Reimagining Spaces:
A Post-Pandemic Design Report

Workplace Edition

Contents

Reimagining Spaces:
Our Post-Pandemic Design Report

Amid the upheaval from today's pandemic, we see one clear implication for our industry: space design is entering a whole new era, and there's no going back. Since March 2020, Omgivning has been exploring the potential of this design evolution and reimagining three space types in particular: Workplace, Multifamily and Commercial.

As with all of Omgivning's work, our goal with this design report is to inspire people to take a closer look at the potential of an existing space or property.

Together, we can reveal and attain a site's highest and best use, even under challenging conditions.

Reimagining Spaces:
Our Consistent Themes

While developing our concepts, we noticed certain themes recurring across our three types of spaces: Workplace, Multifamily and Commercial.

Like many in our field, we had already been moving towards these findings, but today's shifts have filled us with a new sense of urgency.

Theme 1: Prioritize Human-Centered Design
Recent events have underscored exactly what all humans need to survive and thrive. By operating with these principles as our guide, we achieve a more human-centered design. They compel us to:

- Promote equality and diversity through design
- Balance socialization and privacy
- Create a sense of safe shelter
- Connect people to nature
- Promote ergonomics and physical activity
- Allow for interpersonal connections
- Facilitate mental and physical wellbeing

These ideas are intended to work in tandem with the following themes.

Theme 2: Flexibility & Adaptability are Now Crucial to Success
Spaces must be transformable to accommodate different uses, allowing interior spaces to accommodate both living and working, for example, or to allow for a retail space to turn easily into a workspace. No matter the use, these spaces must fulfill the need for privacy, socialization and a connection to the outdoors. We must demand greater resilience from our spaces, whether in a pandemic, natural disaster or economic depression. Our focus comes from our belief that we shouldn't need to tear down a building simply because our standards of living and working are changing. Our goal is to design and adapt spaces that suit many varieties of users for a very long time.

Theme 3: Beyond Mixed Use: Blended Uses
Especially in Los Angeles, distinct uses once occupied distinct areas of the city. Accessing each use meant driving to those areas. Then came the idea of a "mixed-use building," where multiple purposes could be fulfilled in a single structure. Now, we are moving toward blended uses, where individual interior spaces serve multiple functions simultaneously. Long before the pandemic, we had been moving toward spaces blended by use. That natural evolution has been suddenly supercharged, reinforcing the point that users must be able to do just about anything, anywhere, at any time. People can now say: This is my bedroom and my workspace. That restaurant is for dining, working and buying groceries. This gym is a place where I can easily hold a virtual work meeting. Our design work should be able to support those assertions.

Theme 4: A Space is Inextricable from its Economic Context
Reimagining spaces now means that all members of the project team must work to keep things simple and limit excess. As economic inequality increases the distance between the haves and have nots, we must acknowledge our power to reduce that distance: to design spaces where a high quality of life is more attainable for more people. Likewise, during any downturn, residents and businesses must cut back and turn creative with their budgeting. Today's spaces must facilitate cost-sharing and revenue-generating models, in their design and operational programs.

Reimagining the Workplace:
Our Concepts

At Omgivning, we've built our entire firm around the idea of how a space feels. And today's offices suddenly feel very different than before. But what form will those differences take going forward?

Our internal surveys confirm that we all retain a desire for connecting to our colleagues and to being in the office. But beyond that, things aren't so clear-cut. As of this writing, three-quarters of us are looking forward to personal interaction with our colleagues, yet 80% would also prefer to continue working remotely at least part time. And upon the return to the workplace, 65% of us would prefer assigned seating, meaning that a third of us are open to hoteling (that is, working with no fixed desk location).

To understand the future of office spaces, we generated a test case to help us imagine the possibilities. We assumed a firm sized at 40 people (as Omgivning is) and a typical +/- 7000 sf office floor plate as found at our project The Trust Building in DTLA. Through this spatial study and our survey observations, we've developed three concepts that can be applied to a variety of spaces.

Concept 1: Transform

We aren't going back to large private offices and open-plan offices have revealed crucial flaws. We need our personal workspaces to provide more acoustic privacy, ability to focus and a place to feel safe. How can we create spaces that can transform as our needs change?

Concept 2: Leverage

Maximizing all available sources of revenue presents a sustainable way forward for owners and tenants. For example, how can we rethink the use of our leased office spaces? Maybe we have a long lease but now realize that half our staff is going to be working from home indefinitely. How can we help leaseholders or owners better utilize their spaces and generate additional revenue?

Concept 3: Adapt

In the short and long term, how can we adapt the spaces we have now? Let's start by focusing on infection control and introducing a more robust approach to integrating WELL building standard features with technological advances. Collaborative open space and focus-oriented acoustics need to coexist. How do we find the right balance between boundaries and openness?

Transform:
Diversity of Spaces

As offices change to suit the reality of a mobile workforce, traditional footprints no longer apply. In lieu of an open office or large private offices, this concept explores the idea of smaller, more transformable spaces to provide a variety of needs. The use of something like a "pod" could offer a compelling way forward, especially when matched with a diverse floor plan based on a modular grid layout.

In our concept, pods can occupy less space, and they are the definition of transformability. They can provide sound control (needed for video or phone calls), privacy and the ability to focus. They can be highly mobile and easily transformed into meeting spaces or even sleeping spaces. They can provide maximum resilience and flexibility to accommodate spatial needs that could follow daily, even hourly, cycles. They can also address needs presented by natural disasters or sudden curfew or shelter-in-place requirements.

We've developed three pod types that accommodate a broad range of needs. We call these The View Pod, The Meeting Pod and The Open Pod. Each pod shares a consistent 6'x8' footprint, allowing them to be interchangeable throughout the grid on which they sit. Grouping the pods in clusters opens up space elsewhere that can be devoted to a variety of uses and maximizing the variable placement of furniture.

