

# Collaborative Spaces

A White Paper by the Haworth Knowledge and Research Team

While working in teams may not be a new concept, in recent years there has been a steady shift away from independent, heads-down work toward more collaborative, team-based activities (Brand, 2008). Even in businesses that have traditionally focused on the individual, the value of collaboration — whether for brainstorming or socializing — is finding growing support. But how best to support collaboration in a particular environment? The key is in understanding how the organization's culture informs its specific collaboration needs.

## THE ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is the sum of the values, leadership styles, procedures, goals, and many other characteristics that make an organization unique. It is a subtle, yet powerful, undercurrent that guides worker behavior at an unconscious level.

**The Competing Values™ Framework** distills a wide range of attributes into four primary culture types:

**Collaborate** Cultures tend to be open, friendly, and sharing. They value teamwork, participation, and consensus.

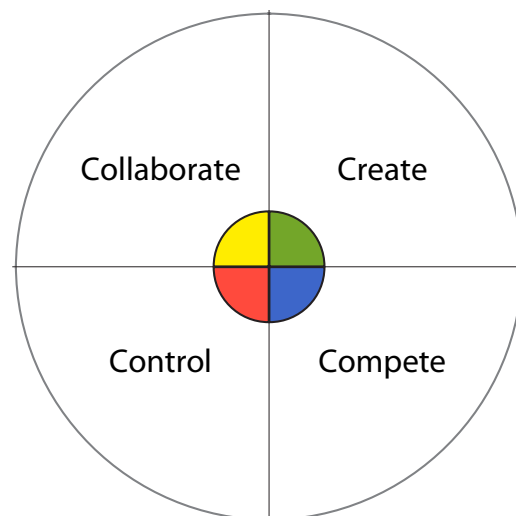
**Create** Cultures are dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative. These organizations or groups embrace innovation, risk-taking, and being on the leading edge.

**Control** Cultures are more structured and formal. Success means efficiency, dependable delivery, standardization, smooth scheduling, risk management, and low cost.

**Compete** Cultures are results-driven, competitive, and goal oriented, unified by an emphasis on winning and reputation.

It's important to note that culture may not be uniform throughout an organization. The marketing department, for example, may represent a collaborate culture, while accounting is likely to exhibit a more hierarchical control culture.

Each of these groups will collaborate in some way to further their objectives. However, the level of collaboration and their reasons for meeting may vary considerably. In order to support and enhance their performance, it's important to understand what brings them together.



**WHY WE MEET**

Social scientists have identified a variety of reasons for meeting (McGrath, 1984; Roman & Nunamaker, 2001), but generally speaking, they can be distilled into four categories (Mittleman, 2009):

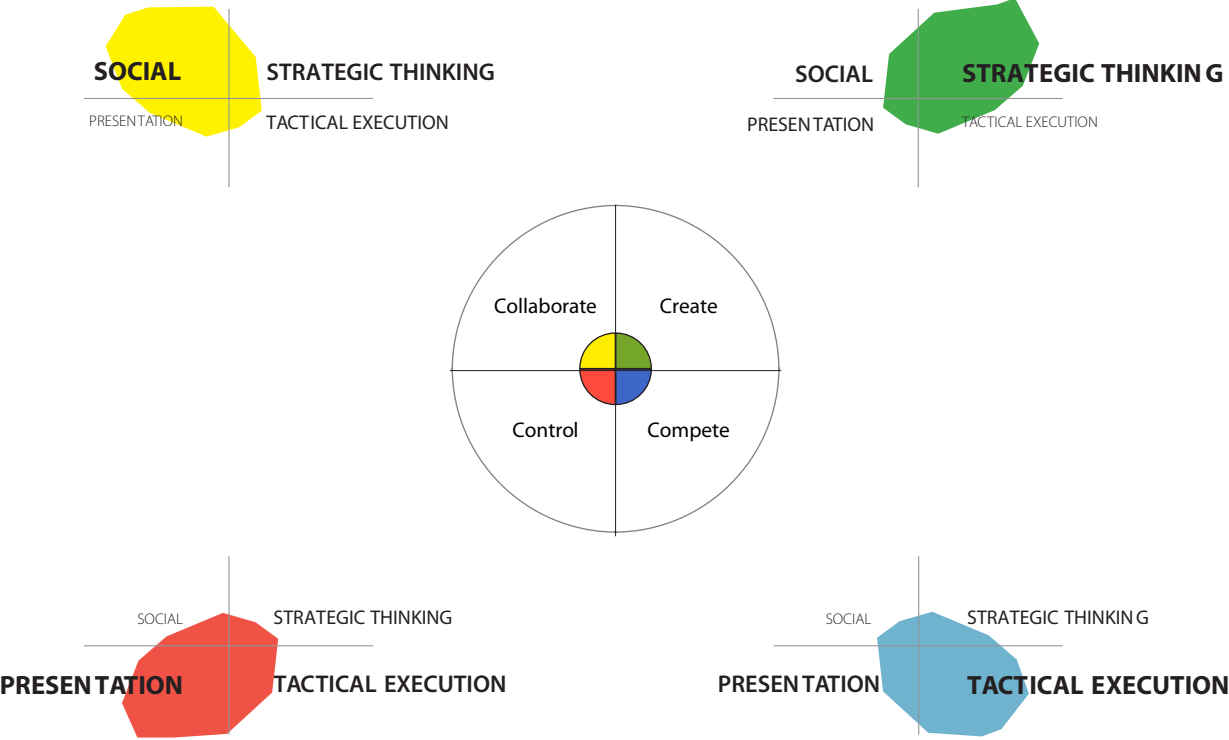
**Socializing** and interacting informally, such as a reception or team-building event.

