



# White Paper

Signals for Privacy in the Open Office

## The Big Push in Open Office Design is for an Open Office Environment

The latest trends in open-plan environments tend to be characterized by fewer and lower partitions along with quiet rooms and team spaces. These are becoming more common as organizations are beginning to realize that cubicles do not support the variety of work modes that happen in an office. This evolving open-office environment allows for the following:

- A sense of community among co-workers
- Enhanced collaboration
- Better communication and a greater ability to ask questions and exchange information
- A perception of team support, as opposed to feeling “closed in” or “all alone”
- A feeling of being “in the know” about what is going on with the company

However, the open office environment can also allow for some unintended consequences, such as:

- Uncontrolled opportunities for interruption due to physical proximity and visual accessibility to co-workers
- Inadvertent distractions due to noise and visual sightlines

As a result, workers often turn to compensating behaviors like wearing ear buds and headphones, even when nothing is playing; or ducking out into the nearest enclosed space if technology permits. These are only a few of many behaviors that are becoming more commonplace as workers attempt to adjust and adapt.

In an effort to help reduce disruptions and improve productivity and focus, adjusting and adapting does not have to be the answer.

## Top 7 Ideas for Adopting Privacy Signals

Whether it’s “Do Not Disturb”, “Busy”, or “Creativity in Progress”, the list below outlines some best practices and ideas for privacy signaling in an open office.

### 1. PAINTED WOOD BLOCKS

A set of painted wood blocks that sit on a worksurface, panel or even overhead. Depending on how the blocks are stacked, they could indicate:

- Green – “I’m free to talk”
- Yellow – “approach with caution”
- Red – “do not disturb”

### 2. NAMEPLATES

Installing nameplates with a slider indicating “occupied” or “available”.

### 3. COASTERS

Coasters with different colors on each side could be used. One side could indicate “open to collaboration”, and the other color could indicate “heads down work” or “do not disturb”.

### 4. MOBILE WHITEBOARDS

Mobile whiteboards with casters on the legs could be useful as written indicators that could be strategically placed. For example, a worker could write “creativity in progress, do not disturb”, and place the whiteboard to the side of the workstation. Having the ability to move the whiteboard around the workspace could also give visual privacy.

### 5. PAPER HANDS

Paper hands hung from the back of a chair or around a worksurface could signal “STOP” – so people don’t disturb someone working.

### 6. EAR BUDS + HEADPHONES

Wearing one ear bud could signal “open to collaboration”, wearing two could signal “busy”.

### 7. LIGHT SIGNALS

Light signals strategically placed on top of a computer monitor (or something else at the workstation) could visually indicate status based on color.



## Developments on Light Signaling Systems

Herman Miller's Insight and Exploration Team is exploring the use of lighting signals placed at the workstation and on top of computer monitors. This particular lighting signal is called "Blync – Busy light for Lync®", which connects to Microsoft Lync®, so the status updates in Lync change the light signal's color. When logged into Lync, for example, the light signal will automatically turn the following colors:

- **GREEN** if you're available
- **YELLOW** for if you're away
- **MAGENTA** if you're at your desk but busy
- **PURPLE** if you do not want to be disturbed



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## How We Can Help

Herman Miller's Performance Environments Group has worked with many customers who have made the move from private to increasingly open environments. In many cases, we have developed protocols and guidelines, which have included privacy cues that are customized, culturally appropriate, and agreed upon for each and every organization. This is only one of the ways we can help ease the unintended consequences of moving to an open plan, assisting organizations in an effort to reducing disruptions and improving productivity and focus.