

# Creating dynamic environments: The intersection of design, functionality and innovation



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# Table of Contents

| Executive Summary

| Importance of Intentional Design Strategy

| Five Considerations for Creating Purposeful Environments

| The Impact of Intentional Design





# Executive Summary

Great design goes beyond aesthetics – it drives purpose, inclusivity and usability.<sup>1</sup> In today's world, whether in a hotel, learning center or office, environments need to be adaptable, accessible and engaging.

ODP Business Solutions Workspace Interiors® demonstrates the power of intentional design through its collaboration with Disney Institute, the professional development and external training arm of The Walt Disney Company. Together, they reimaged the Institute's training space, transforming it into a dynamic, flexible environment that reflects the quality of Disney's programs and better supports participants in their professional learning journeys.

This project highlights how purposeful design and collaboration can create spaces that adapt seamlessly to diverse learning and engagement needs.

# Importance of intentional design strategy

**Design is not just about how a space looks—it is about how it performs for the people who use it.<sup>2</sup>** Across industries, demand is rising for environments that can seamlessly serve multiple functions. While many factors drive this shift, adaptability is at the center. Organizations are seeking ways to scale, shift and maximize the use of space without costly remodels. Modular and convertible layouts make this possible, enabling greater functionality within a single footprint.

This shift reflects broader workforce and consumer trends. Research conducted by McKinsey showed that 87% of employees have taken advantage of remote work opportunities.<sup>3</sup> Having the freedom to work wherever, many people are using hotel lobbies, libraries or cafés as alternative workspaces. To stay competitive and capture this segment of customers, organizations are recognizing that meeting their evolving needs requires intentional design—grounded in a deep understanding of user needs, organizational goals and environmental constraints.

Within workplaces, companies are increasingly recognizing the value of modular furniture and adaptable architecture. From pods and movable meeting rooms to floor plans created with click-together walls, organizations are designing flexibility into their offices to make them more appealing to a diverse range of employees.<sup>4</sup>

Disney Institute recognized this need for functionality when reimagining its approach to professional development. Previously, sessions were held in standard hotel conference rooms. To better match the quality and immersion of its programs, the Institute collaborated with ODP Business Solutions Workspace Interiors® to help transform a hotel ballroom into a highly functional learning environment. Every element was designed with purpose, creating a setting that is adaptable, engaging and user-centered.





# Five considerations for creating purposeful environments

## 1 Accessibility and diverse learning styles

### Designing for everyone who enters the space

Understanding who will use a flexible space and what they need to succeed is an important first step in developing a space that truly serves its purpose. This means thinking beyond just the function of the room and considering the full spectrum of physical, cognitive and technological needs of its users.

At Disney Institute, this took shape through modular seating options such as high-top tables, ergonomic chairs and lounge seating. Desks were designed to support both right and left-handed individuals and storage areas were integrated to provide places for personal items.

"One of the things that we looked at in the functionality of the furniture was to be able to accommodate any type of person that came in here, so if it was a person that was right-handed or left-handed or somebody who needed to get up and stand, then we had different options," said Patti Maneri, ODP Business Solutions Development Manager.

## 2 Social spaces for informal interactions and community building

### Creating environments that support both formal and informal interaction

Striking the right balance between communal and individual-use areas is important when designing a successful flex space.<sup>5</sup> Installing flexible seating and open, spacious layouts can help enhance a space's ability to serve multiple functions, especially when collaboration is a priority. Social spaces allow for informal discussions, reflection and casual connection, while communal areas encourage engagement and networking.

At Disney Institute, the ballroom was reimagined to provide flexibility in how the space could be used. The design allows the environment to shift seamlessly between moments of formal instruction and opportunities for informal connection - fostering both collaboration and reflection. By creating an adaptable setting that supports a range of learning and networking experiences, the space encourages engagement that feels both structured and organic.

### 3 Modular, mobile and multi-functional furnishings

#### Spaces should change as users' needs change

Furniture serves as the backbone of adaptability in modern spaces. Furniture that is easy to move and reconfigure, stackable and durable are essential for creating environments that can evolve with changing needs. For instance, modular furniture allows for easy reconfiguration, which enables effortless transformation of spaces to support various activities. Thoughtful furnishing choices help spaces to remain functional and responsive to the dynamic requirements of their users.

At Disney Institute, all furniture was placed on casters to allow for quick reconfiguration. The space can shift easily from a lecture-style setup to small group discussions. Modular whiteboards with moss backing were introduced to the space, adding biophilic benefits while also serving as flexible surfaces for brainstorming. These features reinforced the idea that learning spaces must be dynamic, empowering participants to engage in ways that work best for them.

"Furniture is a conduit for learning. Desks, chairs, tables and much more are used every single day to help every individual, student and worker alike gain the skills necessary to succeed," says David Gabriel from ODP Business Solutions. "ODP Business Solutions recognizes the importance of flex spaces with proper furnishings, and we aim to assist every organization we work with in finding comfortable, modular and effective furniture for flexible use."

**Furniture serves as the backbone of adaptability in modern spaces.**

### 4 Design elements that impact experience

#### Subtle choices that shape user perception and productivity

Subtle design choices can significantly influence how individuals feel, engage and perform within a space. Elements such as lighting, textures and spatial arrangement play an important role in shaping the user experience. For example, lighting design can enhance audience attention and engagement.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, different types of textures can evoke specific emotional responses. These design decisions, though subtle, are integral to creating environments that resonate with users and support their activities effectively.

At Disney Institute, the design team incorporated a herringbone carpet pattern for visual appeal. Materials were chosen with both hygiene and durability in mind. Moss panels were used to bring greenery into a windowless room, and accent pillows added comfort and warmth. These thoughtful choices enhanced the atmosphere of the learning environment, making it both functional and welcoming.

### 5 Adding value through small details

#### Anticipating what users need, even if they don't know it

Often, it is the little things that make the biggest difference. Anticipating needs, whether visible or not, elevates user satisfaction. At Disney Institute, features such as integrated technology connectivity, wellness elements like high-top tables for standing and personal storage helped enhance the learning experience. Seating variety provided both comfort and mobility, allowing users to adapt throughout multi-day sessions. These details reinforced the Institute's commitment to providing an immersive and supportive learning environment that met the needs of every participant.



# The impact of intentional design

**The environments of the future must be flexible, functional and engaging.** Purposeful design helps organizations create spaces that empower users and maximize investment.

ODP Business Solutions Workspace Interiors® goes beyond selling furniture. The team provides strategic space planning, vendor integration and knowledge of human behaviors, workflow, and design science. Every project is approached with precision to provide long-term value, enhanced user experience, and environments that exceed expectations.

The project for Disney Institute highlights the impact of this approach, serving as a model of how intentional design can transform ordinary spaces into dynamic environments that inspire learning and collaboration.

Ready to elevate your environment?  
Visit [odpbusiness.com](http://odpbusiness.com) or call 888-263-3423 to learn more.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/inclusive-design>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.asid.org/news/asid-releases-comprehensive-research-study-on-the-impact-of-design-in-the-workplace>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/real-estate/our-insights/americans-are-embracing-flexible-work-and-they-want-more-of-it>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ft.com/content/d34f4b8b-e48e-412f-ace4-65460b9e2fb9>

<sup>5</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10584156/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389659419\\_THE\\_EFFECT\\_OF\\_LIGHTING\\_DESIGN\\_ON\\_AUDIENCE\\_ATTENTION](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/389659419_THE_EFFECT_OF_LIGHTING_DESIGN_ON_AUDIENCE_ATTENTION)