GUIDE to the TOOLBOX

Organisation and Design of Hybrid Working Environments for Collaboration in Teams

GIVING TEAMS A VOICE

In times of ongoing change, teams face the challenge of constantly reorganising collaboration in hybrid settings and constantly reorganising and redesigning suitable working environments. Existing processes for the professional (re)organisation of teamwork and the (re)design of hybrid working environments are time-consuming and costly. Affected teams generally do not have access to professional consulting and support services when (re)designing.

With the TOOLBOX and the corresponding explanations in this GUIDE, we invite teams to independently analyse their team collaboration needs and identify suitable working environments for hybrid activities. TOOLBOX and GUIDE thus give teams a voice to identify, communicate and discuss their needs with relevant stakeholders.

A research project from:

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1 — Background Information on the TOOLBOX

Challenge of hybrid working models

If your team is working on innovative, complex, or research-intensive products, services, and solutions, you will constantly have to react to changing requirements and conditions. These changes, e.g. to team processes, team structures or team tasks, require you to constantly adapt your collaboration and therefore suitable working environments for your team. However, existing processes for the professional (re)organisation and (re)design of hybrid working environments are time-consuming and / or cost-intensive.

The solution for teams

Based on research findings, an easy-to-use, modular TOOLBOX has been developed that you can use as a team to independently identify and analyse needs in the organisation and design of hybrid working environments. You can use the TOOLBOX to work step by step or in blocks without professional support.
As a result, the TOOLBOX documents key results in such a way that you can communicate your needs to relevant stakeholders, such as team, departmental and executive management, as well as the specialised departments of facility management, IT and HR. The TOOLBOX can be used again when changes occur in your team tasks, processes, or structures to re-evaluate requirements.

Use the TOOLBOX to…

• analyse your team's characteristics and needs in a hybrid collaboration setting,
• develop clear rules for collaboration within the team in hybrid settings,
• identify suitable working environments for your team tasks, processes, and structures.

What are the limits of the TOOLBOX?

With the TOOLBOX, you as a team cannot initiate fundamental change and transformation processes in your organisation.
However, you can use the TOOLBOX as a team if you are already discussing new, creative and innovative ideas for hybrid working models and solutions for suitable working environments. The TOOLBOX helps you to identify your team characteristics and needs in hybrid working environments. Nevertheless, it cannot solve conflicts and problems in your team. This is where you may need professional support or moderation.

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2 — Instructions for using the TOOLBOX and GUIDE

The TOOLBOX has been developed as an easily accessible Excel tool for simple use. This GUIDE in poster format provides background information, application notes, research findings, and tools for the TOOLBOX in a compact format. The TOOLBOX is available as an Excel version. In the TOOLBOX you will be guided step by step. The results are automatically documented in the Excel tool.

The GUIDE is designed as an A1 poster and can be printed out by yourself.
The licence for use and distribution must be acknowledged.

TOOLBOX and GUIDE are available online in both German and English versions:
https://www.ifaf-berlin.de/projekte/raw_reallabor/

Structure of the TOOLBOX

The TOOLBOX is divided into **phase A** and **phase B**:

Problem area

Phase A: Assessment of Your Team Characteristics

• Organise hybrid collaboration in your team
• 3 tasks = 60 minutes
• Outcome: Agreed-upon schedules and rules for collaboration in your team

When phase A should be carried out:
• Are tasks, processes and structures in your team constantly changing?
• Is it unclear who, when and where works in the team and how your team can best coordinate with each other on-site or hybrid?

Solution area

Phase B: Assessment of Suitable Hybrid Workspaces

• Design hybrid workspaces for your team
• 3 tasks = 90 minutes
• Outcome: Agreed-upon workspace needs for collaboration in your team

When phase B should be carried out:
• Who says A, must also say B :)
• It is unclear which workspaces with which characteristics best suit the tasks, processes and structures in your team?

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3 — Introduction

What can you expect as a team when working on the TOOLBOX?

• The TOOLBOX is designed to be simple and self-explanatory, so that you can work on it as a team without professional support or moderation.
• Choose one person from the team to guide you through the individual work steps and take care of the documentation of the work results, which is largely automatic.
• Use your insights to openly and creatively explore solutions for spatial and technical measures. In many cases, small actions can already have a significant impact and motivate all parties involved to initiate further developments.

