

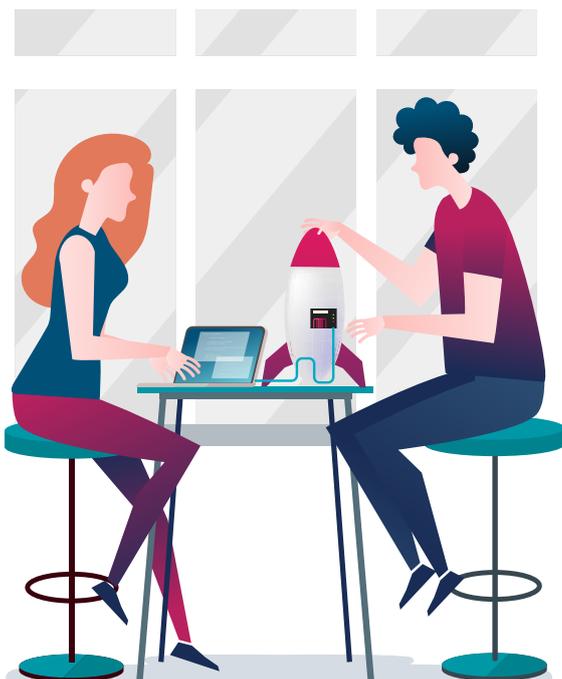
# HARNESS THE POWER OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

THE WORKPLACE SECRET TO  
ENGAGED AND HAPPIER EMPLOYEES



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## INTRODUCTION



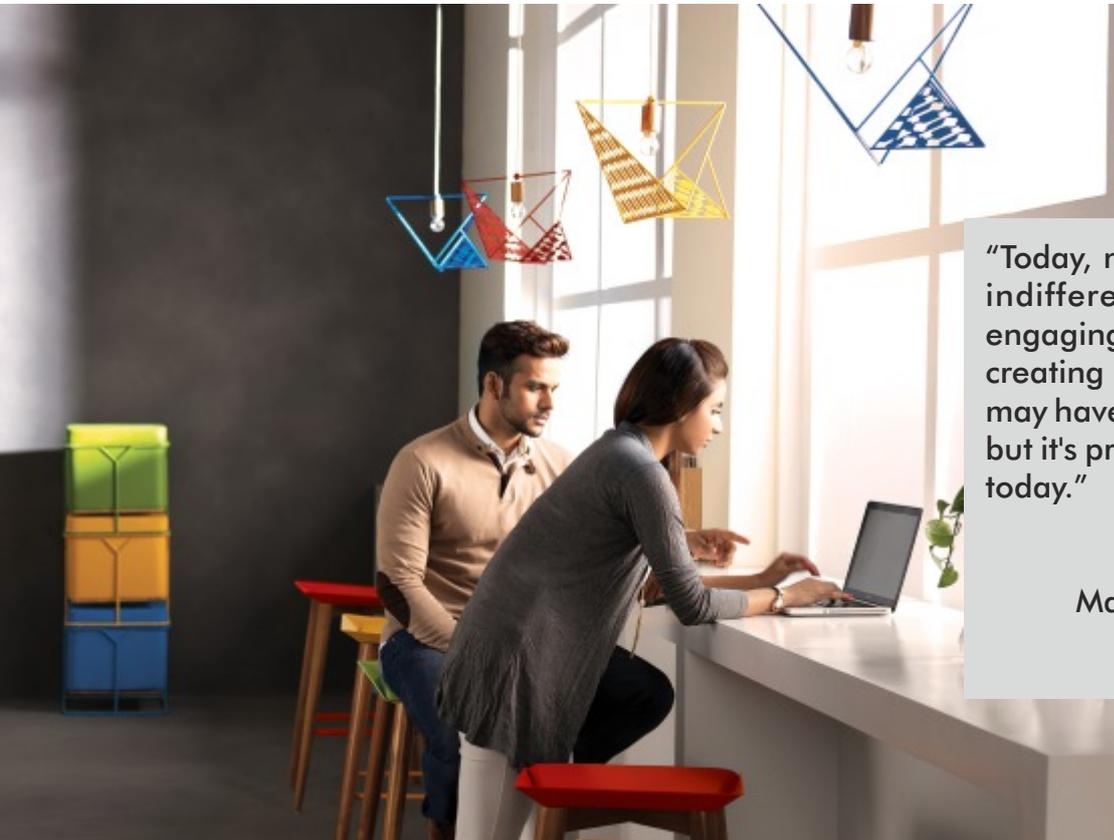
Close to 65 % of Indian offices, including Government organizations, currently utilize open workspace layouts. Open-plan offices layouts have become extremely popular since they first started emerging some years ago. They were seen as catalysts for better communications, collaboration, problem-solving, and idea-generation among employees. That said, contrary views also exist about the utility of open-plan offices.