Depending on the task and the need, each pod could transform from assigned to hoteling (that is, non-assigned); it could also transition from a working pod to one that accommodates sleeping. The result is a diverse floor plan that creates a dialogue between open and closed, private and public.
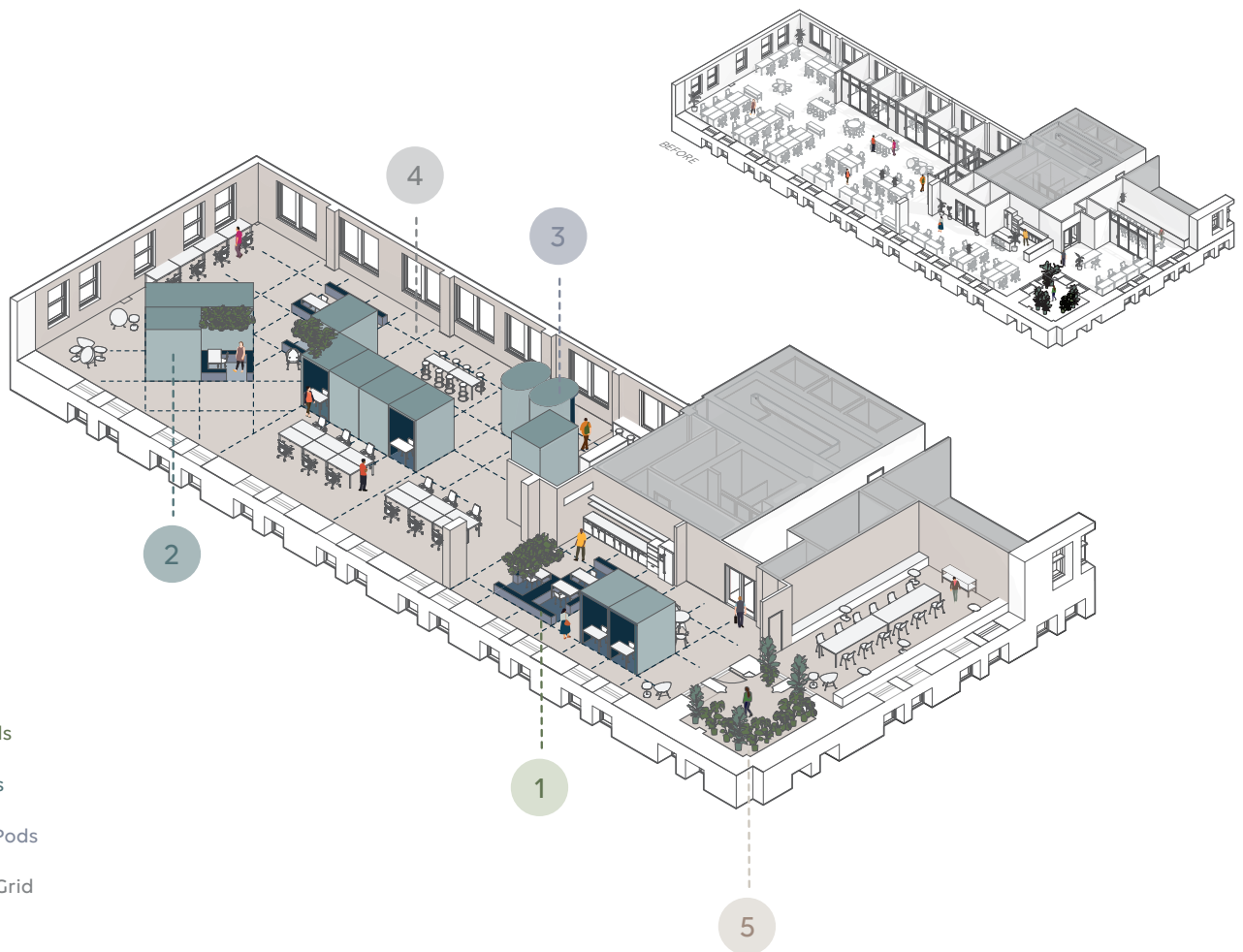
Pod Typology

The View

The Meeting

The Open

1 Open Pods
2 View Pods
3 Meeting Pods
4 Modular Grid
5 Patio

Transform:
The View Pod

The View Pod is designed for maximum resilience supporting unexpected shelter-in-place requirements. Enclosed on all sides with one main opening directed towards a chosen view, these pods could face exterior windows or a common open space within the office. It transforms from day to night through working and sleeping amenities that can be folded and tucked away. In its workspace scenario, The View ensures privacy and sound isolation, while remaining visually connected to elements beyond. The sleep scenario can host a mattress for an overnight stay.

Pod Typology

The View

Work <------------------------> Sleep

Transform:
The Meeting Pod

The Meeting Pod provides flexibility for open or enclosed meetings. Its circular footprint provides acoustic privacy for video calls and to aid in focus. Built-in millwork offers dual functions for seating and storage. Integrated lighting and tackable surfaces present a clean background for personalization and work-based pin-ups. Each Meeting Pod provides an ideal space for quick interpersonal connections for up to three people.

Work ← - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - → Meet

Transform:
The Open Pod

The Open Pod provides a modular footprint with varying barrier preferences. It defines an individual space while staying visually connected to the communal space. The barrier preferences can be seen as a "kit of parts," adjustable to an open or enclosed layout, based on the occupant's needs. Greenery, suspended from above or in planters, can be used to define zones and remind inhabitants to prioritize wellbeing. The Open Pod provides built-in lockers, open shelving and the option for a height-adjustable desk.

Open <--------------------------> Connect

Transform:
Mobile Remote Workforce

As the technological tools that support massive workforce decentralization continue to mature, we see how working remotely can be just as effective as working in an office.

