

Project Overview

A mid-sized sales organization sought to bring its 50 employees together, solving a communication problem through the process of co-creating a new space within their office.

The Fuzzy Situation

Often, businesses find their employees working in small, exclusionary groups. This business found that these employee silos were having a negative impact on office culture—team members were coming together just long enough to complete cross-departmental tasks, building up literal and figurative walls between each other in the process.

Silos like this inhibit the sharing of knowledge between groups and ultimately can stifle creativity or innovation. Within this organization, for example, the field installers rarely interact with the designers, blocking a valuable feedback loop with the potential to lead to innovative breakthroughs.

Framed Challenge

There was a pressing question for this small business: how might space be created within the office to enable individuals from various groups to have serendipitous, meaningful encounters with one another?

A Co-Created Solution

A DORIS design researcher developed and facilitated a four-step process to tackle this challenge.

First, employees gathered to generate ideas for a space that would help them better collaborate. Next, these ideas were rapidly prototyped within their office space to get a better look at what worked and what didn't.

When it became clear which ideas were working best, those ideas moved forward. In the final step, DORIS enabled the small business to create a planning matrix, allowing them to implement the best of their ideas.

In this small business, a few of the ideas tested included centralized mailboxes, clusters of lounge seating, standing-height counters for impromptu conversations, shared music, and sporadic food and drinks to encourage socializing throughout the day.

4 STEP PROCESS

1. Define Problem

2. Find Ideas

3. Prototype Ideas

4. Select Solution



Some of these ideas—like the mailboxes—were very successful. Others, like the lounge seating clusters, didn't quite have the impact the employees had hoped for.

Even though they weren't eventually implemented, the less successful ideas still held valuable lessons. The lounge seating, for example, made employees fear they would be viewed by others as lazy or skipping out on work. This helped the team understand some of the various pressures and judgments that would ultimately help them create a more fluid space. Along with this lesson, the prototyping helped them avoid purchasing furniture that would go unused.



Reflective Evaluation

Ultimately, individuals within this small business acquired a high-level understanding of the purpose behind their newly created space.

When a field installer was asked to reflect on the new space, he noted how much he appreciated having a space to share with coworkers without being intimidated by his colleagues "home court advantage." To him, this was invaluable in confidently producing meaningful interactions with his team.

Executives were also very satisfied with this space for a few reasons. First of all, the new space is actually used for the purpose it was created.

Through the simple act of including everyone in the strategic planning of the space gave it greater meaning, and gave employees a sense of ownership. Executives were also pleased by the unintended consequences of the process: seeing employees learn creative problem-solving techniques that could be applied to day-to-day work.



"With the move of our mailboxes to the new space we are now able to see designers or sales people putting proposals or information packets together. This is something we never saw before. We are now a bit more aware of what others are working on. We even sometimes toss out ideas or ask questions about specific projects."

- Cindy Hornak