**Tactical execution** of work tasks with clearly defined objectives.

**Strategic** thinking and problem solving through brainstorming or negotiation — while the product may not be clearly defined, the goal or aspirations often are.

**Presentations**, including public speeches, staff meetings, or other events in which one person imparts information to others.

All four organizational cultures need spaces that support all four meeting types. But the number, size, and arrangement of spaces required by a particular group will depend on the tasks they have to accomplish.



## MATCHING COLLABORATION NEEDS TO CULTURES

While workers are likely to interact in all four of the ways mentioned above, one collaboration style is likely to stand out as preferred — best supporting their primary responsibilities and choices. Often, this can be inferred from the organization or group's culture type.

At the risk of overgeneralizing, some broad strokes can be drawn to help understand how organizational culture and collaboration needs intersect.

## COLLABORATE CULTURE

**Primary Meeting Preferences:** Social.  
**Secondary Preferences (in descending order):** Strategic Thinking, Tactical Execution, Presentations.

These companies emphasize the value of teamwork and often operate like extended families. Team spaces are most often used for informal meetings or get-togethers. They should be free-form and allow for a mix of activities. Additional spaces must also support workers as they meet for specific tasks, strategic sessions, and all-hands meetings.

## Create Culture

**Primary Meeting Preferences:** Strategic Thinking.  
**Secondary Preferences (in descending order):** Social, Presentations, Tactical Execution.

Companies with a create culture take risks, focus on big ideas, and tend to be agile in their actions. Consider high-tech, advertising, or product development firms. Key spaces should be designed for creative problem solving, such as brainstorming or discussion groups, but remember that the results of these sessions must be presented and acted upon, which can require different types of spaces.

## Control Culture

**Primary Meeting Preferences:** Presentations.  
**Secondary Preferences (in descending order):** Tactical Execution, Strategic Thinking, Social.

In a hierarchical control culture, such as a government agency or major manufacturer with multiple levels of management, information may be most often delivered in a scheduled meeting or formal presentation. Still, teams might need to determine execution plans and are likely to have informal, social connections.

## Compete Culture

**Primary Meeting Preferences:** Tactical Execution.  
**Secondary Preferences (in descending order):** Presentations, Strategic Thinking, Social.

Compete spaces must support workers as they drive to complete independent tasks, such as sales or customer-service calls or transaction-based activities. In addition, people will need areas that support them in strategic thinking, presenting ideas, connecting informally, and getting things done.

the long run. Planning around team needs also aligns the facility with the strategic goals of an organization by helping workers innovate, reducing cycle time, improving service, or furthering other objectives.

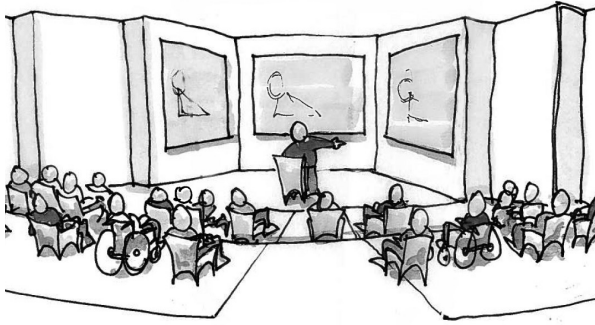
While every environment will have its own requirements, there are some commonalities. All high-performance spaces should provide appropriate ergonomic and technological tools. All should offer views of nature and daylight. And the overall layout of the floorplate requires that attention be paid to appropriate adjacencies — in fact, it's particularly important that spaces for tactical execution be located near individually assigned workspaces.