How can your organisation support you?

• When designing hybrid workplaces, economic, spatial, technical, structural, procedural, cultural and social factors must be considered. To manage this complexity, we recommend appointing a central contact person who supports the teams and consolidates the results.
• It should be clear to everyone involved that not all wishes for innovative workspaces can be realised by the organisation.
• With the TOOLBOX, your team can easily identify your needs to prioritise requirements and provide well-founded justifications when discussing with stakeholders.

Moderation and Roles

For the smooth running of the two work phases A and B, certain roles are helpful:
• **Moderator:** Guides the team through the topics and methods, ensuring that all team members contribute.
• **Notekeeper:** Enters the data requested by the team into the Excel tool and notes results visibly for all.
• **Time- and Focuskeeper:** Ensures that the timeframes and goals are adhered to.

What should the team moderator keep in mind when working on the TOOLBOX?

When discussing needs in (hybrid) work models and workspaces, **contradictions often arise between individual wishes of team members and broader team requirements:**
• As a moderator, you should address these differences openly within the team to facilitate clarification.
• Please note that the TOOLBOX represents the team perspective, which is more than the sum of the perspectives of the individual team members. This is highly relevant for the completion of complex and urgent tasks.

The TOOLBOX has a **modular** structure so that you can lead your team step by step or in one go:
• **Time estimates** are guidelines. Take the time you need.
• Don't worry about mistakes when editing or analysing: **BETTER DONE THAN PERFECT.**
• Every discussion in your team is already a valuable contribution to collaboration.

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4 — Phases A and B of the TOOLBOX: Objectives, tasks and results

Phase A: Team characteristics

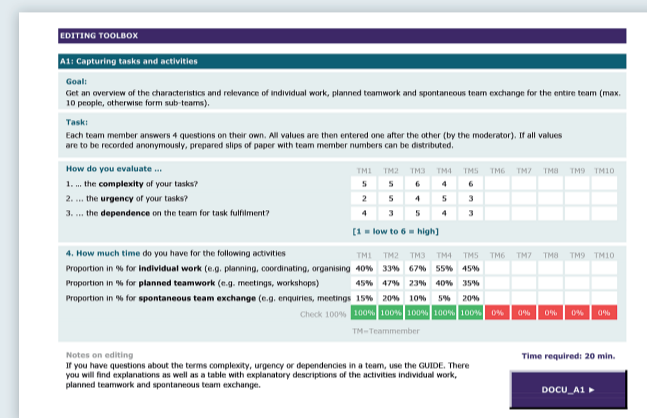#### A1: Capturing tasks and activities

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_A1**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_A1**, the results of your team's mini-survey are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 20 min

Goal: Overview of the tasks and activities of the entire team (max. of 10 people, otherwise create sub-teams).

Task: Each team member individually answers the following four questions:
1. How do you assess the complexity of your tasks?
2. How do you assess the urgency of your tasks?
3. How do you assess the dependency on other team members in completing your tasks?
4. How much of your time is spent on individual work, planned teamwork, and spontaneous team exchange?

Result: By calculating the averages of all answers, you will get an overview of the conditions for team collaboration.

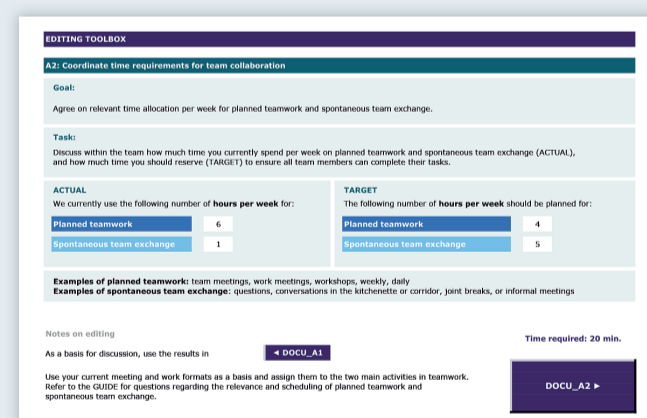#### A2: Coordinate time requirements for team collaboration

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_A2**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_A2**, the results of your decisions are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 20 min

Goal: Agreement on the relevant time allocation per week for planned teamwork and spontaneous team exchange.

