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The Progressive IT Pro's Guide to Addressing Open Office Chaos

Today's IT departments have a lot on their plates. There's always another massive infrastructure project on the horizon, digital transformation initiatives are coming in left and right, and with whatever time is left over, IT is consumed by tech support requests and complaints. But as technology plays a more central role in our working lives, CIOs and IT teams need to prioritize the employee experience, which is a commonly overlooked area by IT departments.

In fact, IT is uniquely positioned to create work experiences that better enable productivity, support collaboration, attract the best and brightest talent, and instill pride in the work environment. This is especially true as the employee experience faces its greatest threat yet.

What threat? **The extinction of the cubicle wall.**

The reality is that the open office has become the decidedly dominant office plan.

Not only does this layout foster innovation, but it attracts workers, particularly Generations Y and Z. Younger generations are drawn to the light, energy, and aesthetic of the space in which they can openly connect with their colleagues. In fact, more than half of workers say they prefer an open, shared floor plan office.[2]
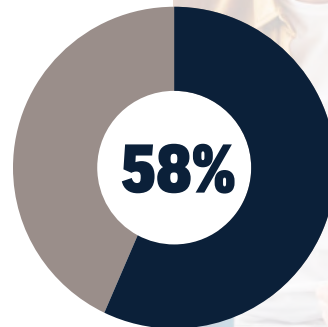
Thanks to the reduced employee footprint, the benefits also extend to the bottom line. Open plan offices help to achieve:

Better collaboration

Higher cost savings

58%

More than half (58%) of IT managers report that their companies have moved to open plan office spaces for some or all of their employees.[1]

However, distractions run rampant in an open office environment. And these distractions are far more than just an annoyance; they can lead to serious financial implications for your business.

Consider this: 40% of workers in open plan offices report that they're always or very often distracted.[3]

Additionally, nearly a third of all workers say they lose an hour or more of productivity each day to distractions.[4] Multiply that by the dozens or hundreds of workers you have in your open office space and you're looking at major financial losses due to nothing more than chitchat and background noise.

40%
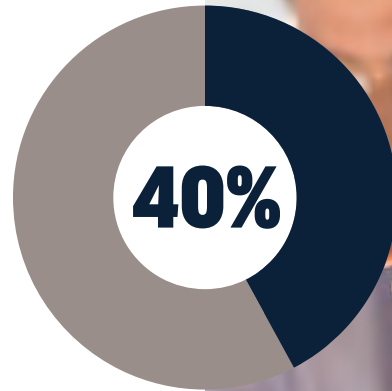
The perils of the open office don't just affect your colleagues.

Imagine this... You're taking a conference call from your desk with your remote team and the CIO. You're attempting to chime in on next year's budget and must-have investments when everyone on the call is interrupted by a group laughing behind you. After spending five minutes sharing your input, the call is interrupted again by a sales rep giving a presentation the next desk over. Your CIO is clearly annoyed and asks to reschedule the call when everyone can be in a quiet environment.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

Building a thriving community within your office is great, but you and your employees don't just go to work to be social. You go to, well, work. When you can't, you get frustrated, which impacts your engagement and retention.

4

That's where IT comes in.

You might think that open office distractions are the responsibility of HR, facilities, or Workplace Solutions. **What you might not realize is that IT can have perhaps the largest impact on mitigating the downside of open offices**—adding real value to the organization.

Here's why:

7 out of 10 workers say they'd be more productive if distractions were reduced.[5]

IT to the Rescue

IT is uniquely positioned to incorporate technology into the office space in a way that helps mitigate distractions and creates a positive change for the business and employees. Using technology to overcome employee distractions is an opportunity for IT to demonstrate to business teams that they're a proactive partner in the business, helping IT earn a greater say in the company's direction.

In this guide, we'll outline the four opportunities IT has to immediately help tackle open office woes. Find yourself a quiet, private space (good luck) and read on.

Equip your workspaces with tech designed to minimize distracting noise

Today's open offices are filled with a variety of spaces that individuals and teams can use to get work done. Each has different characteristics, but they can generally be grouped into two categories:

"I" Spaces

These are spaces for individuals ranging from dedicated desks to shared "hot" desks and private offices. The goal for these spaces is to reduce the impact of surrounding noise for the user and the people on the other end of the voice or video call. Solutions for "I" spaces will need to connect with an employee's multiple devices, such as their PC, desk phone, and mobile phone, and enable varying amounts of local mobility. Technology solutions for "I" spaces include headsets designed for open office environments, desk phones, and personal video cameras.