Recent studies have shown that this type of work environment might also have the potential to create a degree of disruption and distraction in the workplace. Organizational psychologist, Matthew Davis has concluded that open-plan offices may have a detrimental impact on the attention spans of employees, lower productivity and creative thinking, and possibly hurt overall employee satisfaction<sup>(1)</sup>.

Clearly, the open office approach has some drawbacks, and these need to be addressed before weighing the benefits. But organizations had turned to open-plan offices to promote collaboration and communication. So, is there a way to harness the benefits of the open-plan offices, without falling prey to the traps of the open-plan office?

In this White Paper, we will look at the special challenges of modern offices, and how social offices offer an attractive way to address those challenges, drive up productivity, and make employees happy.

## The special challenges of MODERN WORKPLACES and the impact on employees



"Today, no leader can afford to be indifferent to the challenge of engaging employees in the work of creating the future. Engagement may have been optional in the past, but it's pretty much the whole game today."

- Gary Hamel  
Management Guru & Author

The business environment today is exceedingly challenging. Competition is fierce, customer expectations are sky-high, and technology-driven disruptions are always threatening! How to surmount these challenges? Empowered and engaged employees are the solution. It's these employees who will bring innovation, creativity, productivity, and high-quality delivery. And hence it is imperative to provide the right working environment that enables the users to be productive and innovative, in the quest to achieve the organizational goals.

Individuals are all different and they all have their own preferences of work environments they feel comfortable in. Each employee has a different tolerance for factors like noise and interruptions and the impact can become significantly more difficult to predict when you

factor in the complex combination of factors at play in the open-plan office.

A University of Tennessee at Knoxville study of over 38000 employees found conclusively that interruptions were a drag on employee productivity but it also reported that the more senior the employee, the worse was the detrimental impact.<sup>(2)</sup>

It seems clear that a one-size-fits-all work environment will fall short of the specific needs of most of the employees. This is an issue when you consider that the vast majority of the office spaces today follow a standard templated format of workstations and discussion/conference rooms with no allowance for the specific needs or preferences of the employees expected to function optimally in them.

Organizations enthusiastically embraced open-plan offices with more open spaces and fewer areas of individual work in an attempt to provide a more open work dynamic while also keeping real estate requirements under check. But, data seems to suggest that the move may bring its own challenges as well.

