Death of the Cubicle; the Open Office Experiment

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Introduction

- Desired result of this presentation
  - Describe the experiences of our organization while transitioning from cubicles to an open office environment.

- Agenda
  - Introduction
  - Our Office Environment History
  - Description of the Open Office Experiment
  - Feedback from the Experiment
  - The Open Office Today
  - The Open Office Tomorrow
  - Conclusion/Take-Aways
Introduction: My World

- Pacemaker/Defibrillator System
- Safety critical
  - Regulated
  - Robust process
- Medium to Large Projects
  - 6-30 months
  - 6-30 developers
  - 6-30 testers
- Part of a large, successful organization, with strong culture and rich history
Our Office Environment

History

- Prior to 2001 – Cubicles only
- 2001 – Started using Agile
- 2002 – First development lab
- 2004 – Development labs spread
- 2005 – Open Office vision
- 2006 – Open Office Experiment
- Late 2007 – New facility
Our Office Environment History

Traditional Cubicle
Our Office Environment History

SW Development Lab
Our Office Environment History

Open Office Experiment
The Open Office Experiment

- We realized downsides in the use of programming labs:
  - labs are never the ideal size because team sizes change
  - waste computing resources (PCs in cubicles are not being used when developers are in lab)
  - need to constantly walk between lab and office to check messages
  - hard to locate team members
  - not ergonomically suited for individuals
The Open Office Experiment

- We met with Engineers, Facilities Coordinators, and Office Designers for months to design a prototype open office.

- Management agreed to fund the experiment for 38 Engineers as input for the new facility being built in 2007.
The Open Office Experiment
The Open Office Experiment

- To conduct the experiment, we formed a Planning Team and a Data Collection Team.

- Data feedback mechanisms included:
  - Reflection Wall
  - Reflection meetings
  - Survey
Reflection Wall Results

Key Positive Comments:

- Open space fosters inclusion.
- Furniture on wheels makes my office more adaptable.
- It's great to share a view out the windows with the whole group.
- Plenty of room to fit multiple people in my office.
- More aware of activities on other projects.
- More comfortable than the lab.
- The level of noise in OOE is the same as it was in cube land. I would not mind if it was a little noisier in OOE.
Reflection Wall Results

- I am more connected to my team as a result of being in the open space than I was when we were in cubes.
- The low walls make it easy to find people and resources quickly and adds more natural lighting.
- Our huddle area is great! There is always at least one person using this area throughout the work day.
- Clean open lines to outside windows help provide quick mental breaks.
- Proximity & visibility of colleagues really does foster & promote collaboration.
- Co-location is a huge bonus! the lower walls make it easier to ask questions of my team mates.
Reflection Wall Results

Key Negative Comments:

- The privacy cubes are not being used - I do not think we need as many as we have
- Very dreary colors
- File cabinet/stool idea is seriously flawed; they are too heavy to be moved as one moves a chair, they offer no support for appropriate posture, they lack enough padding
- Large user demos (with large speakers) are disruptive to the rest of the open office users and exterior neighbors
Reflection Wall Results

- Printer too noisy to be within the OOE space.
- Reflection meeting in one huddle was too loud for neighboring huddle - couldn't hear the polycom
- Seems darker than lab
Survey Data Themes

- OOE is well suited for development teams because of its flexibility & support for collaboration and co-location

- OOE has a positive impact on productivity for those participating in OOE

- OOE has no significant impact on ergonomics when compared with cubes

- Between OOE or a cube and lab layout, OOE residents have a slight preference for the OOE layout
Survey Data Themes

- Workers adapt quickly to OOE.
- It is slightly easier to focus in a cube environment.
- Employees feel more comfortable working with confidential material in a cube environment.
Open Office Today

- Teams that are co-locating when needed are flourishing
- There is a waiting list of people who want to be in the Open Office
- Small Open Office areas are sprouting
Open Office Tomorrow

Proposed Office Design for the New Facility
Conclusion / Take-Aways

- Most people are initially reluctant to work in an open environment but quickly adapt and leverage the benefits

- Successful transition to an open office environment requires careful planning and ownership by its residents

- Open Office works best if teams co-locate when necessary

- Teams gel and become productive more quickly in an open environment