful planning from the early design stages of a project can help create a flexible, highly functional conference room. By defining standard dimensions for any enclosed space, conference rooms and private offices can be interchangeable. Two offices



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In planning a conference room, natural light sources are one factor that should be considered.

can be combined to create an additional conference room, or conference space can be downsized to create an additional office for incoming personnel.

Planning flexible spaces can also require complex considerations for voice/data, power, HVAC, and other infrastructure. Working closely with a project team that includes the architect, engineers, facilities staff, technicians, and furniture vendors, and considering flexible requirements from the very beginning will help ensure a successful result.

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**Have you built flexibility into your conference rooms spaces? Share your thoughts by sending an e-mail to [avazquez@groupc.com](mailto:avazquez@groupc.com).**