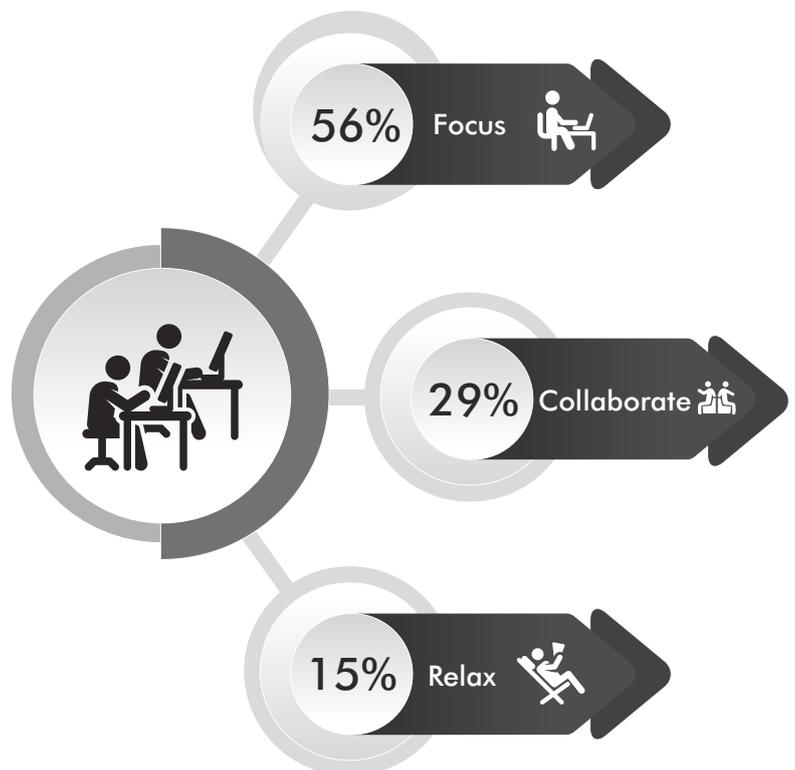


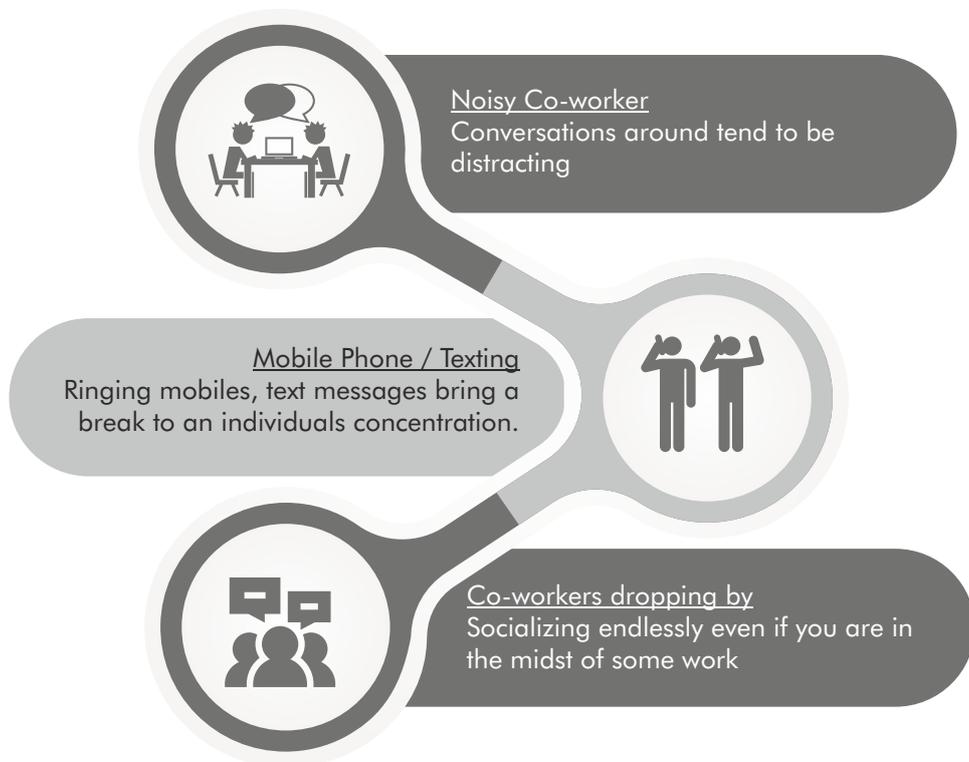
We surveyed over a 100 organizations and their employees and some clear insights emerged. Our research now suggests that employees definitely need more privacy, not just to do work that requires concentration but also to centre themselves to deal with the intense pressures of the modern workplace.

Our study found that 61% of Indian employees said they needed a place to concentrate without distractions, and 56% said their office lacked such spaces.

About 29% felt the need to have collaborative space and 15% preferred to have a zone that would help them relax and rejuvenate in the office space.

Which space do i need in my workspace?





