



## **The Role of Office Partitioning in effective workspace management**

**Balancing Cost, Flexibility & Functionality**

## THE OPEN PLAN OFFICE DEBATE

“The idea is to make the perfect engineering space: one giant room that fits thousands of people, all close enough to collaborate together. But, crucially, it will also have plenty of private, quiet spaces as well.”



## THE HIDDEN COSTS OF AN OPEN PLAN OFFICE

Despite the ongoing trend towards an open office environment, the open plan office could be costing your business.

Open plan offices are often implemented with the belief that they increase collaboration and is key to many organisations. But how does forcing workers to do everything out in the open affect employee health and productivity?

Research from Ipsos and the Workspace Futures Team of Steelcase surveyed 10,000 workers from 14 countries with some startling results:

- 85% of people are dissatisfied with their working environment and can't concentrate
- 95% said working privately was important to them but only 41% said they could work privately, and 31% had to leave the office to get work completed.
- Office workers are losing 86 minutes a day due to distractions

The Journal of Human Ecology found through its investigation into the subject that: “Despite perceived privacy, irrelevant speech contributes to mental workload, poor performance, stress, and fatigue.”



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## COLLABORATION VS FOCUS: THE NEED FOR BALANCE

Open plan offices are one of the biggest trends in the corporate world, as companies look to compete with enhance collaboration and teamwork often leading to innovation. Some of the world's most nimble and well respected companies including the BBC, Facebook, Twitter and Virgin have adopted the open plan office designs.

Whilst this can boost collaboration, even Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg emphasises the need for balance. "The idea is to make the perfect engineering space: one giant room that fits thousands of people, all close enough to collaborate together. But, crucially, it will also have plenty of private, quiet spaces as well."

What can be done to increase collaboration without impacting productivity? The most common response from the corporate sector is "we need both!".

But with limited space and a constantly changing workforce that is so common in today's market, what can an organisation do?

## FACTORING IN THE LONG TERM COSTS IN AN EVER CHANGING WORKPLACE

The benchmark standards for new fit outs and fit out alterations are an investment that many business cannot justify without clarity in their layout long term.

The office workspace is under increasing pressure to accommodate multiple facets of many constantly evolving businesses, whilst managing the shrinking budget for fit out changes.

Training sessions, private space, split space, meeting rooms, break out areas , presentation rooms or even temporary offices are all common requirements within the same office with limited floorspace.

Benchmark Target	Cost per square meter	Cost per person
Standard Fitout (new)	\$1174	\$17610
Minor Fitout Changes	\$310-\$597	\$4648-8955

With this is mind, one needs to balance cost with both aesthetics and functionality, as well as flexibility to accommodate office plans in the future that won't call for further investment.



## THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING WALLS, PARTITIONS AND WORKSTATIONS FOR YOUR OFFICE ENVIRONMENT:

<b>Cost:</b>	This includes cost of the wall unit, cost of installation, cost of painting and cost of office downtime.
<b>Flexibility:</b>	Gives you the ability to modify and reconfigure, ability to shorten or lengthen for different layouts without needing to allocate further budget for new systems.
<b>Functionality:</b>	Some partitioning now can have whiteboard panels, pin board panels, projector screen panels that can be part of free standing walls to be utilised in various office locations.
<b>Acoustics:</b>	Understanding the acoustic requirements and committing the right budget for the right requirement. 'Complete soundproofing' is often prohibitively expensive and less flexible than 'significant sound dampening'. Look for a system that can provide reduce distracting speech from co-workers without being completely 'soundproof' unless you really need it.
<b>Aesthetics:</b>	Every office has a different aesthetic goal. The key for achieving the right aesthetics is choosing an option that gives you the ability to personalise or customise to your preference by way of colour, finish, light transparency etc.
<b>Lock-in, re-use and modification costs</b>	It is critical to have an understanding of whether you are 'locked in' to a particular design or configuration. You need to be able to invest upfront, and make additions, alterations without significant on-site contracting hours or repurchasing. You should factor in these costs when making your assessment.

## FIT FOR PURPOSE OR FIT FOR PURPOSES?

When purchasing partitions and wall systems things typically fall into 1 of 4 categories:

**1/ Permanent.** Studded walls and fitted glass partition systems making fixed offices and rooms. These will need significant contractor assistance for build, demolition and removal. These are not reusable.

**2/ Semi- permanent.** An office or training room that will be built, but may need to come down at some point without full demolition. These will likely need basic tools and a few hours to disassemble and store /reconfigure. Reconfigurable and reusable.