Task: Discuss as a team how much time you currently spend each week on planned teamwork and spontaneous team exchange, and how much time you should reserve to ensure that all team members could fulfil their tasks.

Result: You have collectively recorded your current team times per week (ACTUAL) and agreed on the necessary team times for collaboration (TARGET).

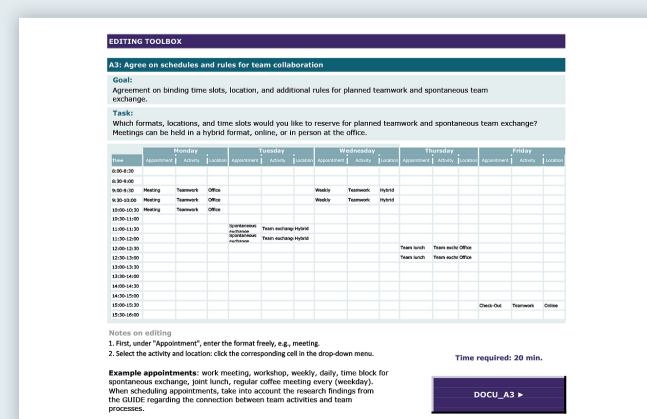#### A3: Agree on schedules and rules for team collaboration

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_A3**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_A3**, the results of your team's scheduling agreements are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 20 min

Goal: Agreement on binding time slots, places, and additional rules for planned teamwork and spontaneous team exchange.

Task: Which time slots and formats would you like to reserve for planned teamwork and spontaneous team exchange? Meetings can be hybrid, online, or in person. What additional rules would you like to establish for your collaboration?

Result: You have agreed on a binding schedule for your team's collaboration.

Phase B: Workplace characteristics

B4: Choosing suitable workspaces

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_B4**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_B4**, the results of your team's selection are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 40 min

Goal: Overview of working spaces that best and least suit your team for individual work, (hybrid) planned teamwork, and (hybrid) spontaneous team exchange.

Task: Together, select 9 of the 12 possible workspaces from the overview of workspaces (6) that best suit your activities in the office and in hybrid settings. Enter the respective numbering of the workspaces according to the degree of suitability (high, medium, low).

Result: You have developed a selection of suitable workspaces for office and hybrid activities.
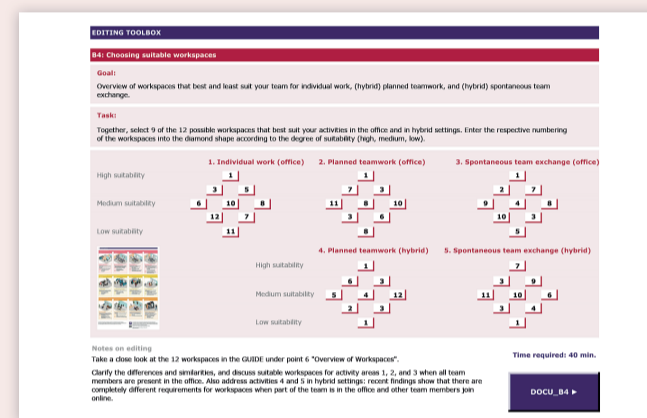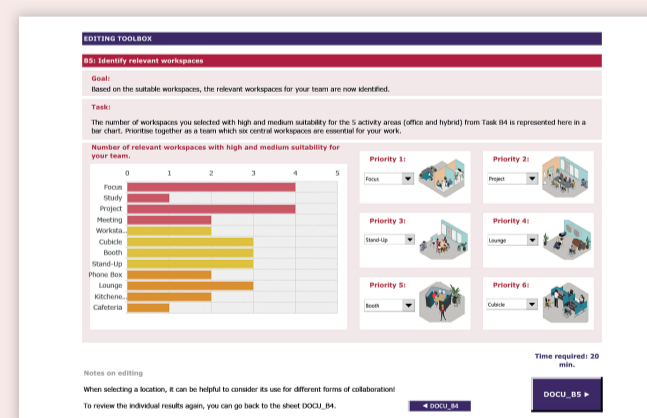

B5: Identify relevant workspaces

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_B5**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_B5**, the results of your team's selection are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 20 min

Goal: Based on the suitable workspaces, the relevant workspaces for your team are now identified.

