THE EVOLUTION OF
COLLABORATION:

Meeting Considerations in the Post-Pandemic Landscape

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OVERVIEW

The Evolution of Collaboration: Meeting Considerations in the Post-Pandemic Landscape

Never before have we witnessed such dramatic change in the field of workplace design. The past two years have seen a shift in human behavior, organizational processes, and diverse technologies. In comes a new era of workplace design heralded by the principles of agility, humanity, inclusivity, and community.

Professionals have developed new habits and expectations about how work gets done. As we navigate the definition of the post-pandemic workplace for our clients, one question consistently comes to the forefront: *How can we support the optimum meeting experience for a hybrid workforce?*

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" As organizations return to the workplace, collaboration settings have to adapt and support a new way of working. "

BEFORE & AFTER

Post-Pandemic Collaboration

PRE-PANDEMIC WORK

Collaboration has always been considered to be a driver of organizational success. Prior to March 2020, collaboration focused primarily on two space types: the conference room and the open collaboration area. These spaces served all forms of interactions from presentations, training, and traditional meetings to brainstorming. The mechanics of meeting rooms included a table, LCD screen, and a polycom.

The in-person meeting experience spanned pre-meeting banter, post-meeting follow-up, and brought undivided attendee attention. Food, beverages, and social interactions were often ancillary enrichments to the actual meeting. Though remote audiences were frequently present, their experience was considered secondary; the in-room experience was prioritized.

PHILOSOPHY SHIFT

Two years of virtual meetings and a commitment to hybrid work have raised questions about the meaning and mechanics of collaboration. Participants are now accustomed to an equality of experience on video platforms driven by the democratic thumbnail views of all attendees—equal access for all. With no requirement for travel, meetings have become more efficient while exposing technology deficiencies, inadvertently enabling distracting multi-tasking during calls, and triggering burnout resulting from an endless stream of video calls.

As organizations return to the workplace, collaboration settings have to adapt and support a new way of working. No longer does one size fit all. Organizers need to consider meeting use case and participant experience, aligning both to meeting setting. To plan a meeting there are fundamental criteria. >

WHAT TYPE OF MEETING IS BEING PLANNED?

WHERE SHOULD MEETING PARTICIPANTS BE LOCATED?

HOW MANY OCCUPANTS ARE PARTICIPATING?

WHAT ARE THE SPATIAL MECHANICS OF THE ROOM?

CONSIDERATIONS

What Type of Meeting?

The word collaboration generated a buzz in the '90s, describing any instance when two or more people work together to drive business solutions forward. The use of the word typically conveys a positive connotation, alluding to betterment, innovation, growth, transparency, and communication. Businesses thrive based on a healthy collaborative culture.

Though collaboration tends to be generalized as a word and a concept, there are a variety of collaboration types. While defining meeting type was once secondary to bringing people together, post-pandemic collaboration sees definition as critical to success. What type will best support intended outcomes and goals? Should those outcomes be driven by a presentation format, a scrum session, or a traditional meeting? Curating the meeting type allows organizers to best achieve meeting success. ∨

PRESENTER & AUDIENCE

Formal Presentations, Town Halls and External Customer Facing Events.

FORMAL TRAINING

Instructionals, Question & Answer, Interactive Sessions, and Hands-On Onboarding.

WORKSHOP & BRAINSTORMING

Ideating, Problem Solving and Pursuing Innovative Solutions.

OPEN COLLABORATION

Ad Hoc and Impromptu Meetings, Stand-Ups, and Changes of Scenery.

TRADITIONAL MEETINGS

Check-Ins, Reporting & Alignments, and Interactive Conversations.

CONSIDERATIONS

Why In-Person, Virtual or Hybrid?

WHY IN PERSON?

The in-person model remains strong for those collaboration settings where relationship building is a side-product of the meeting intention. Face-to-face collaboration breeds better engagement not only during the meeting but also offers opportunities for pre/post-meeting conversations that support interpersonal connections.

In-person collaboration is clearly stronger when physical materials are required and, of course, for those scrum workshop sessions where a loose stream of dialogue is complimented by active interactions such as white-boarding, posting notes, and physical creation.

WHY IN-ROOM HYBRID?

Hybrid meetings are not as ideal as the 100% face-to-face or 100% virtual models. No matter how this experience is curated, there is a gap between in-room and virtual audience that is challenging to overcome. In its most successful form, hybrid meetings prefer less in-room participants. Room sizes are smaller for a more intimate connection to the remote audience.

This type of meeting is desired when some level of face-to-face connection is desired. Audio-visual and acoustics are critical for the success of hybrid meetings.

WHY VIRTUAL OR AT DESK?

