

GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL INTERACTION

Recommendations from AMA WorkWare^{CONNECT}



OUR EVIDENCE

This booklet highlights the key findings and conclusions emerging from a research project exploring interaction in the workplace.

AMA Alexi Marmot Associates has drawn rich insights into the links between space, technology, culture and interaction; formulated clear guidelines for the design and management of space for knowledge transmission; and enhanced our existing WorkWare toolkit with new techniques. WorkWare^{CONNECT} is designed to help organisations capitalise on the benefits of creating opportunities for interaction and enhanced collaboration in the workplace.

Empirical data from surveys of eight offices is underpinned by a review of management, psychological and design literature related to interaction and collaboration alongside rich debate amongst colleagues, clients and industry experts.

Our thanks are due to our five commercial partners who provided us with access to their workplaces and people to test and develop our theories and tools.

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WHY IS INTERACTION IMPORTANT?

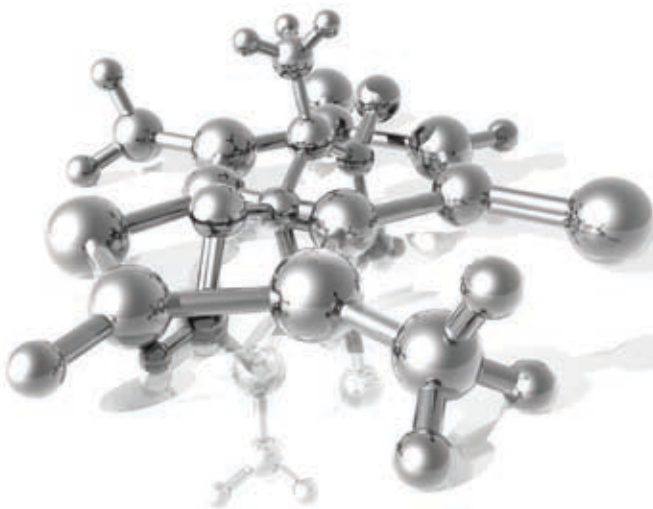
This guide has been developed to show how you can create better space for interaction within your business because...

The age of the 'knowledge' economy is drawing to an end. Thanks to the internet, information is ubiquitous thus increasing the knowledge base of all.

Economists believe we are entering the 'innovation' economy where creative ideas generate new products and services which are essential for competitive advantage.

Face-to-face and virtual interaction are critical in stimulating creative ideas which in turn lead to innovation.

Property can help or hinder interaction. The workplace must go beyond supporting the processing of information to facilitating the creation and implementation of new ideas.



Charles Darwin

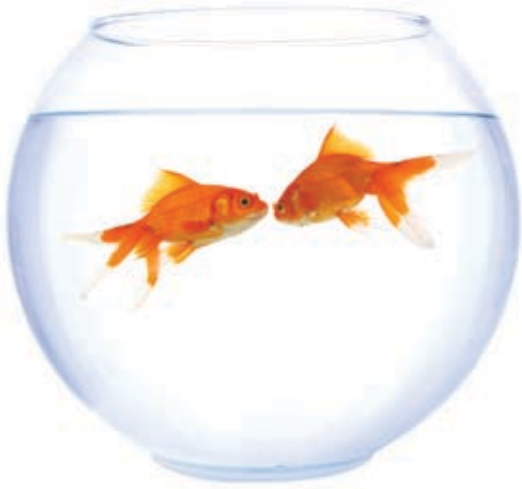
In the long history of humankind... those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.

'FACE-TO-FACE' STILL MATTERS IN A 'VIRTUAL' WORLD...

Virtual interaction offers huge opportunities not least in the race to reduce carbon emissions in order to protect the global environment. But there are key differences between face-to-face and virtual interactions: it is claimed that 55% of communication is non-verbal, 38% is the intonation, and only 7% relates to the actual content.

An often cited drawback of even the most sophisticated virtual media is that they do not convey subtle forms of communication so well, such as gesticulation, reading reactions and other forms of non-verbal communication. The latter alone is a complex amalgamation of body language, facial expression, vocal pitch, intonation and volume.

