

What is "Third Space" and Why Do You Need It?

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Credit: Adrian Wilson

Recently, we took a tour of the new National Public Radio (NPR) headquarters in Washington, DC with the local [IFMA Capital Chapter](#). In addition to the great food and impressive auditorium that hosted facilities managers, architects, and real estate professionals from the DC metro area, NPR put on a fantastic panel. During this discussion the panelists - including NPR's Director of Real Estate and a lead project designer from Hickok Cole - took us through an overview of the broadcasting network's new 400,000 square foot building.

It was during this panel that a very relevant and important concept came up: the Sound Bites Café, which is NPR's designated "third space."



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The Sound Bites Café is exactly what it sounds like and much more. Apart from the cafeteria that accommodates even the strictest diet, the open area is NPR's "third space" or place for employees to spend time at the workplace without any attachment to organized work activity. For NPR, it is essentially a large room that, in addition to the cafeteria, houses a lounge, a raised stage, and an organized seating area that transforms into an open space for social events.

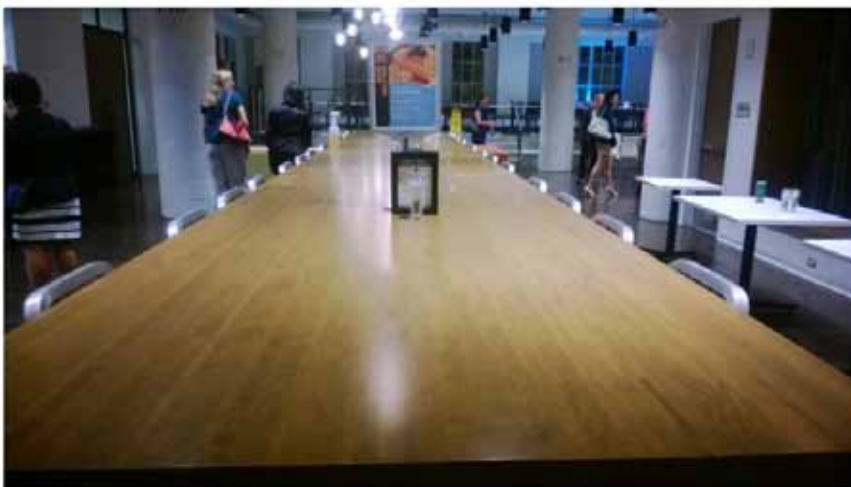
The "third space" is by its own nature a very flexible place - with its platform stage it can host company-wide events such as guest speakers or talent shows and minutes later be converted into a social gathering or eating area. Even though the room is not used for organized work, employees may use the lounge area to quietly do work-related tasks if they please.



The lounge area acts as a place to socialize as well as continue working

So what is the objective of building such a large space into a steeply expensive footprint just a few blocks away from the Capital Building? Put simply, when coworkers spend more time together, they are happier and more likely to do more creative and innovative work.

Take this analogy for instance; when going through your normal workflow would you rather sit in an empty coffee shop or a busy one with people? Even if you don't know your answer, studies have shown that a bustling atmosphere like the busy coffee shop is energizing for most people.



The long "family table" aims to bring employees together when they eat

Different industries have seen their version of third space emerge. For law firms, the traditional library brought attorneys together in a work setting. Even though law libraries have gone away, the need to meet and see others is still here.

On-site amenities and services from an employer should not be seen as a way to get employees to work longer hours. Rather, companies have come to understand that employees perform better quality work when their work-life balance is optimized. Therefore, new office environments are being designed to accommodate personal needs and demands too.



Employee bulletin board

More than likely, your company can benefit by providing for employees to balance out their day and make connections with each other; and in our opinion; it is worth at least a thought.

-Hewitt Tomlin, *Marketing Associate*

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