

Huddle Rooms and the Changing Nature of Business Meetings

How Demographics and Technology are Impacting Workspaces



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Executive Summary

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The U.S. workplace is undergoing one of its largest transformations in the past 40 years. Although the magnitude of this evolution is difficult to notice when viewed in short time frames, by 2020, the percentage of employees in the workplace from the Baby Boom and Millennial generations will have completely reversed from the composition in 2010, with Millennials increasing to 50% of the U.S. workforce and Boomers decreasing to 25%. Because of their size, these generations already exercise significant influence on the workplace and will undoubtedly impact the nature of work well into the future.

Research has shown that Boomers and Millennials share many work-related values. However, they often disagree on specific preferences and general work styles. Enterprises that find ways to satisfy these generations' similarities, while also bridging their differences, will benefit from improved recruiting and retention of these workers.

In parallel with this demographic shift, continued advances in technology are creating observable changes in the way work is performed. The behavior stemming from worker preferences and tools being developed to enable this behavior point to a convergence of culture and technology in the workplace. It is now difficult, if not impossible, to affect culture in the workplace without also affecting technology and vice versa. This means that enterprises must consider both culture and technology in any decision about either one singularly. A recent phenomenon that illustrates this convergence is the huddle room, which is a small space that facilitates quick, casual, often unplanned meetings. The industry uses the terms "huddle rooms" and "huddle spaces," with the former defined as a space enclosed by walls and the latter as an open space. In this white paper, we use the term "huddle room" to refer to both types of spaces.

□ This paper aims to:

- Summarize the demographic shift from a Boomer to Millennial majority in the workforce, while highlighting multigenerational worker preferences
- Explain how culture and technology have become practically indistinguishable business issues
- Explore the huddle room as one manifestation of this convergence
- Introduce some considerations in creating huddle rooms (or similar workspaces) that address multigenerational worker preferences; this exercise will illustrate how inseparable workplace culture and technology have become.

Part I

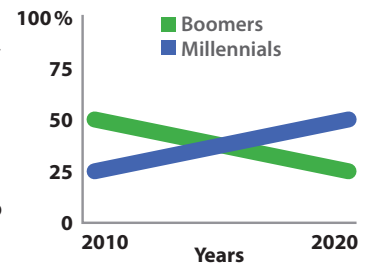
▣ The Dynamics of a Changing Workplace

The U.S. workplace is undergoing one of its largest transformations in the past 40 years. The magnitude of this evolution is difficult to observe when viewed in short time frames, such as one- or three-year windows. By 2020, however, two demographic groups in the workforce will have completely reversed from the composition in 2010 ^[1].

The workforce is now composed primarily of three generations of workers, in which specific year ranges that are used to divide people into generations differ among researchers. The Population Reference Bureau designates the generations as follows ^[2]:

- Baby Boomers: Those born between 1946 and 1964
- Generation X: Those born between 1965 and 1982
- Generation Y (or the Millennials): Those born between 1983 and 2001

The Boomer and Millennial generations each comprise approximately 70 million people, whereas the number of Gen Xers is one-half this number ^[2]. In 2010, the Boomers constituted 50% of the workforce, while the Millennials made up 25% ^[1]. By 2020, Millennials will increase to be 50% of the workforce, while the Boomers will decrease to 25% ^[1].



Given the size of these so-called “bookend” generations (because they straddle Gen X), they will significantly influence the nature of work for years to come ^[3]. Much research has been conducted to glean insights into these generations’ viewpoints, preferences, and values in order to determine how they might impact the future of work.

Boomers and Millennials share many high-level values regarding work. Perhaps surprisingly, the Boomers and Millennials tend to agree on work-related values more frequently than either tends to agree with Gen X’s work values ^[3]. For instance, research has shown that Boomers rate seven non-pay reward types as more important than pay, and Millennials rate six rewards higher. Of these, the two generations share four rewards in common, including high-quality colleagues, flexible work arrangements, recognition for a job well done, and opportunities for new work experiences and challenges ^[3]. Gen X, by contrast, tends to prioritize pay over these alternative rewards ^[3].