A 100% virtual meeting allows for equality of experience. Everyone is represented in the same size thumbnail view on a screen. Access to and for all participants is similar. Because participants do not have to plan for travel time, locating meeting rooms, or technology set-up, virtual meetings are efficient, accessible, and easy to maneuver. In fact, the rise of 15-minute to 30-minute meetings have now replaced what was the typical one-hour meeting when held face-to-face. Virtual meetings are preferred when the participants are distributed and appear to be more successful than the hybrid meetings with 10 or more attendees.

CONSIDERATIONS

How Many Occupants are Participating?

Every organization is striving for an equality of experience between in-person and remote participants. In most instances, organizations seek solutions that are the most cost-effective, flexible, and scalable. In any circumstance, audio-visual systems have to be part of the solution.

In planning the optimum meeting, size does matter. Spaces that accommodate six or less people have the scale, viewing angles, and participant connectivity to balance the in-person and hybrid experience. Once the participant size exceeds eight, either the in-person experience or the remote experience has to be prioritized. In most cases, a more sophisticated audio-visual system is assumed.
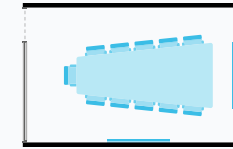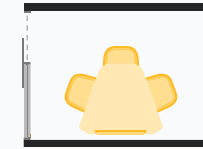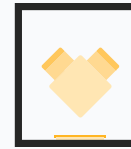
EQUITABLE EXPERIENCE FOR REMOTE & IN-PERSON (1-8)

Meetings with up to 8 participants allow for equitable experiences across remote, in-person and hybrid scenarios.

PRIORITIZE IN-PERSON OR REMOTE (8+)

Meetings beyond eight participants will benefit from prioritizing either in-person or remote scenarios.

(1-8) EQUITABLE EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH REMOTE & IN-PERSON

(8+) PRIORITIZE EITHER IN-PERSON OR REMOTE

What are the Spatial Mechanics of the Room?

The spatial mechanics of any collaboration space that includes remote participation have to be carefully curated. View angles must be calibrated, and **lighting is critical**. The surface behind in-room occupants must be carefully considered. Wall colors are best mid-tone. A too-dark color may blend with darker skin and hair-tones. A too-light wall finish creates glare and hot spots. Distractions created by glass and visible circulation should be mitigated.

Furniture selection is fundamental to the room's success. Does it support the in-person or hybrid meeting use case? Does the placement of table and chairs allow views to the screen and of the in-person occupants? To avoid glare on the face of participants, non-white surface finishes are recommended for tables. Acoustic wall paneling and absorbent finishes and ceilings must support in-person and remote communication quality. The final success factor is the selection of the audio-visual technology specific to room type.
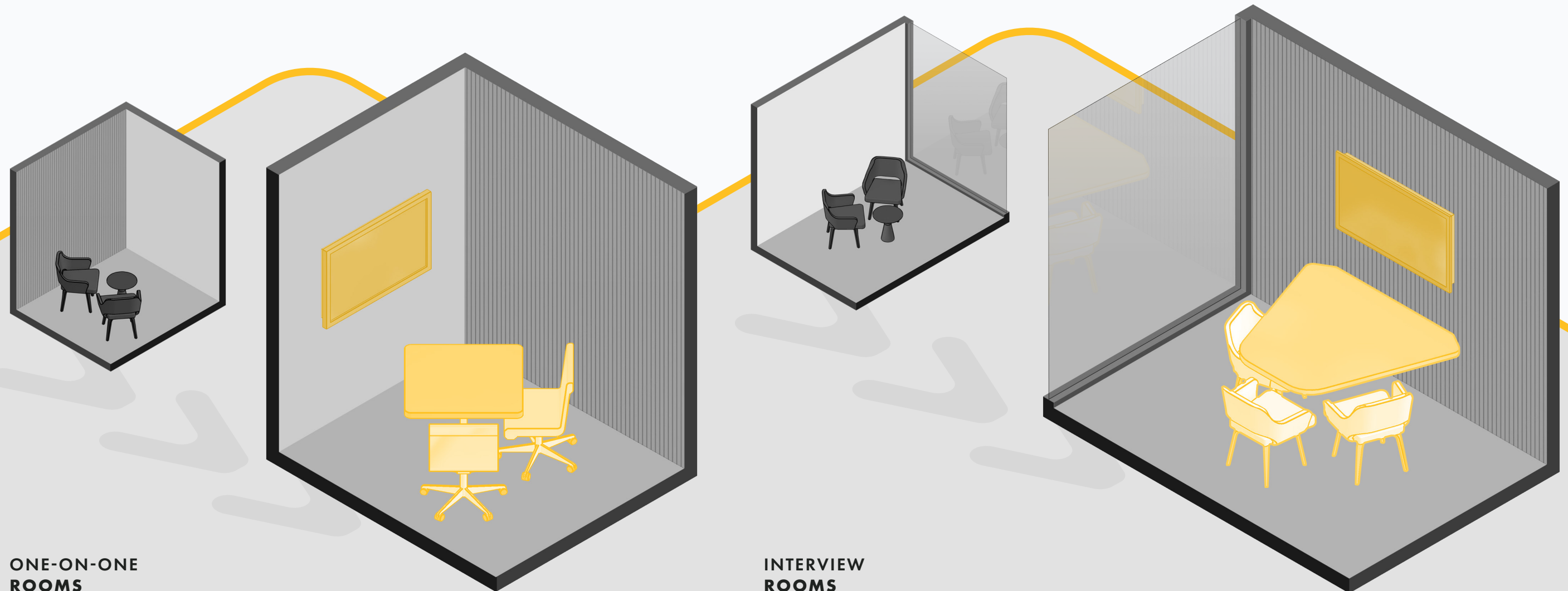
ONE-ON-ONE ROOMS
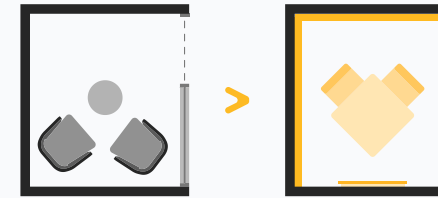
INTERVIEW ROOMS

