Ubiq

CONFERENCE ROOM DESIGN

A GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

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INTRODUCTION

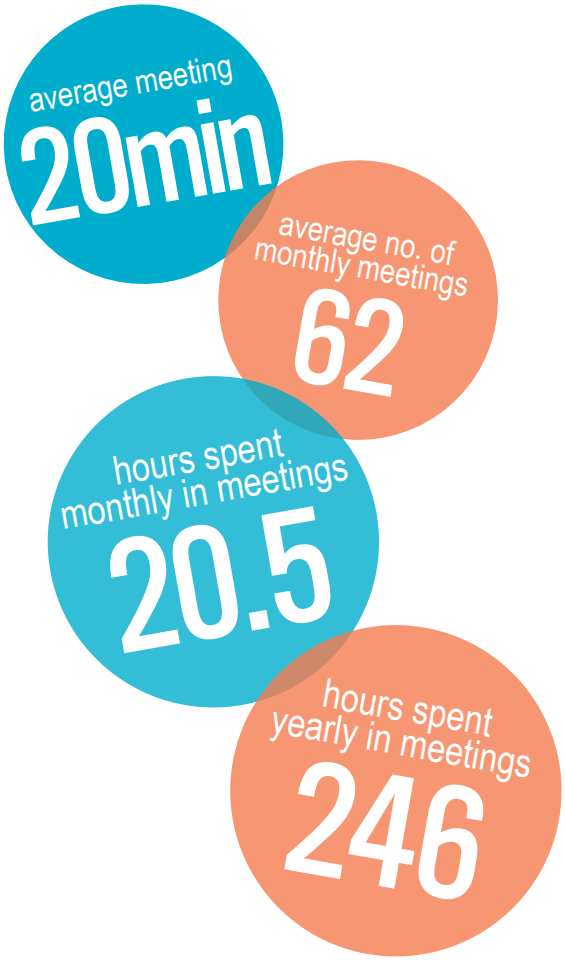
The average professional attends 62 meetings per month. Assuming that a typical meeting is 20 minutes long, that averages out to 20.5 hours per month or 10.25 days per year.

That's *a lot* of time to spend in one room.

If you went on a 10-day-long vacation and weren't satisfied with the hotel accommodations, your vacation would be ruined. If you went on a 10-day-long road trip through the Grand Canyon in a cramped, moldy 1997 Geo Metro, you would find it impossible to enjoy the scenery. Likewise, if you spent 10 days in a conference room with bare white walls, harsh overhead lighting, and creaky, uncomfortable chairs, you and your colleagues would have a hard time concentrating, wouldn't get much work done, and would emerge from the experience pale shadows of your former selves.

An elegant, well-furnished conference room can make all the difference in the world. It can increase productivity, impress clients, and most importantly, it can make your office a place that employees don't dread setting foot into.

The goal of this guide is to provide a complete overview of conference room design, from picking the wall color to choosing the font on your conference sign.



PICKING A WALL COLOUR

The colors we see around us have a profound psychological impact. Red placebos, for instance, have been shown to act as stimulants, while blue lights have been linked to lower crime rates and black sports jerseys have been shown to increase the amount of time teams spend in the penalty box.

Think about that for a second. If a tiny red pill with zero active medical ingredients can produce the same effect as a small dose of caffeine, if a blue light can serve the same function as a police officer, and if a black shirt can help determine the outcome of a sporting event, imagine what effect red, blue, and black walls can have on the people attending your meetings.

And yet despite the overwhelming amount of research that's been done on color psychology, little empirical data exists. Personal taste, past experiences, and cultural differences all conspire to make broad generalizations about certain colors and their psychological impact extremely difficult to make.

That said, there are some commonalities and recurring patterns across the literature. Here's what we've been able to determine. ▶

PICKING A WALL COLOUR

WHITE Nope. Don't even think about it. The only way to make your conference room more boring is to hang photocopies of your tax returns on the wall. White walls have been shown to decrease productivity and increase the number of errors workers make. Avoid like the plague or a Nickelback concert.

PINK In the late 1970s, psychologist Alexander Schauss convinced a Seattle prison to paint its walls pink and found that the change of color had a noticeable impact on prisoner behaviour, reducing the assault rate dramatically. Subsequent studies, however, failed to reproduce the results of Schauss study. So if your meetings tend to degenerate into Jerry Springer-esque brawls, painting the walls pink may or may not be helpful.

RED Studies suggest that red not only makes people more likely to gamble, but also more likely to make riskier bets. (This is why every inch of Las Vegas is covered in red neon light). So if your company encourages reckless financial decision-making, red may be the color for you. Otherwise, watch out.