**3/ Mostly static but occasional removed or folded back.** Often a wall system that splits an office into two that may need to be opened for a conference or staff function a few times a year. Manageable without contractors and very basic or no tools required.

**4/ Free standing partition units.** A mobile wall that can be moved and configured day to day without assistance or tools. Reusable, reconfigurable and relocatable by one person.

Now that we've established the key selection criteria and category for use, let's take a look at the most common solutions available and compare.

## COMPARING COMMON SOLUTIONS

Solution	Approximate Costs
<p><b>STUDED WALL SYSTEMS AND FIXED OFFICE PARTITIONS</b> are the system we are most familiar with. They are built for one purpose and require a builder to build off the plan. They will contribute to office downtime for both the builder to build, and painter to paint. Obviously, there is no flexibility to reconfigure and sadly, even with glass partitioning, it is well documented that relocation and reuse is more costly than the initial investment.</p>	<p>\$6000+ / 10 meter wall.</p>
<p><b>OPERABLE WALL SYSTEMS</b> that are ceiling mounted are a great fix but are a high cost item. The systems themselves are customised to size and the installation requires man hours on-site. The other thing to consider is that if the wall is 'hung' from the ceiling instead of the wall, there is often a need for a structural beam to suspend the operable wall which will further affect your material and labour cost.</p> <p>The operable wall scores highly with regards to aesthetics as they are typically covered with a range of veneers or fabrics that can be chosen to your taste. Being sealed at the top and bottom and made from acoustic panels it offers a strong acoustic barrier.</p> <p>The ability and cost to modify, however, is not the strength of the operable wall. It needs to stay on that line, bound to that structural beam and has only movement from one side to the other. Being made to order, the flexibility to relocate is only workable if you are working to the same specifications. This would also need the contractor's assistance and will incur costs. In short, if you need an operable wall for the same function in the same area over the long term, it is a worthwhile investment.</p>	<p>\$12,000-\$20,000 / 10m wall.</p>
<p><b>WALL MOUNTED PARTITIONS</b> are a great fix for the wall that needs that flexibility to be opened, closed and reconfigured, but does not need to be completely removed from its location regularly. The wall mount is typically a very simple single drill and screw at the top and bottom and can be removed with basic tools in a few minutes if needed. Because it is not 'hung' there is no need for any structural beam work within a suspended ceiling.</p> <p>These can typically be built to ceiling height, and can simply be modified to 'free-standing units' with the addition of one stabilising panel at the wall mounted end. Because they are built in the manufacturing facility and shipped 'ready to fix' you save on all on-site installation costs, and you can have built with panels that favour your preferred colour scheme.</p> <p>These panels can be fabric acoustic panels which can be used as pin boards, white board panels or engineered polycarbonate panels which give you a high acoustic lightweight wall that is customisable, movable and locatable without further costs.</p>	<p>\$3,500 - \$4000 / 10m wall.</p>

**FREE STANDING PORTABLE PARTITIONS** are likely to be your most cost effective and flexible option. They make setting up and reconfiguring a one person job. They can be reused, and relocated without any contractor assistance.

\$2500 - \$3500  
/10m wall.

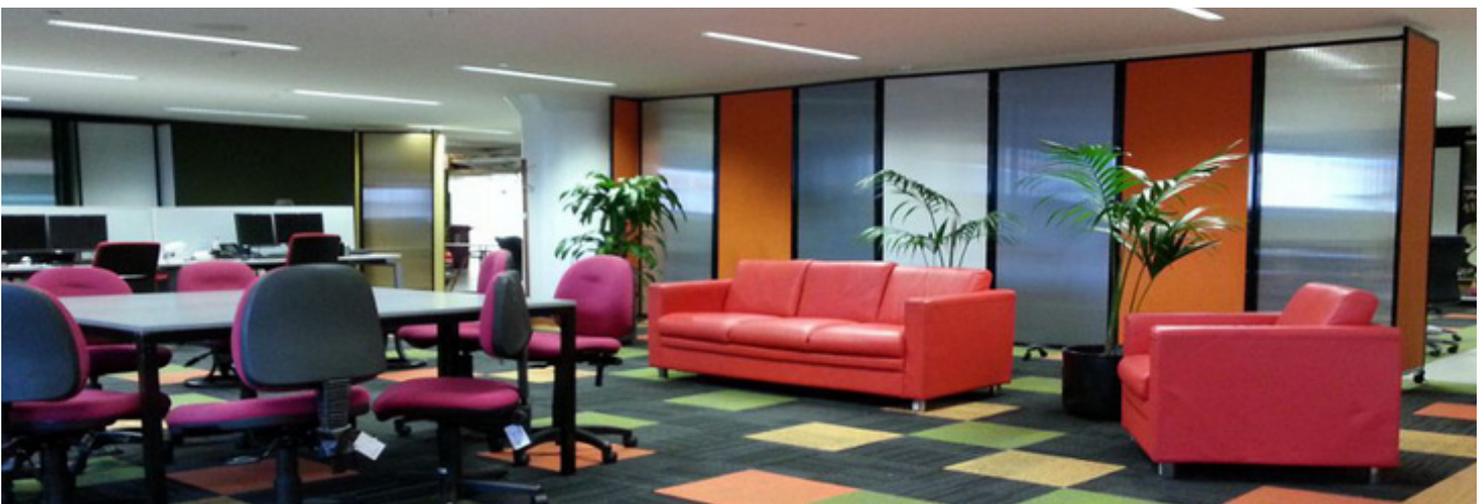
They have the ultimate flexibility with articulating hinge systems so that offices can configure in a straight line or in infinite shapes required. Being built by the manufacturer, they require no on-site fitting and do not contribute to any office downtime.