Task: The number of workspaces you selected with high and medium suitability for the five activity areas (office and hybrid) from Task B4 are summarised. Prioritise together as a team which six central workspaces are essential for your work.

Result: You will receive an overview of the workspaces that were most frequently identified by your team.

B6: Reflecting the needs of workspaces

Open the TOOLBOX and access the sheet **TOOL_B6**, and follow the instructions. In the sheet **DOCU_B6**, the results of your team's reflection on needs are displayed and can be discussed.

Duration: approx. 30 min

Goal: Based on the suitable and relevant workspaces, your needs for working environments are reflected on in the team.

Task: Discuss your potential needs and requirements for the six workspaces you have prioritised using the following questions.

Result: You gain clarity about the team requirements and integration in the organisational context.
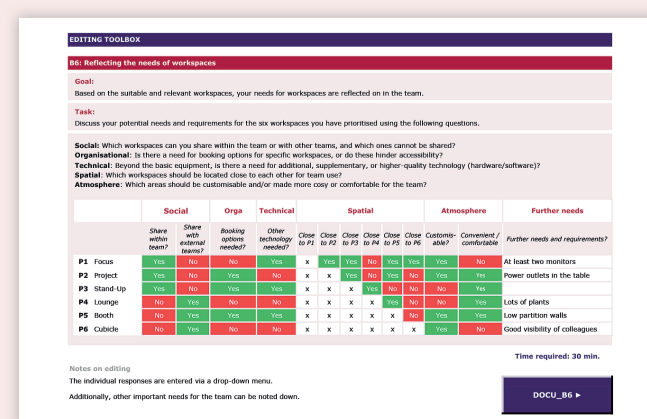
In the following, key findings from the research project on team characteristics, localisation and working environments are summarised. When working on the TOOLBOX, you can use the key findings as a team to categorise and discuss your results.

TEAM CHARACTERISTICS: HOW do we work alone and together as a team?