Remote working has increased the necessity to maintain effective face-to-face interaction. Ironically, as staff spend more time away from the office then it is essential that they have regular face-to-face interaction to help motivation, team building, mentoring and promote a sense of belonging and loyalty to the organisation and their colleagues.



Ryunosuke Satoro

Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are one ocean.



WE FOUND ANSWERS TO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

We find questions that come up again and again when we review spaces for interaction:



How much space do we need for interaction?

We found that the higher the ratio of meeting seats to desks in the office, the more the meetings we observed taking place. This sounds obvious but is quite often overlooked, people need space to interact. In contrast we also found that meeting rooms are only used 37% of the time. There is a fine balance between too much and too little meeting space. But we believe we can now plan this using our new 'meeting room calculator'.

Is the quality of space important?

We observed that the utilisation (uptake) of meeting space increases the better the quality of the meeting space. We can now measure and predict the quality of the meeting space and uptake.

What are the key qualities of a good meeting space?

Key factors are location, proximity, privacy (visual and acoustic) and legitimacy *i.e.* having a good reason to be in the space.

Andrew Carnegie

Teamwork...is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

Is it essential to have good technology (AV equipment) in the meeting spaces?

We found that only one-fifth of interactions in meeting rooms used any form of technology. This may be due to simple lack of technology or lack of trust in the available technology. Spaces will be needed with good reliable technology (and their availability made known) but some spaces should be provided for interactions that do not require technology.

Are meeting room booking systems a help or a hindrance?

A common complaint is that people can not get a meeting space even though we know the utilisation of meeting rooms is low. We have found discrepancies of 20% between meeting rooms booked and actually occupied. A well designed and managed booking system (not necessarily electronic) is essential for ensuring that the availability of meeting spaces is known and they are well utilised.

Are successful interactions just about the design and quality of the space?

The right space matters but organisational factors are also important. The planning and management of meeting is essential to success. Good meeting etiquette includes inviting the right people, starting on and keeping to time, issuing an agenda, encouraging participation by all and following up on actions.



Henry Ford

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

HOW MUCH INTERACTION SPACE DO YOU NEED?

You need more if you want your staff to interact more. But how do you know how much space for interaction you actually need? Too few and people will not get together or meet in spaces that distract others. On the other hand, too many meeting spaces can waste both space and money. Meeting rooms are not the only answer, the workplace should offer a range of spaces for interaction and staff should be trained in when and how to use them.

Space is an expensive resource but rooms are often underused. If you register more than 60% of meeting space utilisation, you are doing well. And it is not just about how frequently the rooms are used as many are also used well under their maximum capacity. Deciding the right balance in terms of number and size of spaces for your organisation should be based on clear information:

- frequency of interaction**
- range of size of interaction groups**
- current spatial and cultural barriers**

At AMA we can use our methods, including our meeting room calculator, to get the information on which to base the best solutions to your needs.

AMA meeting room calculator tells you how many rooms you need based on behavioural data.

MATCH THE SETTINGS TO THE OCCASION

There are many different reasons for interaction. They can be 'impromptu' or 'planned', 'face to face' or 'virtual' with implications for the quality of provision of different spaces and tools in the workplace. Is the purpose of the interaction about:

Sharing information?

Normally this involves gatherings in comfortable settings fitted with good technology whether the occasion is face-to-face or virtual.

Making decisions?

Best is an environment where decision-makers can examine options and make decisions without the possibility of distractions from colleagues and phones.

Generate ideas and solutions?

Consider a brainstorming room, either off-site or in a novel location, where the stimulus of something different will enhance the flow of ideas.

AMA work with your organisation to develop the best settings and tools for different interactions in your workplace.



MATCH THE SETTINGS TO THE OCCASION

Or is the occasion about...

Resolving problems?

Usually these involve personal issues, for example those raised during staff reviews. An optimum location is away from the usual team environment so that the conversation can not be overheard or observed by colleagues, such as a discreet café.