Top three disturbing elements in the workspace

Also, distractions at work leave people with very less time to work without getting interrupted. 11% got only about 15 minutes at a stretch without any interruption, 24% got up to 30 minutes, and 18% got only up to an hour of uninterrupted work. It seems clear that the workplace must align with the expectations of the employees. The way today's modern workers function is very different, and the workplace must provide them the enabling environment they need to be engaged. Allowing space for the individual aspirations of these employees will help them be highly productive.

## THE SOCIAL OFFICE

- how balancing individuality and collaboration can address these workplace challenges



Respect for the individual's workspace coupled with flexibility is a key combination. It is amply clear, that different work demands different kinds of spaces. Based on the job demands, space for focus and collaboration, comfort, and physical as well as the mental well-being of the individual must be kept in mind while designing office spaces.

Another key consideration is that the Office is no longer just a place of work. The vast majority of employees spend the greater portion of their waking hours at work. This is also how work relationships become social relationships and bonds of friendships develop. Given this dynamic, the office space must factor in the desire of the employees to relax, unwind, and bond over casual conversations.

Office design must enable the users to collaborate as a team or move to the refuge of a cozy space when the work demands individual focus.



Flexible settings that allow people to shift easily from a team zone to an individual zone are the need of the day, enabling them to immerse themselves in their work, wherever they want, whenever they want.

In other words, the physical workplace that offers a diverse set of choices for individual work needs is a potential answer. Every office hence



should have an appropriate balance of spaces designed in line with the cognitive requirements of the users. A good balance can be arrived at based on the activity zones: Primary, Interactive, and Rejuvenation. These zones will help the users to immerse, interact, and unwind.

**IMMERSE** -to have a one on one with self.

"The best teamwork comes from men who are working independently toward one goal in unison." --James Cash Penney, Founder of J C Penney

These could be places that let you hide away when you have serious work to do and don't have time for interruptions. They politely send the message, "Don't bother me," while giving the user the physical and headspace needed to be productive. This is the zone to choose when the work demands controlled attention, a need to contemplate, to create and to focus intensely for tasks such as writing or thinking deeply.

**INTERACT** -to let ideas flow seamlessly.

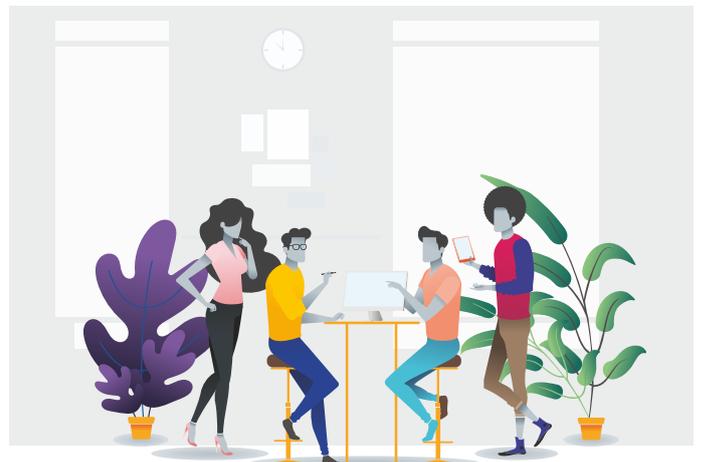
These are the spaces for meaningful conversations planned team meetings, ad-hoc brainstorming sessions, and serendipitous encounters with other teams. These spaces

create opportunities for a free flow of ideas. These encounters lay the foundation for invaluable connections, both inside and outside the organization. Any space where people can meet and work effectively together can be a great zone for interaction and collaboration. These spaces can be as informal as a big table in the break room or as formal as a walled conference room.

**UNWIND** -take it easy sometimes.

This is the space to choose when it's time-out for our brains and bodies. Many workplace studies suggest that if employees can relax and engage in some downtime activity that they want to, this leads to better outcomes in terms of improved concentration, productivity, and motivation.

