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## Good Workplace Acoustics Help Achieve Design Goals

**A**fter years of evangelizing, acoustics are now cool! Workplace trends are mandating that successful designs include acoustical considerations.

Today's workplace is likely to have more open space, lower barriers, more shared spaces for collaboration, fewer assigned seats and all of the distracting challenges that come along with them.

When the density of employees increases, speech distractions increase correspondingly. Workplace blogs are full of proclamations that these trends are ruining productivity. In some cases, this is no doubt true. Every organization has a different way of working. If space is not designed to allow people to do the specific work that they are responsible for, then the workplace will not be a success.

But when space is designed to work for the organization, it can be a beautiful, productive workplace.

One of the common elements of successful open workplaces is attention to acoustics. A few key considerations need to be examined to create a high-performing acoustical environment.

People talk. When they talk, they are little megaphones of sound energy. That sound travels from the source and bounces off of every surface around them. By adding acoustically absorptive materials, those reflections are reduced and sound does not have as much influence on surrounding co-workers.

Having a group of heavy phone users located under a ceiling that is built with painted sheetrock, exposed concrete or metal is a formula for distraction. Similarly, walls of glass provide a powerful reflector for noise. Sound energy has nowhere to go but into the ears of the surrounding people. Adding a good acous-

tical ceiling, acoustical baffles or specialty acoustical treatments will reduce the reflected sound and allow a much more comfortable environment.

Most commercial office buildings have a very low level of ambient sound. HVAC systems are quieter than ever and this leaves the space feeling creepy quiet. When a space is this quiet, every conversation can be overheard at great distances. When multiple people are talking, they start to subconsciously compete with each other and the sound level ratchets up.

Very quickly, a space can become a chicken coop of noise that prevents productive work and effective concentration.

Well-designed sound masking systems gently raise the ambient sound level in the workplace to cover much of the surrounding noise. The result is that conversations that could be understood at distances of 50 to 60 feet are now unintelligible until within 15 feet.

This reduction in the radius of distraction can immediately reduce the number and degree of disruptions. The result is an increase in productivity and workplace satisfaction.

Sound masking also provides a powerful tool for designers. Quiet space may be isolated from collaborative space without barriers. Heads-down work can be performed in an environment that is not boxed in and walled off from the rest of the organization.

Workplace acoustics, applied well, can mitigate noise distractions, improve productivity and increase workplace satisfaction. The time has come for good acoustics! \\\

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