We now believe we will see a corresponding shift in cultural values—especially as they relate to transience and notions of work-life balance (a highly subjective term anyway). So, once working from home becomes the rule rather than the exception, why stop at home?

A fully-equipped van, owned or subsidized by the employee's company, would redefine and inspire a new concept of "remote" work. Assuming a reliable internet connection, a strong emphasis on scheduling and the formation of good new habits, there would be little to no impact on productivity. Productivity may even increase, for nature-oriented people who are motivated by an itinerant lifestyle but who could never find the chance to get away. This solution would be especially useful in professional-service sectors where in-person contact or field verification might offer some special value to the project or client.
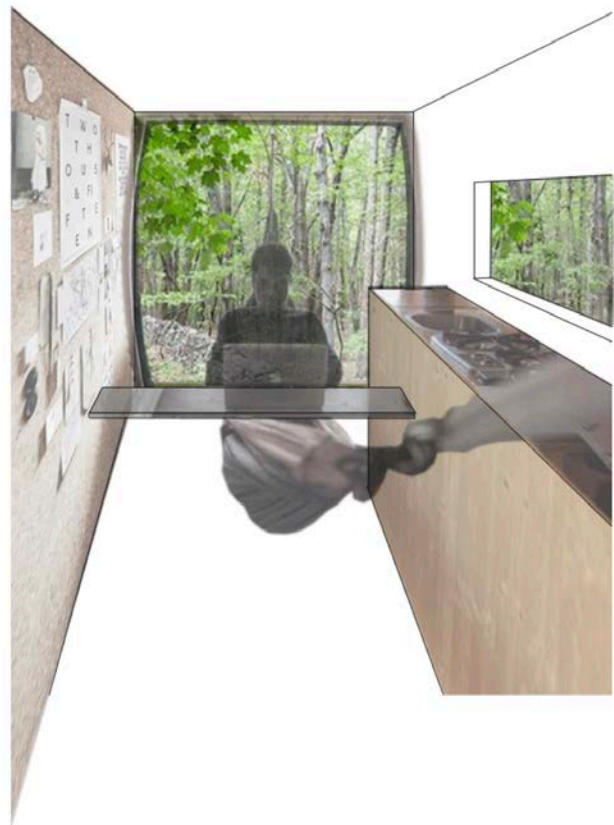
Icon Typology

The Office

The Cloud

The Remote Office
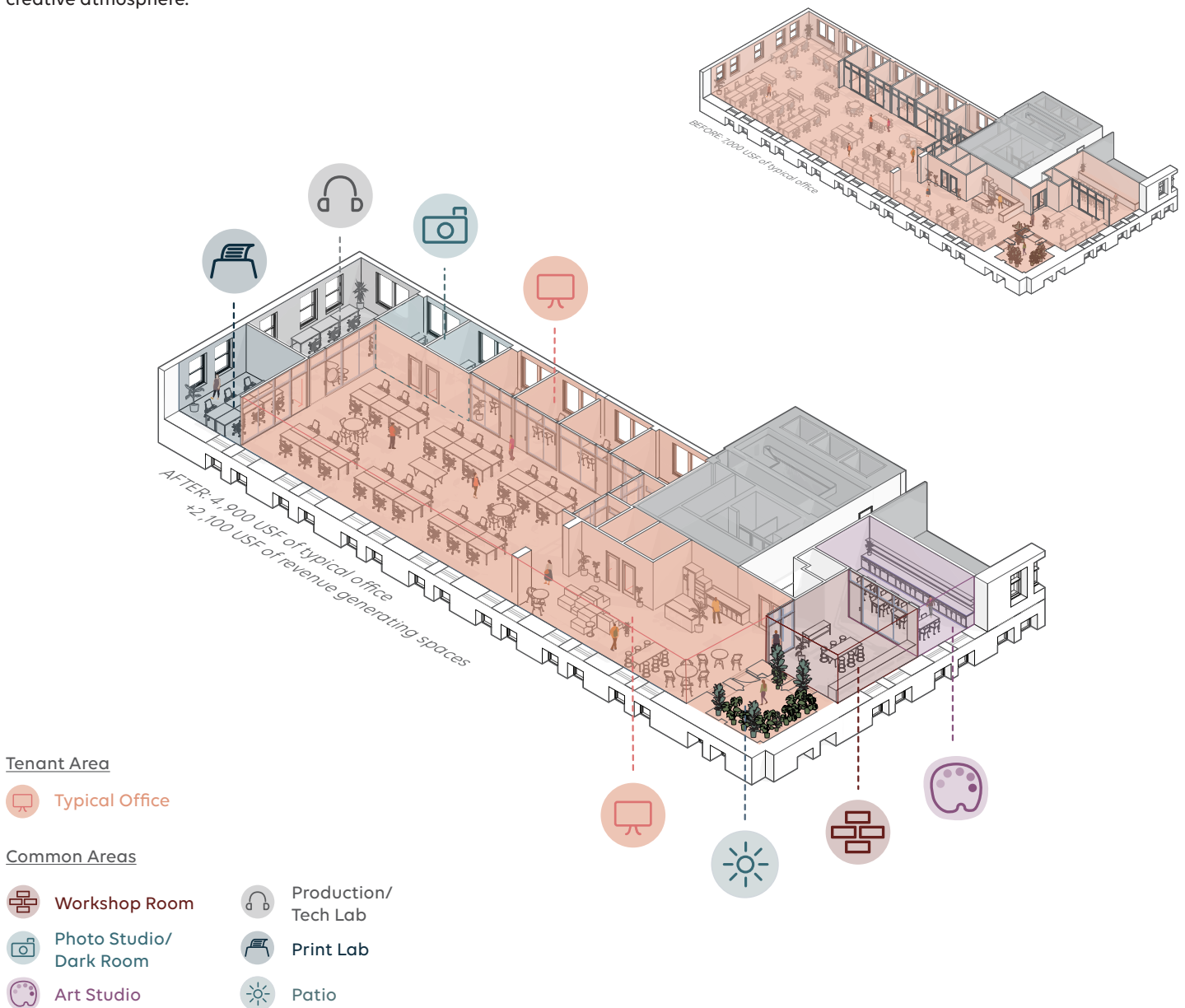
Work<------------------------>Remote