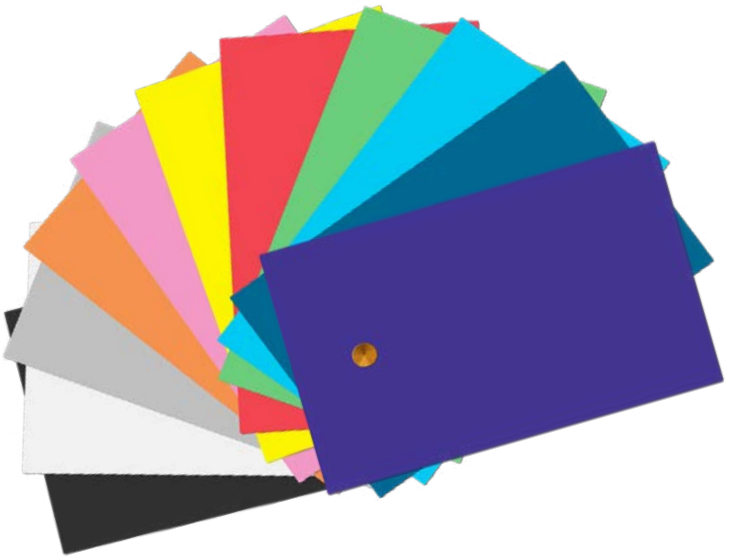
GREY Nope. Like white, grey will send your company's naps-per-meeting statistics skyrocketing. If you have to use it, only do so in small doses, and offset it with something more stimulating like red or yellow.

YELLOW Only consider this color if you don't intend on buying a coffee maker. Yellow has a stimulating effect, so much so that it has been shown to increase the likelihood of temper tantrums.

GREEN Another popular conference room color. Green is associated with vegetation, which in turn is associated with lack of famine, which helps put people at ease. According to a study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, it also can enhance creative performance, which most companies would consider to be a thing worth enhancing.

BLUE The most common color for conference rooms. Blue has been shown to have a calming effect and improve performance on creative tasks. The only downside: You may need to spend more money on heating. (Studies show that blue rooms make people feel colder.)

BLACK A tricky color to pull off. While black certainly worked out well for the conference room in the *Star Wars* Death Star, it may not be appropriate for companies that aren't affiliated with the Galactic Empire. Use at your own discretion.



HOW TO PICK YOUR CONFERENCE ROOM TABLE

Now that you have your wall color selected, it's time to pick the centerpiece of your room: the table.

The first step is to measure the room. The single biggest mistake you can make during this entire process is to put a tiny table in a gigantic room or a gigantic table in a tiny room. If your conference room looks anything like this, you've goofed.

Conference room tables come in all kinds of shapes and sizes. Here's a brief overview of some of the makes/models that are out there.

◀BARRINGTON TABLE (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE)
A classic table which—if it weren't for the laptop sitting on it in the picture to the left—would be perfectly at home in an elegant 1930s boardroom.

EPIC TABLE (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE) ▼
On the opposite side of the spectrum, the Epic Table offers a clean, minimalistic design that's perfectly suited for start-ups that want to replicate the vibe of Facebook's Frank Gehry-designed open office space.

ARROWOOD TABLE (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE) ▶

National Office Furniture's sleek Arrowood line features a mitered rim and clean lines. Like peanut butter or Guile's Theme from *Street Fighter 2*, this is something that fits in everywhere it goes.

LEAN DESK (OPENDESK)

Rather than purchase your conference room table the traditional way, you may want to consider checking out Opendesk, a UK-based company that allows you to download your table so you can have it made locally, regardless of your location. Their Lean Desk—notable for its spacious surface and modular covers—works well as both a work station and conference room table. ▶

BARREL SHAPED GLASS (CALIBRE OFFICE FURNITURE) ▼

Who says that conference room tables need to be made of wood? Not only do glass tables make the room appear larger, they are also much better at handling coffee spills, which—let's face it—are going to occur at a rate of 5-7 per day.

◀ MODULAR TABLE (CALIBRE OFFICE FURNITURE)

For meetings which involve a speaker standing in front of a podium, a U-shaped conference room table can go a long way toward reducing neck-strain.

CONTI TABLE (KROST) ▼

If you want your table to be an exact height, width, or length, you can save yourself the hassle of searching high and low of looking for a pre-made table and just go with Krost, who will custom build your table according to your specifications.