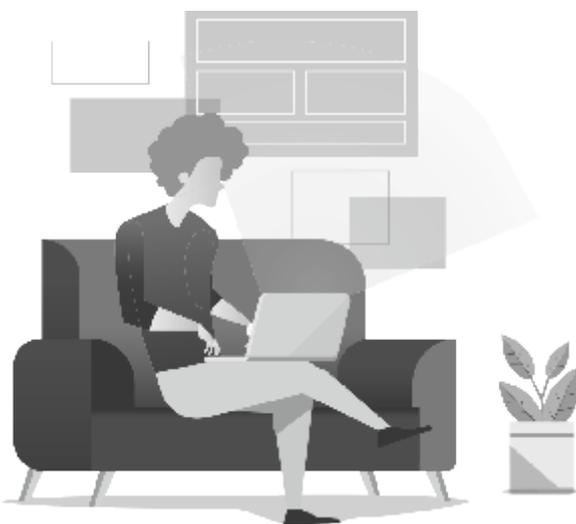
An office that allows this flexibility and provides the zones to Immerse, Interact, and Unwind is, what we call, a **SOCIAL OFFICE**. "A social office allows organizations to build spaces that enable personal focused work (Immerse), encourage face to face interaction (Interact), thereby leveraging the power of informal networks, and allows relaxation at the workplace (Unwind)."



The beauty of the Social Office lies in its variety. The Social Office offers a good balance of ME and WE spaces -different types of work environments that employees can use as they please, to facilitate their work. The Social Office not only encourages collaboration and brainstorming but also counterbalances that by facilitating private meeting areas and quiet spaces designed for privacy and a distinct lack of distraction, to suit the employees looking for a space to do intense, focused work.

## Exploring the benefits of the Social Office

### THE FEEL OF HOME @ WORK



The lines between the home and the office have blurred. The ubiquitous availability of mobile technology coupled with the 'Always online' mentality of employees has extended the workday for employees. This has made it essential to create home-like environments at the workplace. Environments that are warm, comfortable, and yet functional enough to enable employees to think on their feet as well as put up their feet when they need to. Home-like environments – soft, bright and colorful - also help teams gel together and foster the kind of rapport that makes thinking and creating together an energizing experience.



#### ALL THIS WITH A DASH OF TECHNOLOGY .....

Technology has brought about a significant change in the work culture. Employees no longer prefer to work from just their desks. Today they are connected 24\*7. A study we conducted found that on an average, people work on at least three devices with them during the day. Close to 40% of the users surveyed, expressed that there was a significant need to have workspaces that allowed them to connect to their devices from anywhere in the office. Seamless connectivity for devices was cited as one of the top requirements for any given workspace.

As mobile devices multiply, the need for charging them increases. Providing the employees with comfortably placed power outlets that allow them to charge their devices has become a pre-requisite. Spaces, therefore, need to be designed considering how people need to work with technology, even in the rejuvenation zones. Power can be embedded in the furniture or stationed conveniently nearby to make sure people can choose to work where they deem fit.

#### AND KEEPING HEALTH IN MIND .....

Our Ergonomics Team studied the effects of static postures amongst office goers in India.

The study revealed that many office workers suffer from multiple pain problems. 76% complained of musculoskeletal pain in the last six months. There were other worrying stats the research revealed— 64% of the employees surveyed, spent over nine hours of their time sitting – either at their own desks, in meetings or in conferences. The long work hours, static postures for long stretches of time and the common workplace design that doesn't require people to walk around much, are all a threat to employee health.

This supports the need to have office designs that allow movement, interaction, sitting postures that help break the monotony, and the provision of spaces to relax during short breaks while at work. The Social Office addresses all these needs.

The Social Office adds to the the typical concept of an open office. It includes elements, such as poufs, stools, enclosed seating, sofas, armchairs, and other elements that encourage changing of postures. This helps the users stay energized, refreshed, and engaged. This creates a sense of comfort and belonging within the workplace while maintaining the functionality. Work continues seamlessly –all while ensuring good health for the employees.