Leverage:
Revenue Generation

Even prior to recent global events, we have seen a steady reduction in the space required for typical office programming. More than ever before, office layouts will shift to accommodate new mandates for flexibility and the increased portion of employees who work remotely.
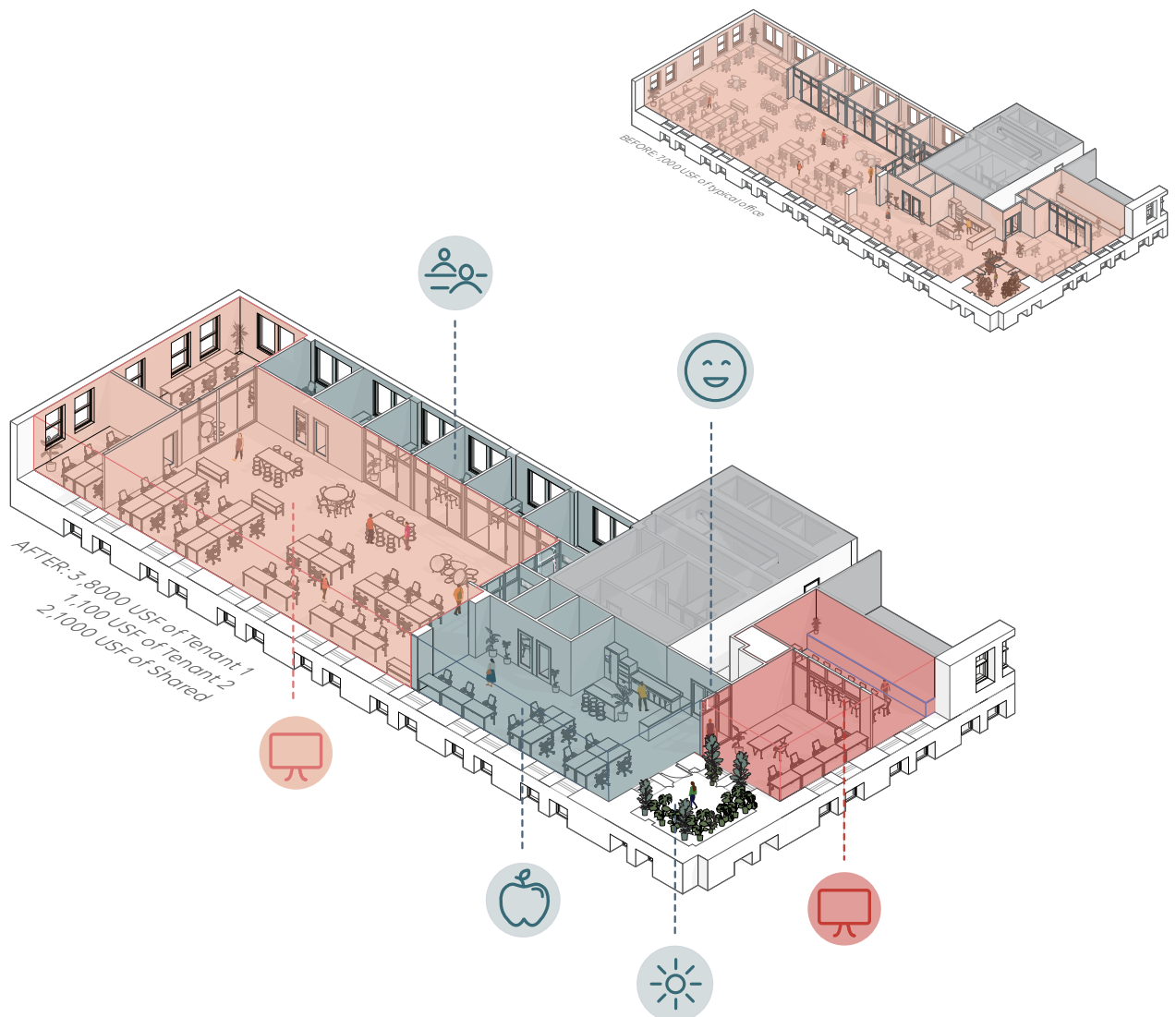
In this concept, the tenant would reduce their physical workspace area and reprogram certain spaces to generate revenue. This provides income to the tenant from dedicated-use areas; examples could include an art studio, a photo studio with a dark room, fabrication lab, or a print shop. The prime tenant could rent out each space individually, manage each space themselves as a service for adjacent tenants, or make them accessible through an app-based membership platform. In addition, this arrangement benefits tenants by providing employees with a compellingly creative atmosphere.

BEFORE: 7,000 USF of typical office

AFTER: 4,900 USF of typical office
+2,100 USF of revenue generating spaces

Tenant Area

⊡ Typical Office

Common Areas

⊞ Workshop Room

▣ Photo Studio/
Dark Room

◉ Art Studio

◖ Production/
Tech Lab

▤ Print Lab

☀ Patio

Leverage:
Shared Spaces

Whereas the previous concept calls for shared spaces devoted to a creative or programmatic use, in this scenario, each tenant has their own office space but shares spaces like a conference room, breakout areas, a lounge area, the kitchen, restrooms, and outdoor space. An operations staff member would handle scheduling for these amenities and ensure cleaning and hygiene protocols for all common areas.

Through thoughtfully arranged co-tenancies, leaseholders can capitalize on their space and open themselves up to potential collaborations all while reducing their monthly rent burden.