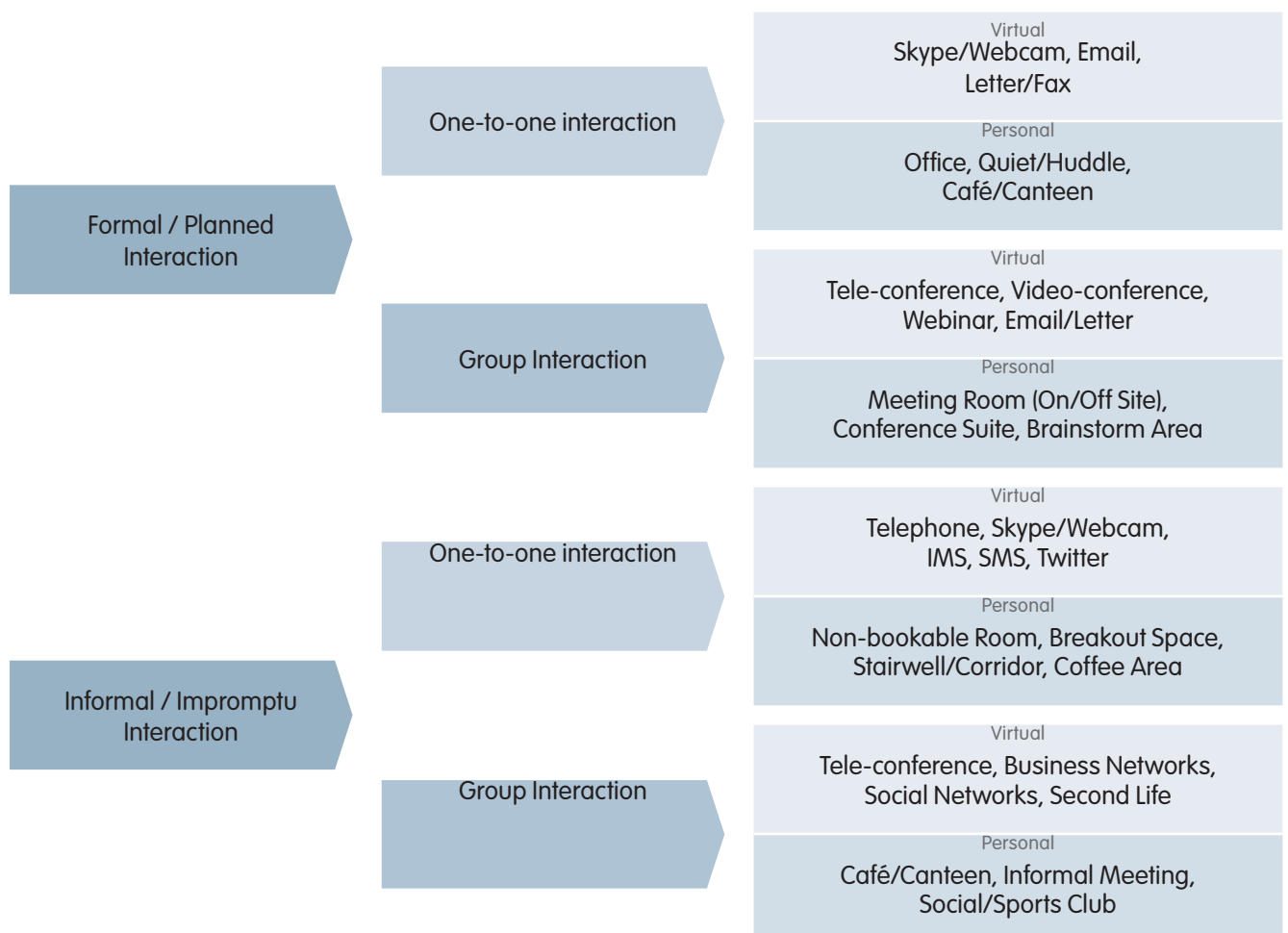
Socialising?

You will need to provide spaces for people to socialise, e.g. breakout areas, restaurant, the gym or outdoor seating.

Whatever the reason for meeting, all too often the immediate response over getting together is 'let's book a meeting room!'. This is the WRONG starting point. Consider first WHY you need to get together and then decide the right type of meeting medium, whether a meeting space, in your office or the local coffee shop!



AMA work with your people to fit the building to their interaction needs.





WHERE CAN I MEET, HOW FAR IS IT...?