Individual work
- When working in a team, individual work is the most important area of activity for the team members.
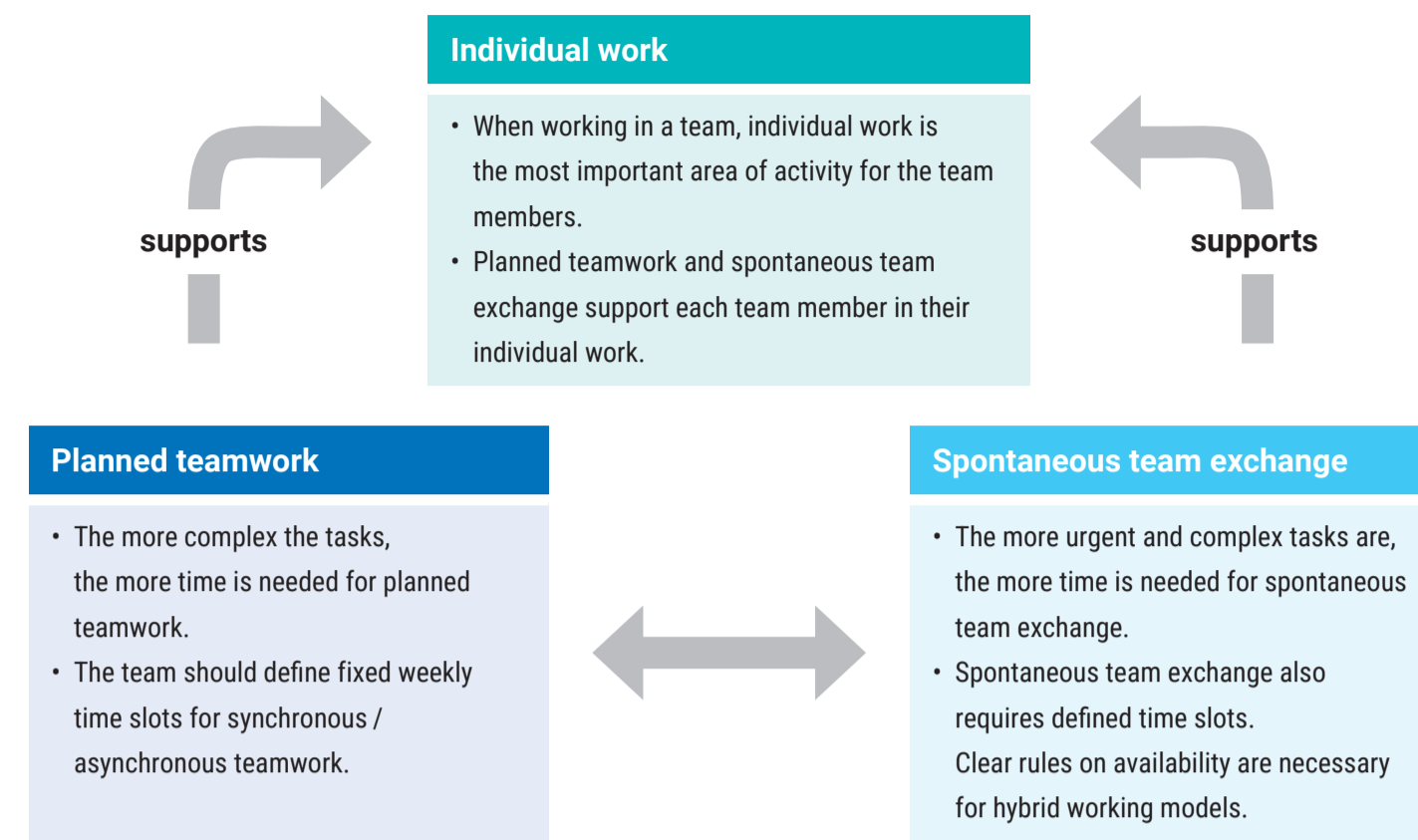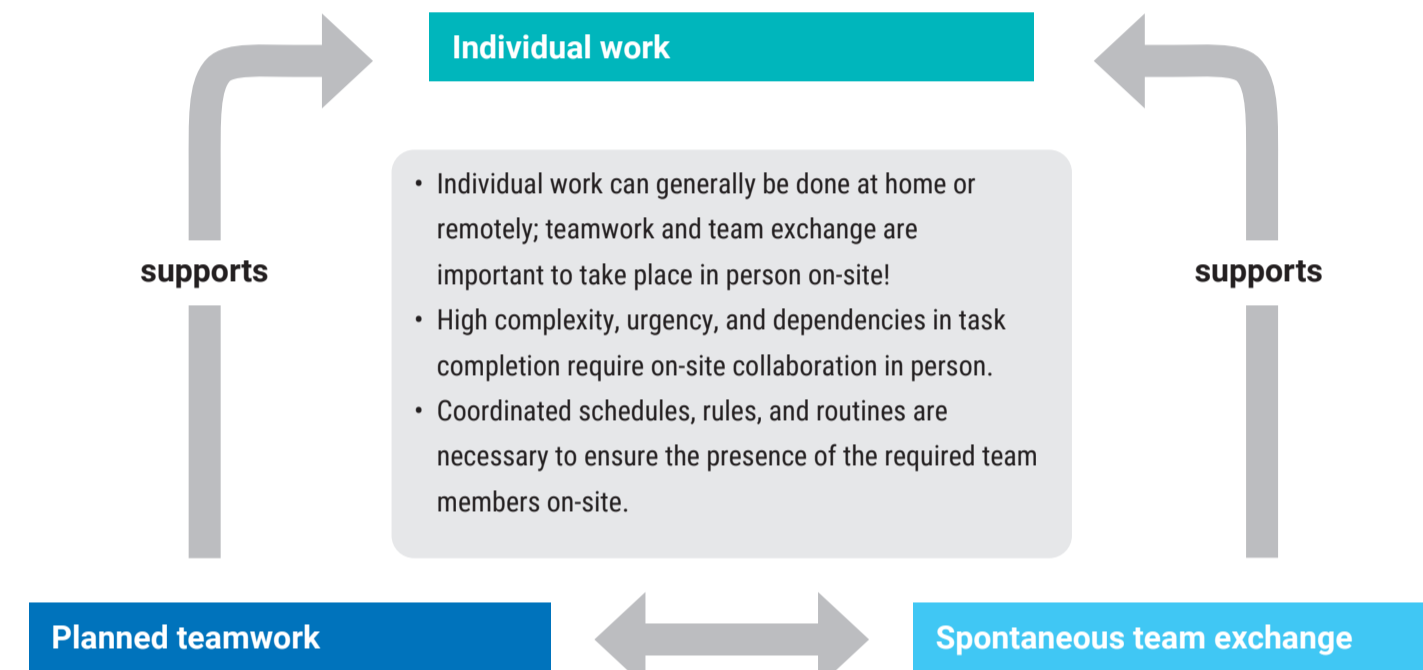- Planned teamwork and spontaneous team exchange support each team member in their individual work.

supports ← → **supports**

Planned teamwork
- The more complex the tasks, the more time is needed for planned teamwork.
- The team should define fixed weekly time slots for synchronous / asynchronous teamwork.