BEFORE: 2,000 USF of typical office

AFTER: 3, 8000 USF of Tenant 1
1, 1100 USF of Tenant 2
2, 1000 USF of Shared

Tenant Area

🖥 Tenant 1

🖥 Tenant 2

Shared Areas

👥 Conference Rooms

🍎 Shared Kitchen Break Area
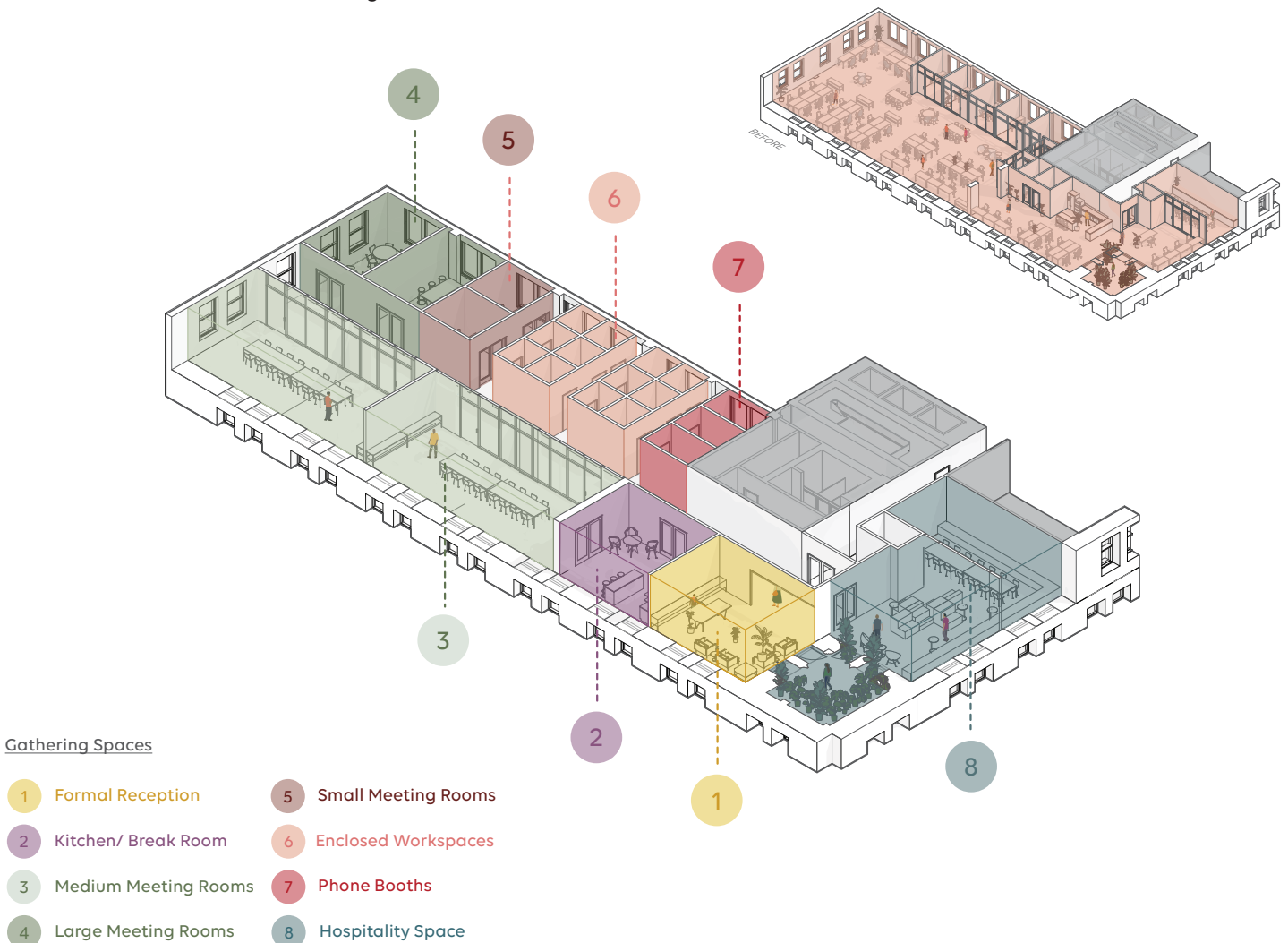
☺ Reception

☀ Patio

Leverage:
Gathering Spaces

As humans, we crave interaction. For some, in-person collaboration is essential to success. We can assume that most people need physical interactions to thrive, even if individual positions require different levels of contact.

This concept is tailored to an office where most employees work from home but come in periodically for staff meetings, client meetings or to enjoy office amenities and in-person office culture. By treating the office as a gathering space, we achieve a hybrid that operates differently from traditional office spaces, and with a different feel accordingly. It's primarily an amenity space for employees and clients that, on demand, happens to serve the functions of a traditional space.

The gathering space program includes rooms for meetings, messy collaboration, workshops by streaming video and in-person public events. Here, the focus is on providing space for the things we prefer to do (or can only do) in person, including gathering spaces for company-wide events.

A formal reception area could be reserved for events, with a digital management system to accommodate bookings by the public and staff. A variety of rooms would accommodate different uses such as client meetings in large conference rooms, smaller rooms for internal meetings of 2-3 people, as well as single occupancy offices and phone booths for the time in between meetings.

Gathering Spaces

1. Formal Reception
2. Kitchen/ Break Room
3. Medium Meeting Rooms
4. Large Meeting Rooms
5. Small Meeting Rooms
6. Enclosed Workspaces
7. Phone Booths
8. Hospitality Space

Adapt:
Creating Safety

Before the pandemic, traditional space-planning paradigms were driven by density. Today, we must focus on wellbeing measures with additional emphasis on infection control. Safety in the workplace now implies a whole new set of requirements that owners and tenants should consciously adopt.