## SOCIAL OFFICES -at work in the real world

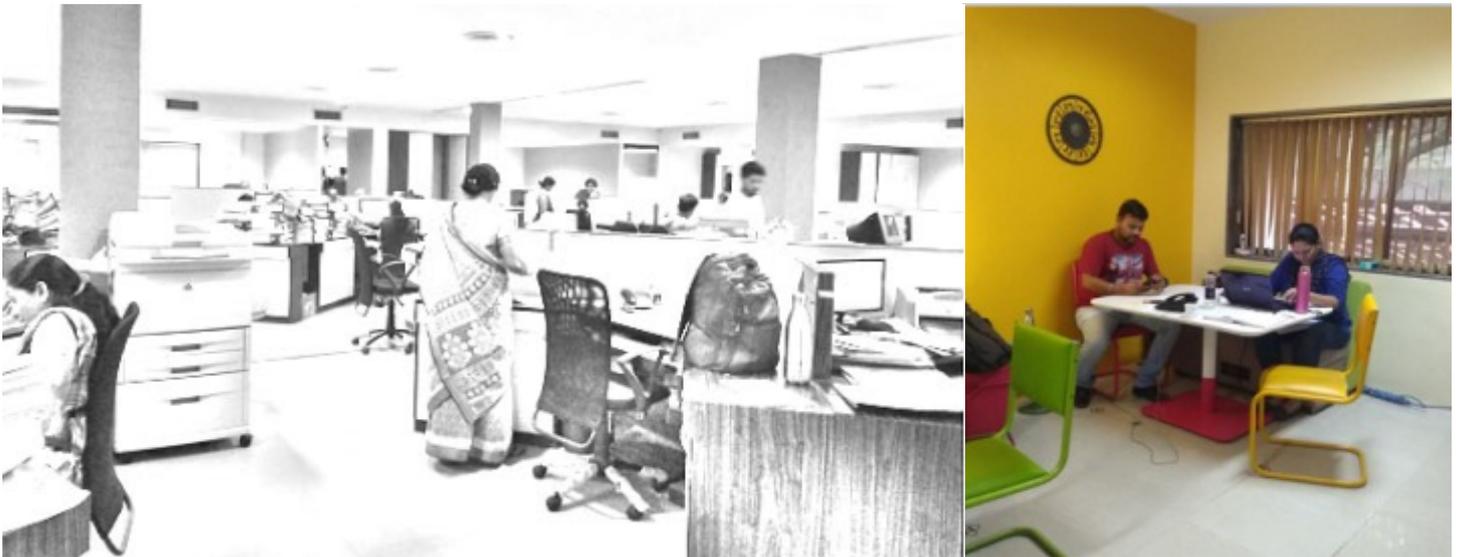
An Indian corporate headquartered at Mumbai

This Indian Corporate listed amongst the 100 Best Employers of India by Hewitt Associates and Business Today decided to revamp its dated office as it could no longer support the way people work today. The leadership wanted to bring down the walls that restricted communication and foster a more open and collaborative culture.

About the Corporate:

In the Business of manufacturing of micronutrients for plants and animals

Number of Employees: Close to 1000 across India



### The Old

The erstwhile office of this Indian Corporate had a cluster of locally made workstations across the width of the office with cabins for senior management in the corners. Teams working on a common project had one large conference room that used to be occupied for most of the time, leaving the team with no choice but to discuss at their desks – creating a disturbance for the rest.



## The New

From creating corners for individuals to focus on to providing areas where the teams could huddle up for their projects, the Social Office provided spaces that every user wanted. In addition, the office now provides for individual desks, library, cafeteria cum training room, etc. The space helps everyone work, communicate and collaborate as their work demands. Employees feel emotionally connected to the organization and the workspace is now more like a home away from home.