"We" Spaces

These are areas where multiple people can physically and/or virtually collaborate while shielding the rest of the office from the discussion. Open offices are driving a spike in conference room usage. In fact, huddle room meetings will grow from 18.1% of all video meetings today to 73% of all room-based video conferences in just five years, according to Frost & Sullivan.[6] Technology solutions for "We" spaces include conference phones and room video conferencing equipment.

Understanding the different types of spaces in your open office and how they are susceptible to noise and distraction will be crucial in helping you decide how to equip them with the right equipment and solutions.

99% **of workers say they're distracted from the noise of their open office.[7]**

Use tech to enable different workstyles and preferences

Every company has a wide range of roles and workstyles in their workforce. That means that each employee has specific technology needs for blocking out noise and distractions. Here are the four most common types of office workers you need to accommodate:

The Office Communicator

This type of worker spends most of their day at their desk, communicating through in-person meetings, email, voicemail, or calls. They prefer traditional modes of communication and are slow to adopt new technologies.

The Office Collaborator

This employee is much more comfortable with technology and is a fan of collaboration applications that help them be more productive. They primarily work at their desk, but are known to switch between devices as needed to manage communication. They often use music to drown out ambient noise from their co-workers.

The Office Warrior

This worker is rarely found at their desk, which means they rely on mobile devices and in-person meetings to manage communication. They're incredibly adaptable to new technology, but place a premium on their ability to sound clear and professional when communicating with current and prospective customers.

The Connected Executive

This person is tech-savvy, has a creative mind, and is respected by their peers. They communicate constantly, often under stressful conditions, and value the ability to seamlessly transition from one task to another.

Each of these workers has unique needs ranging from their preferred style of communication to the way they use different devices in their daily lives. Equipping them with the right tools is critical for maximizing their productivity. It's up to IT to understand each employee's specific needs, and then provide tailored solutions that allow them to be successful regardless of how, where, and when they work.
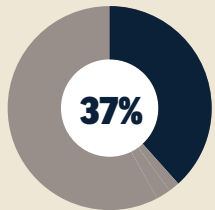
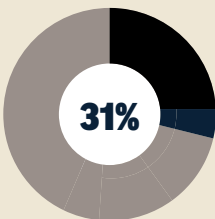## 53% of workers work remotely for at least half of the week.[8]

41%
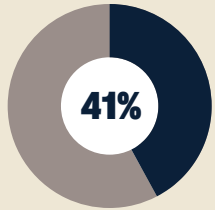
Attendees having side conversations

37%

Seeing strange or inappropriate things on an attendee's video

31%

Phone rings or alerts

OPPORTUNITY #3

Provide an ideal communication experience for everyone

It's important to remember that noise due to an open office floor plan isn't just distracting to workers in the office. It's also distracting to whoever is on the other end of the line. This can mean that remote co-workers, customers, or prospects are hearing laughter, games, barking dogs, and chatter instead of the conversation they're supposed to be having with your employee. Talk about unprofessional.

When tackling open office perils, it's important to look for solutions that protect the people in your office, as well as the people on the other line that they're talking to. Headset solutions need to have Active Noise Cancelling technology specifically designed for open office environments. Additionally, both headsets and desk phones should have smart microphones that block extraneous sounds from entering the call.

In shared meeting spaces, people attending a meeting online shouldn't have to stare at the entire room or hear every noise. Just as you would focus on whoever is speaking during a meeting, your video and audio solutions should allow people who are dialing in to the meeting to focus on the speaker.

Today's leading technology solutions feature HD audio microphones and speakers, seamless content sharing between devices, and HD tracking cameras that can use facial recognition technology to automatically track and frame the speaker. This all helps immerse remote participants so they can engage just as deeply in the conversation as the people who are around the table.

Create a seamless and consistent experience across spaces and platforms

When using technology to reduce distractions, you need to make sure it is both easy to use and consistent across the entire office. The reason is simple: It's in everyone's best interest that employees be able to use meeting technology without requiring IT assistance. Employees don't want to waste the first 10 minutes of a call trying to get the technology to work correctly, and you don't want to keep getting called to troubleshoot every meeting.

But with the average company using three or more different Unified Collaboration and Communication (UCC) platforms,[10] creating a seamless experience that requires little or no IT intervention is a challenge. That's why the endpoint devices you employ should be interoperable and work seamlessly with many different platforms and services. Your goal should be to provide your workers with a simple and familiar experience no matter what "I" or "We" space they happen to be using so that they can be instantly productive.

