OPEN PLAN VERSUS CLOSED OFFICE SPACE
Advantages and Disadvantages…

Office designers have been trying to adapt offices for decades to better suit the nature of work, as well as meet company demands for cost-cutting and integrating new technology. The most popular office design has evolved from rows of offices with doors, to an open-plan designed to facilitate collaboration and now to more mixed-used spaces.

In this article, Diane Sumner discusses the pros & cons of an open plan office concept. With a designer’s expert help, find out how to create an open office that is friendly for all types. Visualise your new space now.

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An open-plan office space layout has pros and cons both for a firm’s personnel and its bottom line. In an open-plan work environment, there are no distinct rooms or fully enclosed spaces. Instead workstations are positioned together – sometimes separated by short screens or panels – within one exposed floor plan. The openness may improve communication and collaboration among your workers, but it also may reduce concentration and productivity.

Staff Advantages
A lack of walls or other physical barriers in open-plan office spaces makes it easier for employees to interact with each other on a regular basis. The constant intermingling not only generates a sense of camaraderie among personnel, it also enhances the flow of information and teamwork. Colleagues can turn to each other for advice or assistance without having to knock on doors or make an appointment. Interactions in an open-plan office space generally are more frequent and informal than in closed environments where everyone needs a separate office.

Business Advantages
The increased collaboration resulting from an open-plan work space can lead to business innovation and advancement. At the same time, an open-plan layout can benefit the business economically by reducing costs tied to construction, utilities and office equipment. Fewer walls mean less time and materials required to create the office space. A single work space also reduces heating / cooling and electricity expenses thanks to improved flow of air and light. Businesses can save on equipment investment as well, since communal spaces promote shared use of resources, such as printers / copiers. An open-plan space also provides greater flexibility to accommodate evolving personnel needs.

Staff Disadvantages
On the downside, the high level of everyday interaction that takes place in an undivided work space may lead to noise and distractions that make it difficult for employees to focus on their work and conduct business. Lack of privacy is another potential problem with open-plan office space, where computer screens are easily visible by those walking by and telephone conversations are likely to be overheard. Open plan layouts also facilitate the spread of disease, so if a colleague comes to work with a cold, it can affect the health of the entire staff.

Business Disadvantages
Most of the factors that are disadvantages for personnel also are detrimental to the business as a whole. The distractions caused by frequent interactions among staff members and high levels of noise can result in decreased productivity. Business output also may be reduced by the higher rate of absenteeism associated with open-plan environments in which disease spreads more easily. In addition, the lack of privacy inherent in open-plan designs may give rise to legal or ethical issues stemming from compromised confidentiality in regard to clients or colleagues.
The type of office you work in can be a reflection of your status within a company. The quest for the prestigious “Corner Office” was traditionally a way of letting the world know that you’d been successful. But times have since changed…

The Case for Open Plan
- Open plan offices can provide employees with the sense of being part of a community. For a while many bosses were choosing to base their desk alongside their staff, but this trend seems to have died down.
- One of the main reasons companies choose the open plan option is cost: more employees can be housed in less space making it more economical. Smaller workstations are required as technology is taking up less space.
- Another reason is to improve communication between staff. Rather than sending emails, it is much easier to ask questions of your colleagues face to face. The aim is to promote a more collaborative and innovative workplace.

The Case for the Closed Office
- Privacy is the key benefit of having your own closed office. If you are working on a sensitive project, this privacy may be critical as it prevents people walking behind you and seeing what you’re up to.
- You also have more space to spread your work around, which can be advantageous if you have many files. Also you won’t have colleagues sitting nearby, complaining about your mess.
- A closed office offers fewer distractions, especially from noise. In many organisations, work stops of birthdays or other celebrations, which can be frustrating if you’re trying to focus on a task.

Office of the Future
- The trend for workplace design within companies is more toward open plan rather than closed offices. But an emerging trend, especially among larger companies, is for hot desking – where employees don’t have their own dedicated desk but work from anywhere in an office and with more flexible working styles.
- But whatever the configuration, if an organisation is going to alter the workspace, it is important to incorporate a change-management plan so that the benefits of such a move are explained properly to the employees who will be affected.

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- DESIGNING YOUR WORKPLACE
  31 KEY QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD ASK…
  … A detailed discussion paper listing 31 key questions to consider when planning your office environment.

We welcome your call or e-mail. To arrange a meeting to discuss your office layout or to organise our Spatial Assessment Package please feel free to contact:

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