While there is broad agreement on work-related values, there are also notable differences in style. In large surveys, Millennials prioritize “engaging workplaces” while ranking “quality of meeting rooms” last ^[1]. In contrast, Boomers stated a reversed preference ^[1]. Millennials tended to prefer unplanned, casual, informal meetings, whereas Boomers preferred planned, formal, structured meetings ^[1]. And while Millennials stated a preference for workspaces that were open and conveyed a “residential” feel, Boomers showed no preference for residential-like or office-less workspaces ^[1]. The Millennials’ priorities reflect their preference for collaboration, interaction, and a synthesis of life/work ^[1].

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Given their relatively smaller numbers, Gen Xers will play an outsized role in creating workplaces that appeal to these generations' shared values, as well as bridge the gap between their differences, as they rise to assume management responsibility from retiring Boomers. Gen Xers would be wise to heed these two generations' preferences, because recruiting and retaining top talent is a strategic and competitive business issue ^[4].

Technology, in parallel with this demographic shift, is an equally important part of the evolving workplace because it directly influences and enables organizational culture. The convergence of workplace technology and culture in areas such as collaboration software has been broadly observable in recent years. If the recent past is any indication, then technology will be important to, and inseparable from, the goal of creating desirable workplace cultures and bridging the gap between generational styles.

Part II

□ The Emergence of Huddle Rooms



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One recent trend that reflects Millennials' work style preferences is the huddle room. Huddle rooms are spaces not necessarily designated by physical boundaries (i.e., four walls), but more so by a logical concentration of the resources necessary to conduct quick, informal, often unplanned meetings. (The industry uses the terms "huddle rooms" and "huddle spaces," with the former defined as a space enclosed by walls and the latter as an open space. In this white paper, we use the term "huddle room" to refer to both types of spaces.) Huddle rooms

usually provide technologies to support long-distance communication and collaboration.

Several behavioral trends encourage the use of huddle rooms. These trends span the multigenerational workforce, but they are especially facilitative of Millennials' work preferences and styles. These behavioral trends include the following:

- **Mobility** – Some parts of the workforce have always been highly mobile (i.e., sales forces), but enterprises increasingly recognize all workers' desire for flexible work arrangements. This flexibility includes worker mobility, whether at many locations in a single office or off-site. In response, some companies no longer assign permanent workspaces to employees, even those who are primarily local and on-site [5]. Instead, employees work in the location where it makes the most sense to complete a project or a task – whether for several hours, a day, or months at a time. Then they relocate based on project or team requirements. The concepts of flexible work locations and worker mobility are beginning to be applied to meeting spaces.
- **Spontaneous, casual interactions** – Millennials prioritize teamwork, and collaboration is the core activity of any team. The need to collaborate with one or several teammates often arises spontaneously, and huddle rooms are ideal for quick, unplanned meetings. In addition, Millennials prefer casual collaboration to formal meetings. Huddle rooms' small, open spaces are adapted to quick, unplanned, more informal interactions.

- **Geographically dispersed workforces** – Today, even tiny start-up companies have geographically dispersed employees. This creates the need for workspaces where individuals and small groups of workers can interact with co-workers, managers, customers, and business partners located around the globe. Huddle rooms are usually outfitted with technologies to enable long-distance communication and collaboration.

In addition to these behavioral trends, several technological trends support the use of huddle rooms. These technological trends include the following:

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- **Wireless technology, pervasive networking, and ad hoc networks** – Businesses have entered the age of pervasive networking and are moving into the age of ad hoc networks (also known as mobile ad hoc networks, or MANETs) ^[6]. In most U.S. urban and suburban locations, at least one public wireless network is accessible. In the future, MANETs will enable users to quickly spin up and shut down networks on demand, without the support of predetermined infrastructure ^[6]. Businesses and consumers continue to spend heavily on wireless technologies and subscription services. The International Telecommunications Union estimated that, by mid-2014, 6.9 billion wireless subscription services were in use worldwide, compared to 4 billion at the end of 2008 and 1.41 billion in 2003 ^[7]. Plunkett Research has estimated that 79 per 100 people in the global population now have a wireless telecommunications subscription (compared to 16.5 landlines per 100 people in the global population) ^[7]. Wireless services support worker mobility, always-on network connectivity, and easy intercommunication of devices required for the types of meetings that are ideal for huddle rooms.
- **Mobile technologies** – The rise of pervasive networking has supported an explosion in mobile technologies, ranging from personal computers and tablets to smartphones and newer categories such as wearables. Based on aggregate data from its customers, Citrix reported in May 2014 that device enrollment in enterprise mobility programs increased 135% over the previous year, and the number of devices that businesses are managing across all platforms (Android, iOS, Windows Mobile) more than doubled [8]. As with wireless services, mobile devices enable workers to take advantage of flexible work locations and arrangements, such as huddle rooms.
- **Social and collaboration software** – This technology enables teams to communicate, collaborate, and share information on a single platform. The paperless office has been predicted for decades ^[9]; social and collaboration software, in conjunction with cloud computing, brings businesses to the brink of finally realizing it. Such technologies facilitate huddle rooms because each worker can access shared resources and information on their screens, rather than relying on physical presence to share hard copies or awkward methods to collaborate on different copies of the same digital file. This software supports remote collaboration, as well as rapid set-up and breakdown of meetings in physical spaces.