This concept poses a variety of recommendations that can be implemented to ease infection concerns and provide a more meaningful human experience. This outlook helps employers assess workers' needs, develop targeted protocols and keep focused on the human impacts of navigating "the new normal."
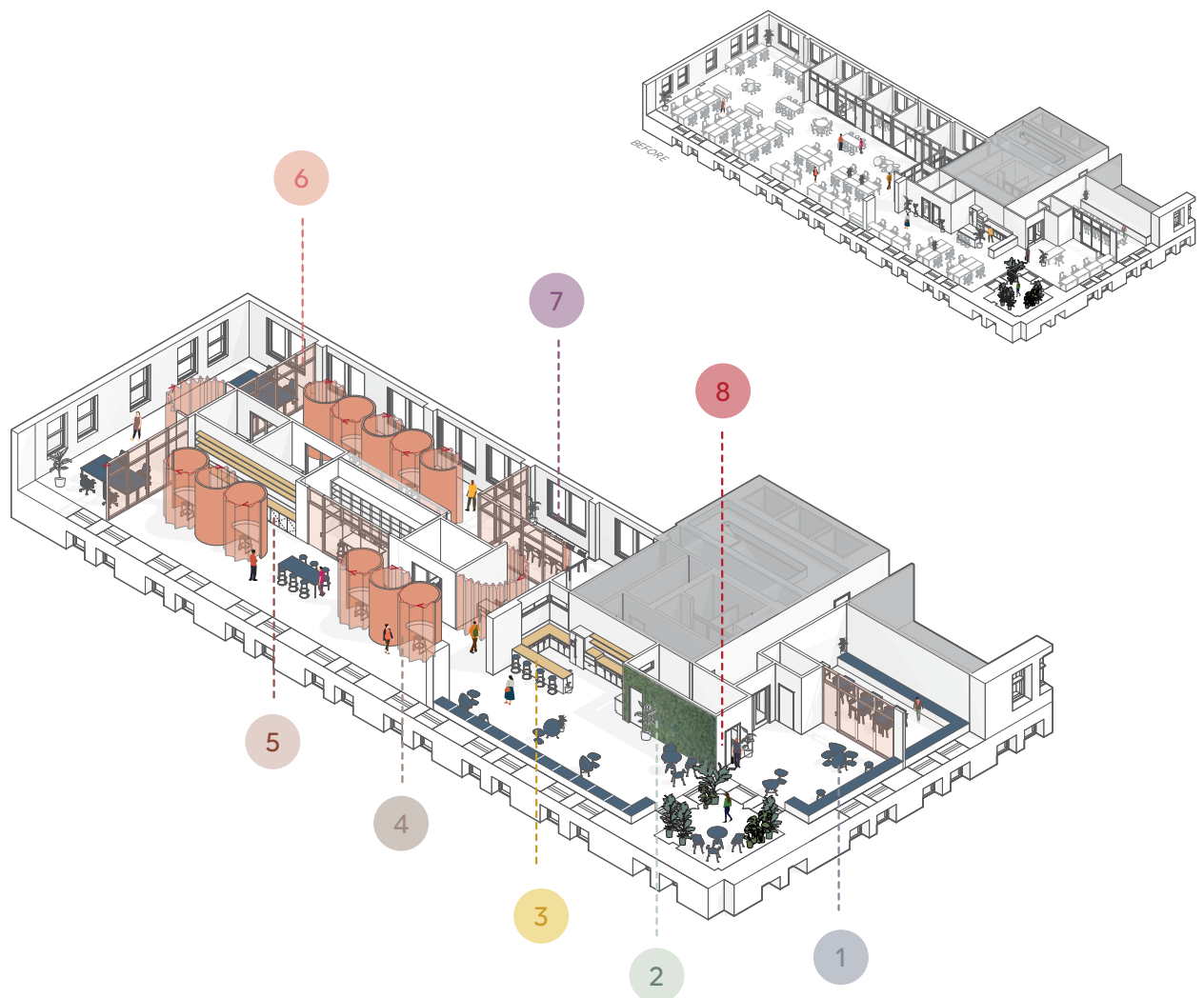
Safety + Wellness

1. Flexible / Reconfigurable Furniture Solutions
2. Biophilic Elements
3. Antimicrobial finishes at high use areas
4. Increased physical comfort through ergonomic solutions
5. Employee Lockers
6. Option to enclose workstations / zones
7. Increased air purification
8. Provide Guidelines / Signage Throughout

Adapt:
Creating Safety

We recommend the following to optimize workspaces for safety and wellness:

Sanitation Vestibule
Include a sanitation vestibule at entry of the space and give the option of enclosing individual workspaces or areas within work and social zones. For touch-less access, install hands-free door operators or remove doors entirely.

Antimicrobial Finishes
Reevaluate materiality throughout the space, especially at areas requiring touch. Provide open shelving in any kitchen and supply areas. Specify non-porous finishes with anti-microbial coatings that facilitate easy cleaning and disinfection without compromising quality or function.

Flexible / Reconfigurable Furniture Solutions
Flexible, easily configurable furniture solutions can promote physical distancing, at every desired level of privacy. To manage density levels, install lockers for individual storage, especially if an operations plan calls for cycling through different occupants on different days.

Ergonomic Solutions
Employers can Increase physical comfort by empowering employees to adopt ergonomic solutions, whether by altering posture periodically or using standing or walking desks. They can also impact thermal comfort through radiant temperature systems and acoustic control by identifying loud and quiet zones. Making cleaning solutions accessible and visible increases the likelihood of a cleaner space.

Biophilic Elements
Today's wellness measures can incorporate new signage and guidelines. This includes wayfinding as well as general reminders to limit touch and maintain distancing. Occupancy indicators must be visible at distance, especially if partitions are not transparent. Optimizing circulation patterns will help maintain distance and minimize close encounters.