Spontaneous team exchange
- The more urgent and complex tasks are, the more time is needed for spontaneous team exchange.
- Spontaneous team exchange also requires defined time slots. Clear rules on availability are necessary for hybrid working models.

LOCALISATION: WHY should we work together in the office?

Individual work
- Individual work can generally be done at home or remotely; teamwork and team exchange are important to take place in person on-site!
- High complexity, urgency, and dependencies in task completion require on-site collaboration in person.
- Coordinated schedules, rules, and routines are necessary to ensure the presence of the required team members on-site.

supports ← → **supports**

Planned teamwork ← → **Spontaneous team exchange**

Time- and place-flexible collaboration in teams

Hybrid work models allow for both synchronous (simultaneous) and asynchronous (time-shifted) work in the office or other places, fundamentally increasing the complexity of work organisation.

Hybrid workplace: Team members are simultaneously in the office, at home, or on the move.
- *Synchronous:* Simultaneous collaboration from different places (e.g., hybrid meetings).
- *Asynchronous:* Collaboration at different times and places using digital tools (e.g., shared documents, project management tools).

Virtual workplace: Team members work online from various places.
- *Synchronous:* Simultaneous virtual collaboration (e.g., video calls).
- *Asynchronous:* Time-shifted virtual collaboration using digital tools (e.g., email, chat).

Physical workplace: Team members work on-site in the office.
- *Synchronous:* Simultaneous collaboration in the office (e.g., workshop).
- *Asynchronous:* Time-shifted collaboration in the office using analogue and digital tools (e.g., whiteboard, flipchart).

	Synchronous	Asynchronous
Hybrid workplace	Teamwork at different places	Teamwork independent from time and place
Virtual workplace	Teamwork online	
Physical workplace	Teamwork on-site	

Which activities are relevant when collaborating in a team?

Team members switch between individual work, planned meetings and spontaneous encounters. These activities vary in importance and frequency in teams and among individual team members. The table helps to differentiate between individual work, teamwork and team exchange and to understand the different activities.

1. Individual work	2. Teamwork	3. Team exchange
1.1 Administrative routine tasks e.g. written communication, planning and organising task	**2.1 Meetings** e.g. plan, coordinate or monitor planned and regular team tasks	**3.1 Spontaneous exchange** e.g. clarify tasks / appointments during meeting in the kitchenette or across the desk
1.2 Analysing problems, building and deepening factual knowledge e.g. researching and reading texts, organising notes, or gathering ideas	**2.2 Working meetings** e.g. planned collaborative analysis of problems, building and deepening factual knowledge	**3.2 Spontaneous problem solving** e.g. brief, intensive brainstorming in the corridor or withdrawing for more intensive discussion in the team
1.3 Developing new approaches e.g. systematically or freely comparing, elaborating, and evaluating ideas	**2.3 Workshops** e.g. developing new ideas in a planned team and linking knowledge to solve problems	**3.3 Informal meetings** e.g. exchanging knowledge over spontaneous or planned lunch meetings

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WORKSPACES

WHERE and HOW can we work well together in the office?

Based on appointments, rules and routines suitable workspaces for team collaboration in the office can be designed.

Workspaces for team collaboration and team interactions should...
- be easily accessible and located close to workspaces for individual work,
- technically support team interaction so that team members can always be integrated online,
- be accessible or available (on-site/hybrid) during core hours to allow for spontaneous team exchange when needed, and
- be designed to enable confidential interactions between team members.

For spontaneous team exchange, informal spaces with a pleasant atmosphere are needed, located close to individual workstations and usable without organisational barriers (e.g., booking systems).