APOLLO (BOSS DESIGN) ▼

For meetings that draw in larger groups, a table that can comfortably seat up to 14 people is essential. Boss's Apollo is one such table.

FOUNDATIONS TABLE (TEKNION) ▲
One benefit of the Teknion Expansion table is that it can be purchased with a matching lectern and wall-mounted display board, making your job as an interior designer that much easier.

EXPANSION TABLE (TEKNION) ▼
Teknion's Foundations table offers simple horizontal and vertical planes with added option of contrasting finishes for those seeking aesthetic variety.

CONFERENCE ROOM CHAIRS

The style of your conference room table should help determine the style of you conference room chairs. If you've gone with a lush mahogany table out of *The Godfather*, you may want to refrain from buying hipster-y wooden stools to place around it.

Here's a quick rundown of some of the styles that are currently popular.

◀ FARRAH (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE)
Although intended for lounge seating, we think that the tapered legs and inset base panels would look pretty in a conference room.

RESPECT (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE) ▶
Environmentally-conscious companies may want to consider National Office Furniture's Respect line, which earns SCS Indoor Advantage Gold and level 2 certifications, which means it can contribute to LEED points.

◀ LAVORO (NATIONAL OFFICE FURNITURE)
National Office Furniture's Lavoro combines sleek metal arm rests with a subtly curved back support that looks like it belongs inside a luxury Italian car.

VALOVÍ CHAIR (OPENDESK) ▶
Engineered from 19 interlocking parts, Valoví features a curved seat and back to ensure maximum comfort

◀ TIVOLI (CALIBRE OFFICE FURNITURE)
For companies that are unable to avoid longer meetings, uncomfortable chairs are bad for business (except for perhaps the chiropractic business). Calibre's Tivoli, which features a stretched structural synthetic mesh upholstered with 10mm thick injection molded polyurethane foam padding, is ideal for those longer marathon sessions.

BALANCE STOOL (KROST) ▶
And now for something completely different: Not only does Krost's self-balancing stool follow the user's every movement, it also returns to its upright position after each use. For start-ups attempting to do something outside the box with their conference room, there are few better alternatives.

◀ PAGE CHAIR (BOSS DESIGN)
For companies seeking a 60s vibe, Boss's Page chair is a tour de force of retro chic.

RBG TASK CHAIR (TEKNION) ▶
Teknion's RBT (responsive back technology) chair incorporates patented technology that responds to the shape of the user's back and supports continuous changes in posture.

◀ SCULPE HIGH STOOLS
(CALIBRE OFFICE FURNITURE)
There's no rule that says conference tables need to have chairs. If your table is high enough, these stools from Calibre would get the job done just as well.

DECOR – LIGHTING SCHEME

The importance of lighting in the conference room cannot be overstated. If the lights are so bright that employees require sunglasses or so dim that they require night vision goggles, productivity will suffer.

It used to be the case that if you wanted lights in your conference room, you'd have to go with boring overhead fluorescents. Now the number of styles is basically unlimited. Here's a quick rundown of some of the most popular.

LUMISTONE (PHILIPS) ▲

We've already discussed how green and blue walls help encourage relaxation. Another thing that will help put employees at ease is the LumiStone, which bears a remarkable resemblance to one of mother nature's most comforting and reassuring phenomena: a pebble at the bottom of a stream.

ONESPACE (PHILIPS) ▲
When you think about it, having a ceiling that's a mixture of dry wall and lighting fixtures is kind of redundant. Why not just make the entire ceiling one huge light?

LATERALO RING (TRILUX) ▶
The war room in *Dr. Strangelove* may not have been the world's most productive meeting place, but it certainly looked cool. With the Lateralo Ring, you can bring the celebrated set design of Stanley Kubrick's classic to your workplace.

◀ LATERALO PLUS (TRILUX)
If your end users tend to bring MacBooks and iPads to meetings, you can't go wrong with the Lateralo Plus, which matches those two devices perfectly.

ONPLANA (TRILUX) ▼
Who says that lights even need to go on the ceiling? With Trilux's Onplana design, you can put your conference room lights on the walls.

DECOR – SHELVES

Unlike lights, shelves basically come in two styles:

1. TRADITIONAL

2. WHATEVER THIS IS

If you're having a hard time deciding which to pick, just flip a coin.

THINGS TO PUT ON THE SHELVES

The three most common things to put on shelves are books/magazines, pottery/plants, and art (namely tiny to mid-size sculptures).

To begin assembling a mini-library, we recommend consulting this list of the 20 best coffee table books of all time and then going hog wild on Amazon.