In these ways, huddle rooms illustrate one way that workplace technology and culture have converged.

Part III

□ Considerations in Establishing Huddle Rooms

Two primary considerations in establishing huddle rooms, or similar workspaces, are the design of the space and the technology deployed. Environment is a distinguishing feature of the huddle room, especially in contrast to traditional corporate meeting locations. Traditional conference rooms tend to provide much more space (e.g., seating) and more types of resources (e.g., technologies, refreshments, storage, etc.) compared to huddle rooms^[5]. Huddle rooms do not make traditional corporate conference rooms obsolete for some purposes, but they do make more sense for smaller, informal meetings that can be quickly convened and dismissed^[5].

The design of huddle rooms, and their differentiation from traditional meeting spaces, is influenced by three broad factors:

- **Size** – Huddle rooms are usually designed to comfortably support the physical presence of up to half a dozen meeting participants^[5].
- **Location** – Huddle rooms may or may not be closed spaces isolated by a physical boundary. Huddle rooms can be found adjacent to lobbies, lounges, and open workspaces. The casual style and usually non-confidential topics of huddle room meetings do not require physical separation from other office spaces.
- **Look and Feel** – Huddle rooms are usually furnished with a table, several chairs, and perhaps simple shelving. Some advocate designing the space to reinforce a team's identity or the company's brand through the use of colors, slogans, and other themes^[10]. Others advocate making the spaces easy to modify for short-term, project-based uses by numerous teams^[10]. Agreement exists that huddle rooms should be designed to not detract from their main purpose.

Much professional literature has been written on the design and environmental factors important to huddle rooms, but often, less attention has been given to the optimal technologies that should be deployed. Technological considerations shift the discussion from form to function. The first question to ask in considering huddle room technologies is, *What types of activities will be performed in the space?* These activities determine the technologies needed to maximize productivity.

Huddle rooms are excellent spaces in which to conduct the following activities:

- **Conceptualizing / brainstorming** – Generating and developing new concepts, ideas, designs, etc.
- **Information sharing** – Quickly updating team members on project status and new developments
- **Document sharing** – Planning, developing, editing, and reviewing documents
- **Dialogue vs. monologue** – Facilitating dialogue among teammates equally (in line with a more casual, informal style) rather than monologue from a clear meeting leader

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To facilitate and enable these activities, following are suggested technologies to consider:

- **Whiteboard** – The traditional whiteboard remains central to meetings. Few technologies surpass the whiteboard’s simplicity, ease of use, and effectiveness for generating and capturing ideas from a group of people in real time.
- **Telephony** – The ability to speak with remote teammates, whether via traditional telephone or voice over Internet protocol (VoIP), is fundamental to productive meeting spaces.
- **Audio** – Audio accessories such as loud speakers, whether portable or fixed, improve the ability of meeting participants to communicate, especially in spaces adjacent to passing foot traffic.
- **Video** – The ability to view remote meeting participants on a screen, as well as to play video or to share images, enhances and improves communication. Flat panel displays (FPDs) are often the first technology businesses consider for this use. However, newer technologies such as interactive projectors (discussed below) provide absolute advantages relative to FPDs in terms of cost, sustainability, and features.