Workspaces for individual work should...
- be technically well-equipped, quiet retreat spaces,
- be in close proximity to team members to ensure spontaneous exchange.

Rules for the use of different workspaces are necessary to...
- avoid disturbances from noise during spontaneous team exchange,
- ensure that team members are available for spontaneous exchange and that available spaces (in the office) are rarely left unused,
- facilitate the shared use of workspaces within and between teams (who uses what and when).

A shared mindset is essential for the appropriate use of workspaces:
- Usage rules must be negotiated within and between teams.
- A team (member) can act as an experience manager to convey and communicate this mindset.

Technology and Diversity
- For hybrid team collaboration, a wider variety of workspaces is needed compared to in-person teamwork.
- The technical equipment in working environments must consistently support team collaboration, regardless of whether team members are participating on-site or online.
- The more complex and time-consuming team tasks are, the more diverse workspaces teams require.

How can team members assess task complexity?

An understanding of task complexity helps you to evaluate your team processes. The more complex a task is, the more time is required for coordination within the team or the more complex team processes become (based on Bell & Kozlowski, 2002):

Low — Pooled — Sequential — Reciprocal — Intensive — High complexity
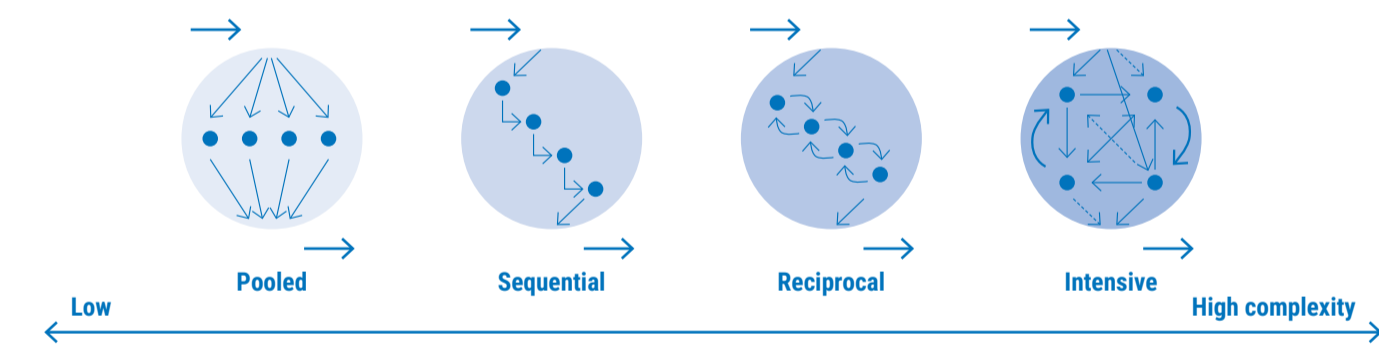
Explanations can be found in the table:

Complexity	Team processes	Coordination	Example
Low	Parallel processing of clearly defined tasks	Minimal coordination	Each team member creates their own section of the report.
Low to medium	Step-by-step processing of clearly defined tasks	Occasional coordination	One team member collects data and passes it on for analysis.
Medium to high	Changing, iterative processing of less clearly defined tasks	Regular coordination	Joint development of a concept.
High	Dynamic processing with overlapping task areas	Constant coordination	Simultaneous work on different process or product areas.

How can you assess dependencies within the team?

The higher the degree of dependency (e.g., tasks, goals, outcomes) between team members in completing tasks, the more complex the coordination of activities and the alignment of roles within the team becomes.

Degree of Dependency	Example
Low	Team members can complete their tasks largely without help or input from others.
Medium	Team members require occasional coordination or input to complete their tasks.
High	Team members are heavily reliant on the results of others.

How can you assess the urgency of tasks within the team?

The more urgent a task is, the faster it needs to be completed. Assessing urgency helps organise team processes and team structures.

Urgency	Task Description	Example
Low	Tasks that can be planned and completed without time pressure.	Updating documentation
Medium	Tasks that need to be prepared and completed within a specific time frame.	Planning a workshop
High	Tasks that arise ad hoc and require immediate attention.	Fixing a critical system error

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Closed workspaces – Perfect for concentrated work and confidential discussions.