Location, proximity, accessibility and legitimacy all matter. Some buildings are better organised than others to support interaction. Research shows that the frequency of communication between people decreases with distance and significantly after 30 metres.

What signals are provided to encourage serendipitous meetings? Use the opportunities provided by stairwells, lobbies, copy/print areas, in particular for impromptu interactions.

Is signage for meeting spaces adequate and clearly distinguishable? Have you provided meeting spaces on each floor? Are there opportunities for teams to meet informally in their dedicated floor area? Building design and layout help provide the appropriate solutions to your organisation's interaction needs. However, ensuring that people know the availability of meeting spaces (bookable and non-bookable) is also important.



Productive interaction requires both spatial and organisational opportunities, and at AMA we want to help you maximise these opportunities

CAN I SPEAK IN CONFIDENCE...?

If this is what is wanted the meeting environment must be perceived to provide privacy. Space should provide perceived aural and visual privacy.

Lack of sound proofing between meeting rooms is a common source of frustration. The right partition systems and sound absorption on walls, ceilings, padded screens and chairs are all helpful remedies.

The essential visual privacy must not affect the quality of light or create a sense of isolation. Planting, movable partitions, location or a busy café are some of the ways to give people a sense of privacy. The crucial thing is to ensure it is addressed.



AMA can help you tackle privacy issues effectively.

HOW FUNCTIONAL IS THE MEETING ROOM?

Room capacity, furniture layout and style, technology, environmental conditions and services all affect the success of a meeting. Flexibility and adaptability are imperative as different furniture layouts can change the tone of the meeting.

Understand the technology you need and barriers to technology use. Ensure issues such as technology integration, AV and connectivity provision, fitting of power and data sockets at desk level, are addressed.

If control of environmental aspects (e.g. light and air) for users' comfort is not possible, it could be the reason why a particular room is never used.

But get these parameters right and you know that your meeting spaces will be popular as well as enhancing the success of interaction.



At AMA we can help you choose the best tools and settings for different interactions in your workplace.

ROOM BOOKING SYSTEMS

Meeting spaces need support from an efficient booking system and/or booking policy. People complain that they cannot get a meeting space even when utilisation is low. Our own data show bookings nearly always exceed actual usage by around 20%.

Any booking system, electronic, via a dedicated staff member or paper, must be managed. We have seen exceptional levels of utilisation attained thanks to an excellent booking system combined with systematic policing (including a charge for non-use of booked space). You too can have an excellent booking system.

But not all booking systems are the same. The future is in systems which better match organisations and their reasons for meeting to the most suitable spaces. Imagine a booking system recommending you don't book a room at all!



AMA can help you select the right booking system and develop protocols on the management of your booking system.



MANAGING MEETINGS

Let's be clear, a great meeting environment with wonderful views, the latest technology and excellent catering is important and can greatly enhance collaboration. But it cannot ensure a successful meeting. We have all left meetings feeling frustrated, with meetings failing to start on time, actions not being followed up.

Good meeting etiquette is essential to ensure the success of formal interactions. Many organisations underestimate the need for training on how to conduct meetings leaving staff disenchanted with the purpose of meeting. Issues such as invitations, layout, agenda and minutes, chairing and catering provision, need to be resolved in advance.

Good meeting etiquette also involves the adoption of a policy at organisational level to identify which means of communication is best for the different types of information.



AMA can help you assess whether your organisation needs training for meeting management and, if so, provide it.

AMA Alexi Marmot Associates Ltd
Linton House, 39 Highgate Road
London NW5 1RS, UK
www.aleximarmot.com
T +44 (0)20 7284 5888
E mail@aleximarmot.com

AMA TOOLS

WorkWare^{CONNECT} tools were developed as part of our two-year research project on interaction in the workplace. They are designed to help our client provide optimum workplace conditions for interaction and innovation through design and management.

WorkWare^{CONNECT} is an extension of WorkWare, our briefing toolkit which was established almost 20 years ago. We are proud to say that, built on a database of over 60,000 people in 250 buildings, it has been used in 17 countries around the world.

AMA's expertise developed through WorkWare combined with our new tools means that we can assess with great confidence your interaction needs.

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