The adoption of biophilic principles will help to reduce stress and heighten emotional wellbeing. These principles include access to natural light, circadian lighting design, access to plants and the outdoors and, while retaining a focus on wipeable surfaces, a preference for nature-based forms and textures over rectilinear or overly refined ones.

Increased Air Purification
Owners must prioritize protocols leading to clean air. This means regular replacement of air filters, providing entryway seals, installation of operable windows and adoption of measures to increase ventilation, whether through redesign or other means.

All of these elements will help reduce the spread of infection and, just as important, instill a sense of safety and calm among employees. Together, employees, employers and owners can help foster mental wellbeing, limit exposure and manage fear before it arises.

Adapt:
Technology for Well-being

More than ever, we can integrate technology into workplaces to drive and monitor occupant wellbeing. Design elements such as touchless doors and digital receptionists can reduce uncertainty over unnecessary contact. Other features below can subtly manage density and even compel behavioral changes. Moreover, they serve to remind occupants and visitors that the office is a place where safety and wellbeing are priorities.
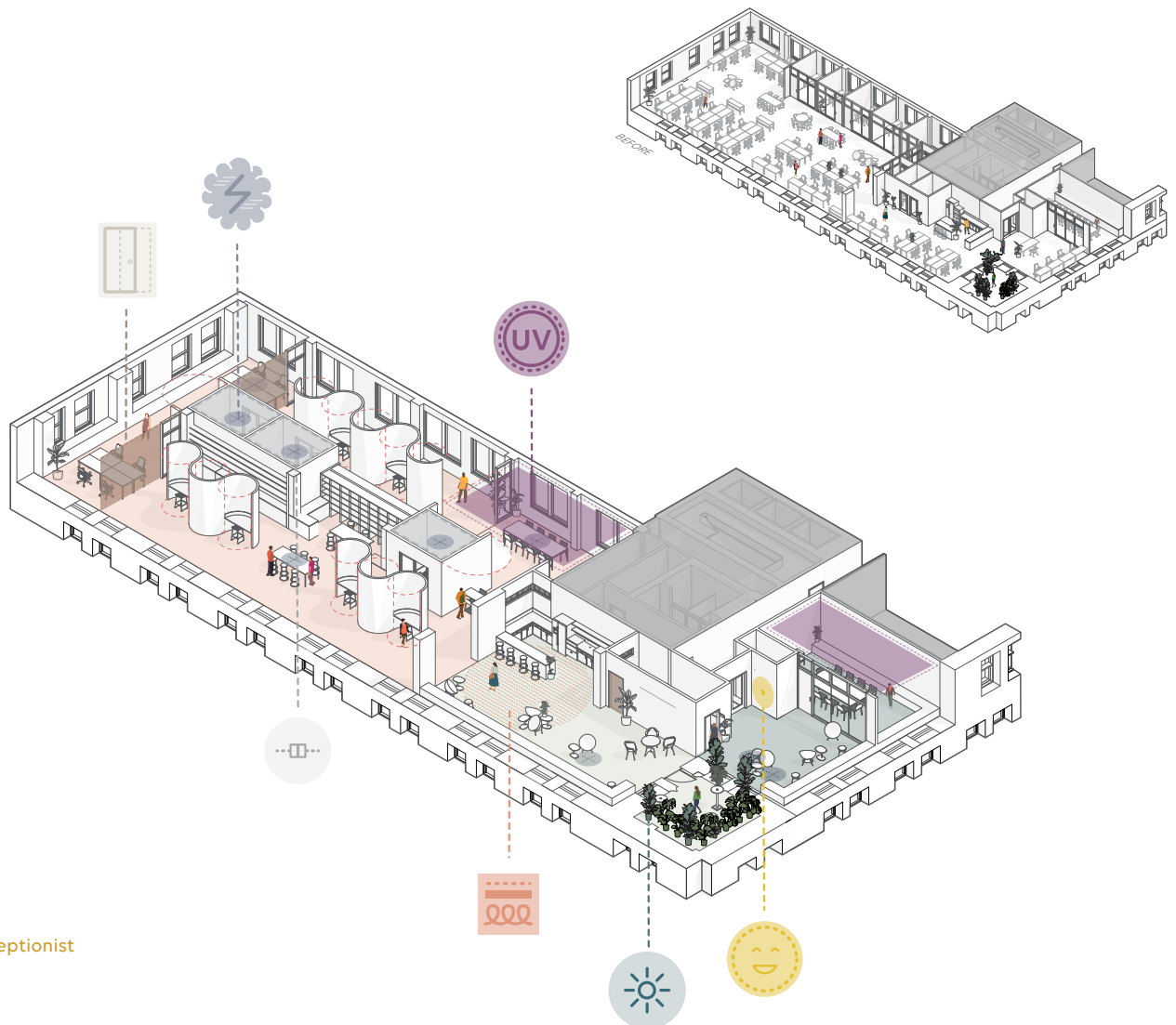
Technology

- **Digital Receptionist**
- Patio
- **Radiant Temperature Systems**
- Occupancy Sensor
- Automatic Doors
- Flexible Power Hubs
- UV Lighting

Adapt:
Technology for Well-being

Digitization & Automation
We can eliminate the need for contact and minimize exposure by enabling hands-free practices wherever possible: touchless doors, digital reservations, voice-activated controls and a digital receptionist.

Radiant Temperature Systems
Incorporating radiant temperature systems reduces dust transmission, provides increased thermal comfort and maximizes floor space.

Occupancy Sensors
Movement sensors have long helped identify when spaces are not in use to help conserve energy. Now, we can use these sensors to know what areas have been used and when. This helps focus efforts on those areas, for cleaning and ventilation control. Occupants can understand which areas have recently shown higher traffic, allowing them to find an alternate workspace if necessary.

Power Hubs
In essence, power hubs are upright, movable, elegantly designed electrical outlets with surge protection. They provide convenient access for people moving freely through informal touchdown spaces, so that charging can occur in places where there are no wall outlets.