1. Focus

Soundproof room as a retreat for one to a max. of two people
- Suitable for tasks that require concentration and/or privacy
- Can also be used for small meetings and phone/video calls

Capacity: 1 to 2 people (6 sqm), 1 to 2 rooms per 20 people
Location: Within the area of both closed and open workplaces
Media: Desk monitor(s)

2. Study

Multiple workstations for focused work alongside others
- Suitable as a retreat from conversations and interruptions in open work areas – similar to a reading room in a library (no phones, no conversations)

Capacity: Depends on the number of workstations, 1 per 50 or 100 people
Location: Within closed and open working environments or centrally located
Media: Desk monitor(s)

3. Project

Multiple workstations for intensive collaboration
- Suitable for project or teamwork that is confidential and/or requires frequent coordination

Capacity: Depends on the number of workstations and the project work
Location: Within closed and open workspaces
Media: Desk monitor(s), mobile monitor or wall monitor, audio and video technology, whiteboard, flipchart

4. Meeting

Meeting room for multiple people in various sizes
- Suitable for different types of meetings, e.g., confidential discussions, team meetings, client meetings, etc.

Capacity: S: 1 to 2 people (6–10 sqm), 1 per 10–20 workstations
M: 8 to 12 people (24–30 sqm), 1 to 2 per 50 workstations
L: 14+ people (>48 sqm), as needed
Location: S/M: Near workspaces
L: Centralised as a conference room
Media: Mobile monitor or wall monitor, audio and video technology, whiteboards, flipcharts

Open workspaces – Ideal for team collaboration and dialogue.

5. Workstation

Workstations in groups of 4, 6, or 8 units
- Suitable for cooperative collaboration and general office tasks requiring a moderate level of concentration

Capacity: 4 to 6 sqm, 4 to 6 units per 10 people
Location: Away from busy areas and social gathering spots
Media: Desk monitor(s)

6. Cubicle

Semi-open workstations with visual privacy
- Suitable for tasks requiring moderate concentration and moderate interaction

Capacity: 4 to 6 sqm, 1 to 2 per 20 people
Location: Within closed and open workspaces
Media: Desk monitor(s)

7. Booth

Space for small meetings, collaboration, and individual work
- Suitable for meetings that provide a sense of privacy while still being part of the open space

Capacity: 1 to 4 people, 5 to 8 sqm, 1 to 2 per 50 people
Location: Near (open) workspaces (possibly kitchenette/cafeteria)
Media: Optional desk or wall monitor, whiteboard

8. Stand-up

Space for stand-up meetings, e.g., for agile working methods
- Suitable for informal discussions and meetings without seating

Capacity: Depends on the team size and number of scrum or agile teams
Location: Near or part of (open) workspaces
Media: Mobile monitor or wall monitor, audio and video technology, whiteboard, flipchart

Complementary workspaces – Flexible spaces that can be used for both individual work and team exchange.

9. Lounge

Open space with an informal, comfortable atmosphere
- Suitable as a gathering place for teams or departments, as well as for informal conversations, relaxation, or work

Capacity: 20 to 32 sqm, 1 per 100 workstations or 1 per floor/area
Location: At entrances (building, floor, workspaces) or as a complement to the kitchenette/cafeteria
Media: Optional, based on needs for multifunctional use

10. Kitchenette

Space for getting beverages and food
- Suitable as a place to encourage social interaction and encounters

Capacity: 6 to 15 sqm, 1 per 50 people or 1 per floor/area
Location: Near workspaces (be mindful of noise)
Media: Optional mobile monitor or wall monitor, whiteboard

11. Cafeteria

Space where employees and guests can eat
- Suitable as an informal meeting point during and outside of meal times, and also as a workspace

Capacity: 2.5 sqm per seat, 1 per building/office unit
Location: Centrally located
Media: Optional, based on needs for multifunctional use

12. Phone Box

Acoustic pod
- For phone or video calls that require a certain level of concentration and privacy
- Should be used to avoid potentially disruptive activities, especially in open workspaces

Capacity: 2 to 4 sqm, 1 per 20 to 30 people
Location: Within closed and open workspaces
Media: No special requirements

References: Bell, B. S. & Kozlowski, S. W. J. (2002). A Typology of Virtual Teams. *Group & Organisation Management*, 27(1), 14-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601102027001003
van Meel, J. (2020). *The activity-based working practice guide* (2nd ed.). ICOP.