

New Performance for the Private Office

The movement toward more open, collaborative spaces is undeniable. Yet the need for private offices persists, especially in professions – such as legal, financial and human resources – that must promote high degrees of confidentiality and confidence. But what people need from private offices is changing.



Steelcase embarked on an extensive research project spanning the legal, financial and professional services sectors. We interviewed and observed dozens of people who plan, use and prioritize private offices as an essential part of their modern workplace strategy. We wanted to understand how private offices are being used today – what users want and need to perform at their best. And we wanted to help organizations uncover ways to make the most of their investments in space and talent by creating high performance private offices for the new ways people are working.

THREE SHIFTS AFFECTING WORK – AND PRIVATE OFFICES

Experts point to three major shifts in the past 10 years that have influenced

how people work, and these shifts are reshaping the private office:

Economics. As the cost of real estate rises, especially in dense urban areas, workplace planners must do more with less. Private offices are becoming smaller and more standardized in size. Organizations are also standardizing furniture options to simplify planning.

Culture. As organizations increasingly recognize the importance of work culture, they want their desired culture expressed in the overall office design.

Generations. Different generations at work embrace different workstyles and priorities. For example, younger workers are less interested in expressing status in traditional ways and more interested in work-life balance.

**MAXIMIZING SPACE.
CREATING EXPERIENCE.**

In many ways, private offices as traditionally conceived are incongruent with today's dynamic workforce. It's time to reimagine the private office as a high-performance workspace that serves talented people and the organization's real estate strategy.

WHAT PRIVATE OFFICES CAN BE

Optimized for value.

As real estate prices escalate, private offices can make more of every square foot.

Adaptable now and later.

As the workforce grows more mobile and dynamic, private offices can flex to keep serving people and organizations.

**Designed for wellbeing
and personalization.**

Amid stress and overload, private offices can foster comfort and self-expression.



**PRIVATE OFFICE
DESIGN INSIGHTS**

Through our research we identified a set of insights supported by design principles to guide private office planning that addresses the needs of workplace decision makers and end users.

For decision makers

Optimize real estate by standardizing private office dimensions and furnishings, increasing use of shared offices, and leveraging both the horizontal and vertical planes.

Increase adaptability by creating offices with modular elements that are easy to repurpose and redeploy as needs change.

For end users

Create privacy levels using spatial orientation, barriers and materials that provide visual and acoustical privacy for different types of work.

Support a range of work modes within private offices by defining zones that support activities ranging from deep individual focus to small group collaboration that happens both remotely and in person.

Foster wellbeing so people can perform at their best by supporting alternative postures, managing background noise, making room for the display of expressive artifacts, and bringing in elements of nature such as natural light and materials.



LESSONS FROM THE LEGAL SECTOR

Our researchers observed people at work in private offices across a variety of fields, including the legal sector where privacy and confidentiality are critical. Here's what we learned from this private office-intensive profession:

- Law firms face some of the same pressures to reduce real estate as those in other industries – and while the private office remains primary, it's becoming smaller and more standardized.
- Shared offices are increasingly common, especially for legal professionals who work from home part of the week.
- Privacy and status still matter in the legal sector. But status can be expressed in more ways than office size. Increasingly, partners are willing to compromise on square footage if they can have privacy and priority amenities like a window.
- Though technology has advanced, the legal profession is still heavily reliant on paper. Private office users need storage for files and banker boxes and easy access to the documents they contain.
- In addition to needing offices for deep focus work, legal professionals often need privacy for collaboration with two or more others.

See the Private Office Ideabook for further insights and design principles – plus applications based on our research.

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