For potted plants, there is no shame in going to Ikea. Remember: Every workplace has at least one IKEA item in it. It's simply is an unavoidable fact of life.

Finally, for affordable office sculptures, look no further than etsy.com. They have everything from portable Zen Gardens to statues made out of recycled metal bolts to replicas of ancient Egyptian artifacts.

HOW TO NAME YOUR CONFERENCE ROOM

Now comes the trickiest part: naming the conference room. You've gone to all the trouble of painting it, furnishing it, and decorating; to give your masterwork a lacklustre name like Conference Room B or Meeting Room #7 would do it a disservice. (Imagine if the makers of the Empire State Building had simply decided to call it Manhattan Skyscraper #719.)

And yet most companies are perfectly fine with naming their rooms after letters and numbers. This is a wasted opportunity to show off company culture/creativity. Here are some ways to help you get started coming up with the perfect name.

GO WITH A THEME RELATED TO YOUR BUSINESS

If your company sells yoga mats, name your company after yoga positions like Downward Dog, Warrior Pose, or Seated Forward Bend. A company that specializes in construction equipment would be well-advised to name their conference rooms after construction terminology like Fill Trestle, Free Floating Screed, or Seismic Motion. And what could be more appropriate for a company in the robotics industry than naming the conference rooms after some of the big screen's most famous automaton's like R2D2, *Wall-E*, and *Robocop*?

MAKE IT A TEAM EFFORT

Make the first order of business in your new conference room a group brainstorming session to determine its name. If there are any marketing people in your organization, ask for their input: It's their job to come up with clever branding ideas.

CHOOSE A NAME BY LOCATION

A fun way to pick a conference room name is to look out the window and name your room after the thing you see. If your office is in New York, this means that the Brooklyn Bridge, Times Square, and Grand Central Terminal are all up for grabs. In London, Piccadilly Circus, Battersea Bridge, and Tate Modern are all viable options. An office in Hong Kong may want to consider names like Victoria Peak, Ocean Park, or Central Plaza.

GET INSPIRED BY SOCIAL MEDIA

Everything looks cooler with a hashtag in front of it. A room called "Coffee Break" is kind of blah, but #coffeebreak? That's over 9000 times as awesome.

SIGN

Now that you've come up with a name, the only thing left to do is create a sign so people know what the name is.

There are basically three ways of approaching the problem.

1. DESIGN THE SIGN YOURSELF OR HIRE A GRAPHIC DESIGNER TO DO IT

This is the best way to express your company's personality. A sign that's been created from scratch is infinitely more attractive visually than the standard plastic black sign with a sliding bottom. But it comes with a downside. If you decide to name your name your conference room Venice Beach and hire an artist to draw a beach scene, you could be in trouble if your boss chooses to re-name it Mulholland Drive.

2. GO WITH THE STANDARD PLASTIC BLACK SIGN WITH A SLIDING BOTTOM

It's been around for 100 years, it'll stay around for 100 more.

3. USE DIGITAL SIGNAGE ▼

By far the most exciting signage solution for your conference room is to go digital. For the price of a tablet, you can change the room name as many times as you want with just a few taps of the backspace key.

You can also use digital signage to display the meeting room schedule, show videos, and share company updates.

FINAL THOUGHTS

And so concludes our guide on conference room design. The only thing left to do is install your room's AV equipment, a task so simple and straightforward that it barely warrants being mentioned here. All you have to do is buy a TV or projector and the following cables:

HDMI

VGA

mini DisplayPort

DVI

USB

Lightning

thunderbolt 3

(In today's BYOD environment, you never know what ports your end users' laptops are going to have, so the more cables you have, the better).

Now, your end users aren't going to be thrilled by the prospect of having to get up to connect their laptops to the TV, so it's probably best to run the cables straight from the TV to the center of the conference room table.

To do this, simply cut a square hole in the middle of your conference room table and install a connectivity box (which usually retails for about $500). If the cables are giving you too much slack, a $100 cable management box should help remedy the situation. Finally, in order to make the cables look presentable, hide them under the carpet or under the baseboards (Note: You may require a crowbar, several twist ties, and some superglue to do this).

This process should only take a day or two and won't compromise the look of your room too severely.

Or, if all of this sounds too complicated, you may want to invest in a wireless presentation system. As it happens, Ubiq—the company whose logo you may have noticed at the bottom of each page—produces a wireless presentation system which allows end users to connect their laptop to the TV or projector in just 1 second. No cables, no hassles, no headaches.

For more information, please click here.

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