The shift from an open work environment with just primary work zones to one with a good balance of spaces was welcomed by the teams. Omkar, a Project Lead, has this to say, "These desks are better in terms of colors and aesthetics as compared to the old workstations. It enhances our creativity as well when we think on a project as a team. It's like a co-working space which we like more compared to the cubicles. They are comfortable as well"

Mr. Biplob, Facilities Head, said, "Ever since the Social Office has been brought in our office, it has become an ADDA for the employees. They have gone ahead and placed a fish tank on the table tops as they would do at their home. Project teams huddle around through the day and are enjoying working together. It has the warmth & comfort of home and the functionality one needs in an office. It has brought them closer and is helping in better project completion"

### An MNC headquartered in Bangalore

Employing close to 25000 employees across multiple locations, this German multinational engineering and electronics giant sought to foster a culture of innovation within the organization to stay relevant in the market.

About the Corporate: In the business of mobility solutions, consumer goods, industrial technology, and energy and building technology.



### The Old

Designed like the office of a traditional manufacturing organization, the earlier office was set up with individual desks and cabins, with the hierarchy clearly visible. The grey-white office had little scope to inspire innovation and creativity amongst its employees.



## The New

The re-design brought in a complete change to the character of the workspace. From a mundane grey space with high visual privacy to an open space full of color and vigor, the new office was a complete transformation.

The new office is now an eco-system of spaces – individual desks, innovation room, collab zones, rejuvenation zones, etc. Innovation rooms housing social office elements like the vibrant Tetris and Orbb and writeable walls have replaced the old, stuffy meeting rooms.

Ankita R, Team Lead said, “Our old office was only a sea of workstations. It limited our interactions and discussions. With the new set up, we enjoy having our discussions in our

Innovation room. It’s a colorful and bright space. This room is funky and at the same time functional enough to take care of our work requirements. And sometimes over coffee and casual conversations here, we bumped into some great solutions.”

The new workspace enabled the users to enjoy the freedom of choice with respect to the space they wanted to work from. They found cozy corners in Immerse to deep dive into their work as well as the Assert and Topo desks for productive discussions over coffee.

Mr. Prasanna of the German MNC said, “This setting gives a different look to our office as compared to our old office. The erstwhile cubicles made it difficult for us to communicate. The new office provides us with options to sit basis the work we have. While we are working on a project, we sit together and it enables us to interact better. And we have the choice to move to a corner when the work demands peace and focus.”



## CONCLUSION

The empowered and engaged employees of today find workspaces full of cabins and cubicles as boring. They prefer to function out of multiple environments including cafeterias, work lounges, break-out spaces, home-like settings, and so on, rather than spending all their time at a single workstation. In short, they prefer a space that facilitates easy collaboration, rejuvenation, while still allowing much-needed isolation.



In all, a balanced mix of 'I' and 'WE' Spaces, coupled with the right access to technology, and designed with the health of the employees in view, must come together to give people the freedom to choose their workspace and enable them to work their best. A Social Office allows workers the choice and freedom of choosing where to work from and how to work.

Looking beyond the concept of an 'open office', a Social Office allows a perfect balance of collaboration and privacy, beyond the limitations of traditional office setups. It enables organizations to harness the power of formal

and informal networks by creating casual spaces that make employees comfortable and feel at home. It builds a culture of choice and synergizes the aspirations of multiple generations.

The Social Office creates the sort of informal and pleasing environment that makes people want to be at work and to meet and interact. This not only results in more ideas but better ideas and a strong sense of belonging. It creates a sense of control, and therefore, satisfaction with one's work situation.

## ABOUT GODREJ INTERIO



Godrej Interio (GI) is India's leading furniture brand in both the home and institutional segments. GI aims to transform spaces to create brighter homes and offices with aesthetic, functional, and technology-driven products that retain a special focus on health and ergonomics. GI's product portfolio covers:

- i. B2B – Office Modular Furniture, Turnkey Projects, Healthcare Furniture, Lab Furniture, AV and Vending Solutions
- ii. B2C – Home Furniture & Storage, Mattress, and Kitchens

GI is widely known for its comprehensive sustainability certifications for furniture products. Currently present in over 650 cities with 250 exclusive showrooms and 800 dealers, GI is one of the largest divisions of Godrej and Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd., part of the Godrej Group, one of India's largest engineering and customer product groups.

More information is at  
<https://www.godrejinterio.com/Godrejinterio/index.aspx>



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