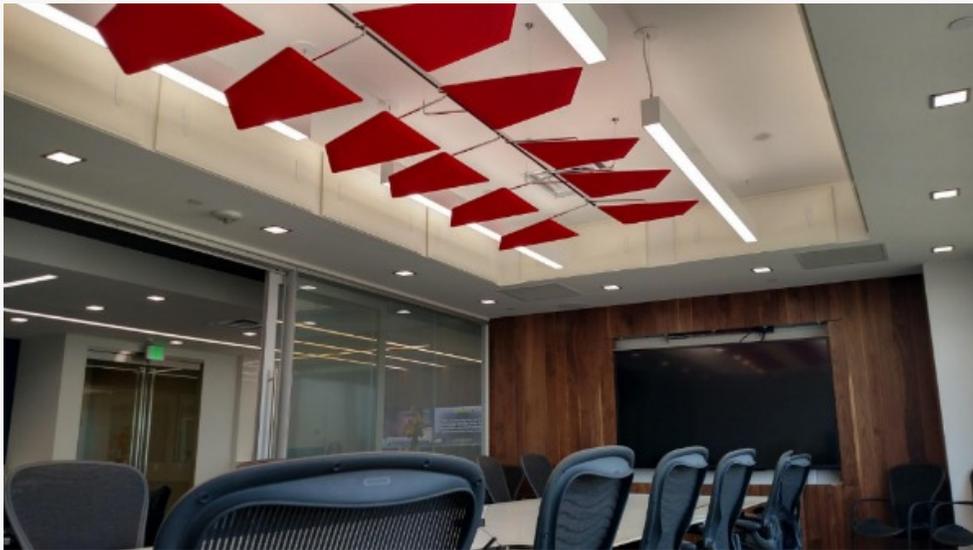


Are Conference Room Acoustics Sabotaging Your Meetings?

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When evaluating the effectiveness of a meeting space, the most obvious factors to consider are the technology, the furniture and maybe the design style or "personality" of the room.

What might be overlooked, unfortunately, is conference room acoustics.

"Many conference rooms are designed with glass walls, hard ceilings, whiteboards and big-screen televisions on the walls," points out Steve Johnson, founder of [ADI Workplace Acoustics](#).

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“All of these materials reflect sound very effectively, so the sound of speech bounces around from one hard surface to the next. It has nowhere to go but around and around the room.”

It's called Reverberation Time (RT), and in many modern conference rooms, it's uncomfortably high.

Problems With Call Clarity, Privacy

Wondering why you should care about RT?

For one thing, too much reverberation makes it hard for the people on the other end of your call or [videoconferencing](#) session to hear you. You can end up sounding like you're “talking with your head in a bucket,” as Steve puts it.

How many of your meetings have someone joining remotely? Even if your company has invested in the best technology for those calls, you might still be making a bad impression on the people dialing in, thanks to your conference room acoustics.

That's not the only downside. Privacy is also a concern, says Steve, whose business specializes in working with interior designers and architects to address speech privacy problems in the workplace.

“Many conference rooms, even with the doors closed, have poor privacy,” he says. “Conversations may be easily understood in adjoining spaces.”

What to Do About Bad Conference Room Acoustics

If bad acoustics are sabotaging your meetings, it might be time to start looking into installing sound-absorbing materials or sound masking.

Absorptive materials reduce the amount of sound that ricochets from one hard surface to another. The effectiveness of an absorptive material is measured by the Noise Reduction Coefficient (NRC).

Acoustical ceiling tile is a popular absorptive solution. Be sure not to use high NRC ceiling over conference rooms with open return air plenums. In these areas, Steve recommends mineral board tiles, which act as a lid to contain sound.

If ceilings do not fit into the design concept for the room, absorptive materials can be used in other, creative ways. Ceiling-mounted baffles and wall-mounted acoustical panels are available in many interesting varieties.

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“There has been an explosion of beautiful acoustical materials over the last few years as acoustics are becoming more of a focus,” says Steve.

Another option is sound masking, which provides a soft background sound that covers the sounds of speech and allows for better privacy in offices and conference rooms. It is frequently referred to as white noise or pink noise.

Sound masking is easily implemented in areas that surround conference rooms at a relatively low cost.

Start Early, If You Can

The best time to deal with these problems is before the conference room is even built. If your company is expanding or redesigning its office space, be sure to consult an acoustic expert early on.

“Acoustical conditions profoundly impact human performance in office settings ... a simple, acoustical performance specification should be added to the planning, design, engineering and construction process,” reported [David Sykes, PhD](#), founder of the Acoustic Research Council.

A professional in acoustics can guide you through considering materials, finishes and intended use of space, so you can capture a modern look while still securing the right acoustics.

In addition to a professional's insight into areas you haven't considered, it saves money to get an acoustical team involved early on, allowing the general contractor to layer in acoustical elements while installing walls and ceilings.

The conference room is where your company's visions are shared, confidential discussions are held, and decisions are made – all for the growth and well-being of the business.

You've already invested a lot in the technology to make these rooms effective. Now make sure the acoustics are conducive to technology-rich meetings.

Photo by ADI Workplace Acoustics showing Snowsound acoustical panels.

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