Not only will this help reduce support tickets, but it will accelerate adoption and help your organization more quickly mitigate the perils of the open office.

10

What does IT need?

Handing out headsets and equipping rooms is one thing. But finding all the solutions you need, configuring them, and making sure they're operating correctly is the true key to success. You must find the right communications partner to successfully help your employees overcome the perils of the open office. Here's what to look for:

☐ **Broad portfolio**
One-stop shop that can support all spaces and workstyles so you can reduce cost and complexity.

☐ **Certified interoperability**
Proven track record of devices that are certified as interoperable by your key service and platform providers.

☐ **Monitoring and reporting for devices**
Real-time access to all devices to monitor performance and identify any red flags.

☐ **Installation and rollout services**
Support and training to optimize your overall investment.

It's up to IT to create an open office that helps people thrive

The distractions of the open office are keeping organizations from fully realizing the lower costs, enhanced collaboration, and greater productivity that open floor plans promise. While certainly not the typical IT concern, progressive CIOs are increasingly focused on delivering a great employee experience. This allows their organization to attract new people and optimize employee engagement, while demonstrating that IT is a proactive, positive force for change in the company.

IT is the most equipped department to give the business the solutions it needs to mitigate the perils of the open office.

THE NEXT STEP
START A SMALL PILOT

Addressing open office chaos is an opportunity for IT to drive positive change for the business and build a progressive image for the department. Your team has the power to:

> Forge connections between disparate teams

> Provide effective communication and collaboration resources

> Positively influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention

You might be surprised at how easily and cost effectively you can demonstrate results, from combining the right audio and video technology with dedicated work spaces, to increasing employee productivity. Here are some tips on how to run a simple and engaging pilot program to foster better communication and collaboration within your business:

01

Partner with a motivated business leader

Find a business leader with a team that frequently holds meetings and brainstorming discussions, and has a good mix of in-office and remote employees.

02

Select one or more dedicated spaces

Choose a variety of room sizes and types—from private offices to collaborative huddle rooms—to test different technologies and experiences.

03

Consider a variety of workstyles

Ensure your test group is representative of the different workstyles that exist throughout your organization, including executives, desk workers, and on-the-go professionals. Their experiences and feedback will be invaluable to understanding the needs of your overall workforce.

04

Collaborate with internal champions

Those who "get it" and are excited to try something new are your champions. They may be members of leadership, department managers, or other employees across the business. Motivate them to drum up excitement about the new experiences, communicate the benefits, and, of course, help mine and relay feedback to IT.

05 Make the pilot fun and visible
Align with your champions to craft a plan for promoting these new spaces and technologies to employees. Put up signs and send updates letting everyone know that IT is leading a fun, new, and innovative project that they can sign up for and test during their regular workday meetings.

06 Bring in an experienced UCC endpoint vendor
Choose a vendor or reseller that can provide the right endpoint solutions for voice, video, headsets, and software for your pilot. These solutions should tightly integrate with the communication and collaboration platforms your business supports, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, WebEx, BlueJeans, GoToMeeting, Google Cloud, Amazon Alexa for Business, Chime, and Connect.

07 Measure and share results internally
Track the success of your pilot by combining qualitative employee feedback, help tickets, solution usage, and more. This will highlight additional considerations for success, and help you sell the program to executives, based on an action plan to roll out the pilot more broadly.

IT teams are so much more than order-takers and problem-fixers. Show off your innovative side! **Poly is here to help.**

Contact a Poly Product Expert
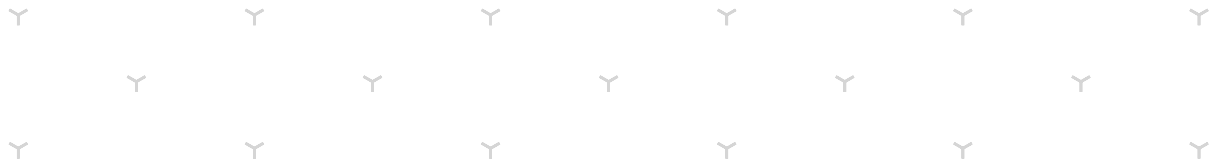
Sources

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[2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9] "Your Employees Are Distracted," April 24, 2019. Future Workplace

[6] "Growth Opportunities for Video Conferencing in Huddle Rooms, Global, Forecast to 2023," August 2019. Frost & Sullivan

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[10] Forrester Opportunity Snapshot: "Streamlined Videoconferencing Strategy Drives Business Results," November 2018. Forrester