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- **Interactive Projectors** – This more recent technology offers robust visual and functional capabilities for maximizing productivity. Interactive projectors can be used in a variety of ways, from serving as the video display during videoconferencing to projecting images and video. Interactive projectors bridge a significant gap in a work style preference between Boomers and Millennials. Boomers love whiteboards for their simplicity and ease of use, while Millennials are comfortable using digital alternatives. Interactive projectors allow users to capture written notes on a whiteboard in real time and then to easily save, transmit, store, and share those notes in digital formats. In essence, interactive projectors transform physical whiteboards into digital technologies. Interactive projectors are versatile tools that should be seriously considered for meeting spaces.

To maximize the value of huddle room technologies, organizations should plan for complementary capabilities, which include the following:

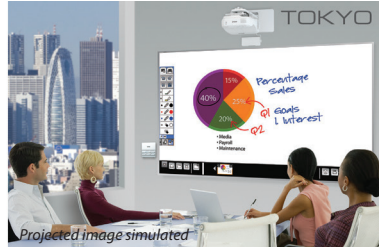
- **Network integration** – The ability to integrate huddle room technologies into the enterprise’s broader information and communications infrastructure is critical to maximizing productivity and investments in existing technologies.
- **Universal connection methods** – Workers should be able to connect (or “tether”) multiple types of devices to huddle room technologies. For instance, laptops may use high-definition multimedia interface (HDMI) technology for transferring audio and video to projectors. In contrast, smartphones may use wireless or mobile high-definition link (MHL) for the same task.
- **Security** – Huddle room technologies typically integrate into the enterprise network and interface directly with multiple end-user devices. For this reason, proper security

measures should be implemented. Consultation with the information security team on how to incorporate appropriate identity and access management, authentication, and device-specific “hardening” measures should be conducted.

By considering both environmental design and technological toolsets, organizations can ensure they optimize both the form and function of huddle rooms.

Part IV

▣ The Convergence of Culture and Technology in the Workplace



The demographic, behavioral, environmental, and technological trends covered here all point to the convergence of workplace culture and technology. The huddle room is one observable manifestation of this trend. As illustrated generally and in the specific case of huddle rooms, these trends impact several aspects of business, including the nature of interactions, collaboration, and productivity.

This convergence provides a path forward for enterprises. Businesses that embrace these changes and adapt their practices accordingly are likely to remain competitive by tapping the knowledge, skills, and talents of the evolving multigenerational workforce. Creating workspaces that facilitate and enable evolving worker preferences and styles is a fundamental strategy for attracting and retaining talent. Creating these spaces begins by recognizing that any decision affecting culture also affects technology and vice versa. Therefore, technology must always be considered, even in seemingly cultural workplace initiatives such as huddle rooms.



Businesses that embrace the changes spurred by shifting workplace demographics and adapt accordingly are likely to remain competitive by attracting the best talent of an evolving multigenerational workforce.



One newer technology to consider in huddle rooms, huddle spaces, or any meeting space is the Epson BrightLink® Pro. The BrightLink® Pro transforms almost any flat surface into an interactive whiteboard for real-time collaboration. It can improve the effectiveness of business meetings and bridge multigenerational work styles by:

- Providing a whiteboard for Boomers with the interactivity Millennials prefer
- Serving as a versatile video display to improve sharing and long-distance communication
- Enabling users to view and contribute content locally or remotely from most types of devices
- Simplifying the ability to capture, save, share, and store meeting notes
- Improving productivity by supporting different worker preferences for common meeting activities

BrightLink Pro is ideal for huddle rooms because it is compact and works without the need for a computer or software. Launching a session and shutdown require the press of a button.

To learn more about huddle room technologies generally, and interactive projectors specifically, visit Epson online at Epson.com/blpro. This site provides in-depth resources to use in planning huddle rooms and other contemporary workspaces.

About Epson

Seiko Epson Corporation is a global imaging and innovation leader that is dedicated to exceeding the vision of customers worldwide through its compact, energy-saving, high-precision technologies, with a product lineup ranging from printers and 3LCD projectors for business and the home, to electronic and crystal devices. Led by the Japan-based Seiko Epson Corporation, the Epson Group comprises over 70,000 employees in 108 companies around the world, and is proud of its ongoing contributions to the global environment and the communities in which it operates.

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3840 Kilroy Airport Way, Long Beach, CA 90806