In addition, there is a wealth of workplace knowledge that can guide design decisions. While these barely scratch the surface, they provide a bit of insight into specific ways to enhance the performance of a particular collaborative space.

## CREATING COLLABORATIVE SPACES THAT WORK

When designing spaces for collaboration, the activities performed, the length of time spent in the space, and the number of participants will vary according to the collaboration style. The environment should be aligned to best meet the specific needs of the workers and groups involved.

Certainly, facility planning is more complicated when based on the needs of specific team styles. But accommodating teams that occur naturally in an organization can cut down on costly physical changes over



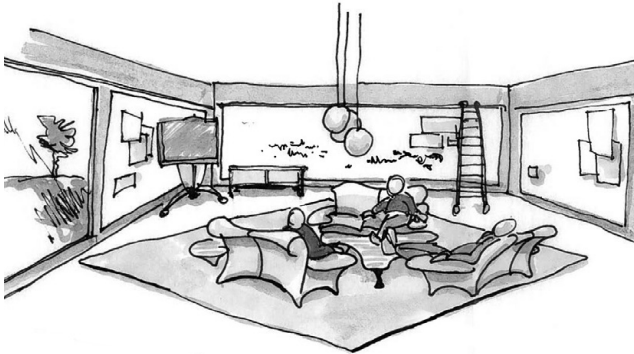
### Presentation Spaces

- In public spaces, aesthetics are especially important for communicating a consistent brand to people outside the organization. In private spaces, finishes should also reinforce the brand, but don't have to be as high-end.
- Lightweight, comfortable, readily moveable chairs — perhaps on wheels — can maximize a relatively small footprint and be arranged in multiple configurations.
- A laptop-sized surface for each attendee may be sufficient, as they are unlikely to require additional reference materials.
- Walls can be used for projection, writing, or pinning up information in areas visible to everyone.
- Acoustic privacy should be ensured; for complete separation, doors should close.



### Tactical Execution Spaces

- Team rooms should offer the flexibility to be arranged to suit the project at hand.
- Seating should allow all participants to see one another.
- Casters on tables and chairs can let members break into small groups.
- Small tables can be used for breakouts or grouped into a common surface.
- Ample writing and display areas, as well as surfaces for laying things out, support the need for visual cues and reference materials.
- Tables should be power and internet enabled.
- Acoustic shielding is key.



### Strategic Thinking Spaces

- Seating should allow all participants to see one another, and people should have control over how far apart they sit.
- The space should allow for frequent movement and sit-to-stand action.
- Seating should be comfortable to encourage relaxing and staying, as well as allow space to stand or change position easily.
- No barriers should be placed between people, unless they need horizontal surfaces for writing or references.
- Good visual and acoustic shielding from outside will limit distractions within and outside the space.

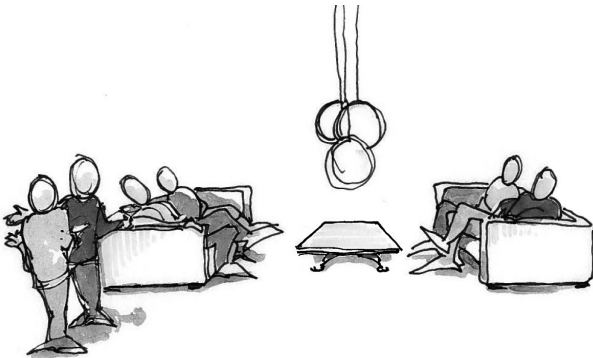
### Culture-specific suggestions:

- A collaborate culture may require greater flexibility and access to technology, and a whimsical, social aesthetic may inspire ingenuity.
- A create culture may have lower technology requirements; more whimsical, nontraditional furniture and accessories can be incorporated.
- In a control culture, whimsical additions are likely to be unappreciated or even confusing — workers may prefer a fairly static, unchangeable space.
- Members of a compete culture want specialized tools that speed their processes, and aren't as likely to benefit from a flexible space.

### Social Spaces

- Because these include a wide range of spaces, from reception areas and lounges to coffee bars and multipurpose rooms, each environment must be considered individually.
- Impromptu spaces to sit and connect throughout the building encourage short conversations and idea sharing.
- Where possible, soft seating and an element of residential design can be incorporated.
- Flexibility in multipurpose spaces requires furniture that allows them to be arranged to suit a variety of activities.

While these are just a few broad strokes to get things started, the objective is clear — when designed with an understanding of organizational culture and collaboration styles, group spaces can improve the way people work together.



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