Lighting
Germicidal UV lights are non-toxic and can be installed in the ceiling over areas where infection control may be a priority. These fixtures are highly effective in eliminating germs upon contact.

Adapt:
Zoning to Address Needs

In the long term and the short, we must design workplaces that prioritize adaptability. By prioritizing the use of boundaries, we can help tenants control key characteristics of their workspace. These deliberate separations provide the physical distancing needed to guarantee not only safety and privacy but also acoustic comfort. Setting the workplace on a gradient from quiet to loud brings balance to any environment where collaborative practices and moments of inspiration must not spill over into quiet, focused attention.

In this example, higher-risk public zones would be located upon entry and lead to a sanitation vestibule where workers can cleanse prior to occupying workstations, offices or the kitchen. Within these zones, users can create their own boundaries by closing off their workstations and meeting rooms or by using adaptable furniture to adjust spacing and address variable demands.

ENTRY SEQUENCE

QUIET

LOUD
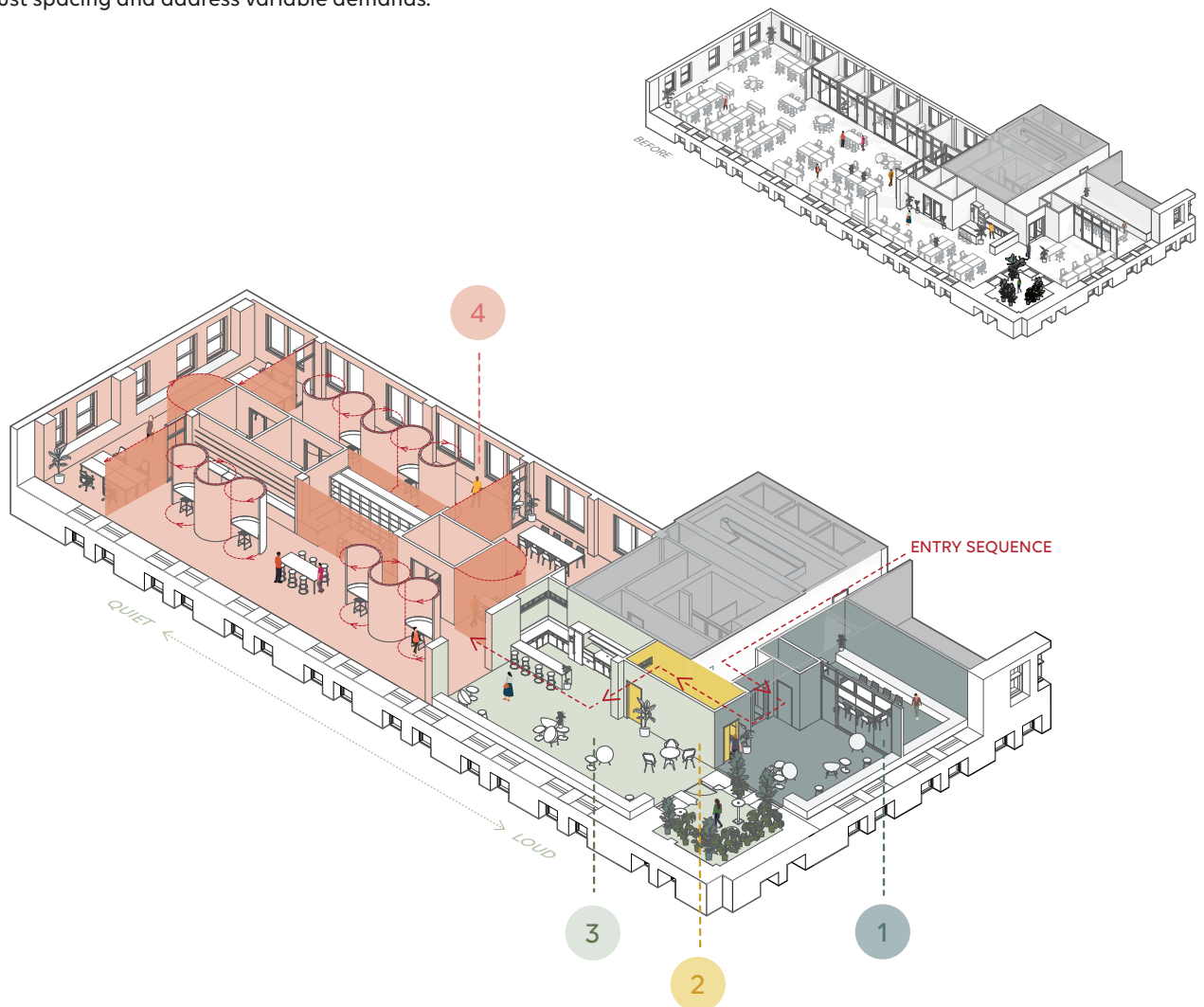
Zones

1 Visitor Zone

2 Sanitation Vestibule

3 Social Zone

4 Work Zone

Adapt:
Zoning to Address Needs

Description of zones:

Visitor Zone
This is the office's point of entry for all arrivals. Staff and other daily users can continue on to a sanitation vestibule before entering their office spaces. Visitors can move seating in the reception area to follow distancing requirements or attend meetings in the conference room.

Sanitation Vestibule
The sanitation vestibule offers a place for handwashing and provides employee lockers for belongings. It contains essential protective equipment and, when empty, can be sanitized by ultraviolet light. For anyone entering the shared office space each day, it also functions as a reminder to prioritize handwashing.

Social Zone
Here, easily rearranged seating facilitates social-distancing practices. Long benches are provided along operable windows with access to an outdoor space.

Work Zone
The work zone conforms to its own distinct boundary, with the further option of closing off one's individual workstation from the office. Meeting Pods are provided with sliding partitions so that users can optimize their acoustic comfort and visual privacy.