Made from acoustic panels they have strong sound dampening qualities. Being free-standing they have a height restriction of around 2.3m. Aesthetics and personalisation a strength with a range of panel options and customising available.



## PORTABLE PARTITIONS AUSTRALIA:

Portable Partitions Australia manufacture and assemble acoustic partitions here in Australia. With Australia's largest range of fixed and mobile room dividers, wall mounted operable wall systems and modular workstation cubicles, they can offer bespoke designs for your workspace and despatch within 48 hrs. Portable Partitions Australia have a huge range of colour finishes in fabric, polycarbonate and vinyl and can also integrate whiteboard and pin board panels for added wall functionality. All partitions are built to order and customisation is available on most models. All manufacture and assembly is completed off site so that there is no disruption to your workspace for installation.



## CASE STUDIES

### Portable partitions Australia partner with Jones Lang LaSalle for Sydney CBD project

Adaptability and flexibility within Australian offices is crucial to ensure companies are fully maximising all available working space.

Often, there will be a requirements to ensure spaces are multi-purpose, to allow different uses such as meetings, functions, training sessions or chill out areas to be created all within the same space.

Portable Partitions Australia (PPA), the market leading supplier of portable room dividers and mobile partitions, were recently approached by Jones Lang LaSalle in Sydney to help create a dynamic multi-purpose office space for one of their clients.

The brief was to create a flexible work and game space within an existing large cavernous room. The idea was to be able to transform the room quickly and easily, depending on use requirements. The client wanted to incorporate bright and vibrant custom fabric colours to match the current room décor and they were also keen to avoid expensive permanent building works.

Multiple units of the 360 Acoustic Portable Room Divider were chosen in various sizes to allow maximum versatility for the room and to help dampen sound travel between different quadrants. The capability to easily fold, stack and store the units when not in use was also crucial. A mixture of custom fabric panels and polycarbonate panels were used to create a bespoke look and feel.

The results were impressive, creating a modern and fresh look whilst helping to transform a previously under utilised space into a hub of activity.

Manuel Ortega, Senior Facilities Manager for Jones Lang LaSalle commented, 'Currently my client has one large room on the the lower ground floor of their office block that is generally used as a corporate playground. By utilising portable room dividers, this room has now been turned into a more flexible work/game space. We divide the room into a maximum of four different spaces that are then used as a combination of small meeting rooms, boardrooms and games areas. We can use the white polycarbonate panels as whiteboards, customise by adding our logo's or artwork and pin/tack things to the fabric panels.'

## REFERENCES:

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**ii/ Impact Magazine:** Design Talk "Focus on Flexibility" [www.impact.officemaxinteriors.com/focus-on-flexibility](http://www.impact.officemaxinteriors.com/focus-on-flexibility)

**iii/ The Economist:** "The Office Cubicle: Inside the Box " March 2015 [www.economist.com/news/international/21637359-how-workers-ended-up-cubesand-how-they-could-break-free-inside-box](http://www.economist.com/news/international/21637359-how-workers-ended-up-cubesand-how-they-could-break-free-inside-box)

**iv/ The Guardian:** Open-plan offices can be bad for your health: <http://www.theguardian.com/money/work-blog/2014/sep/29/open-plan-office-health-productivity>



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