1 Introduce audiovisual technologies to support collaboration.
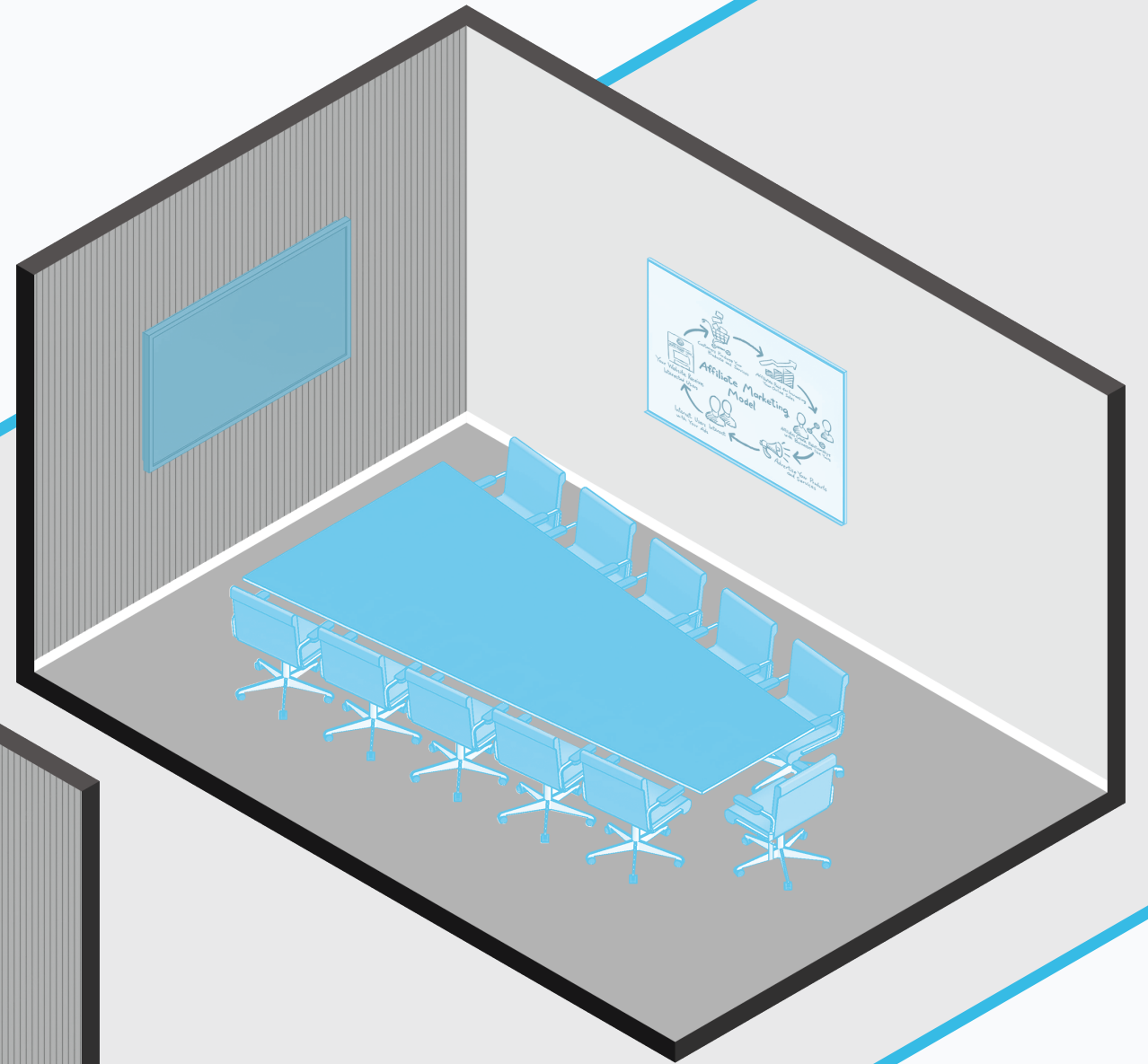
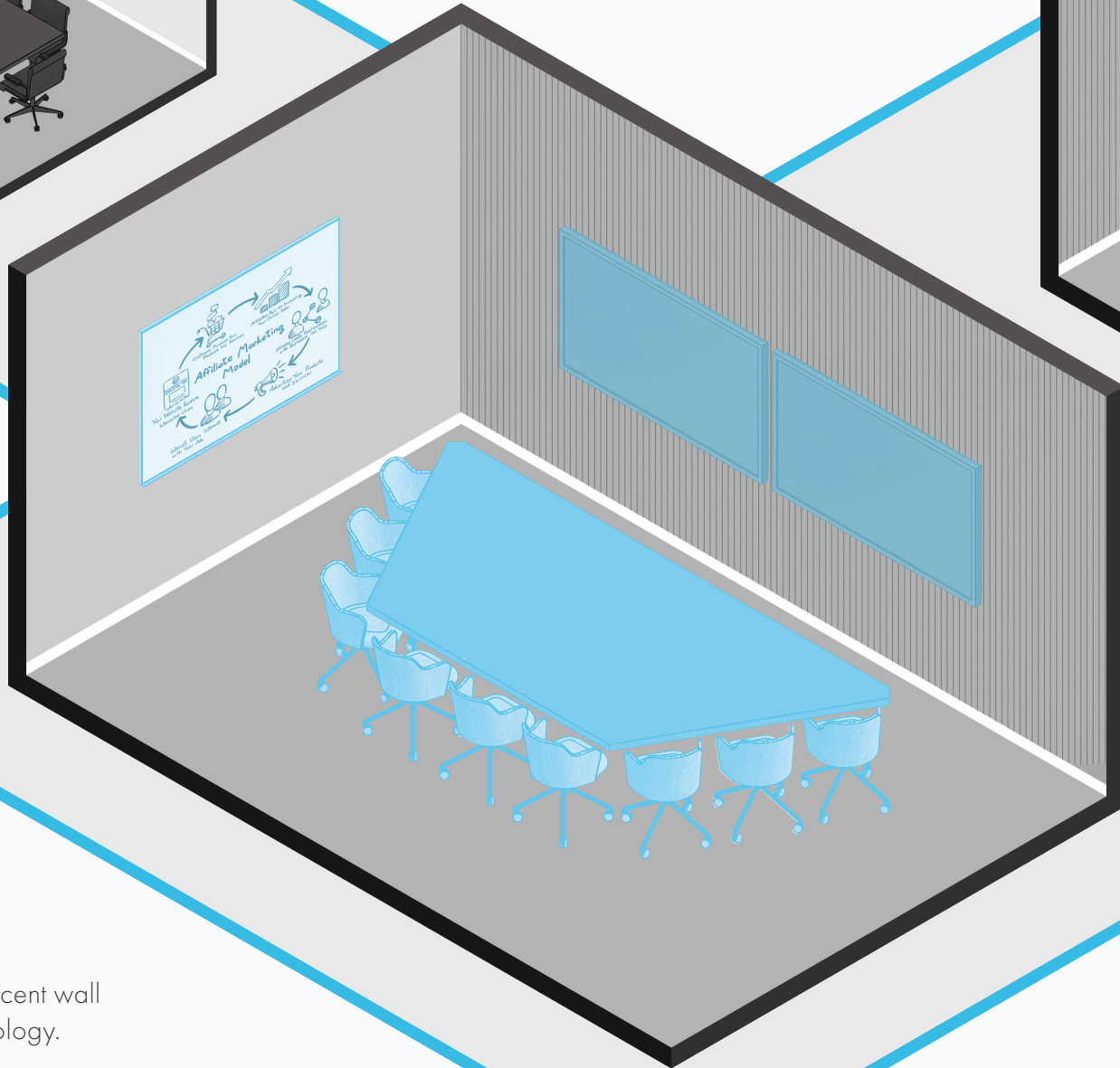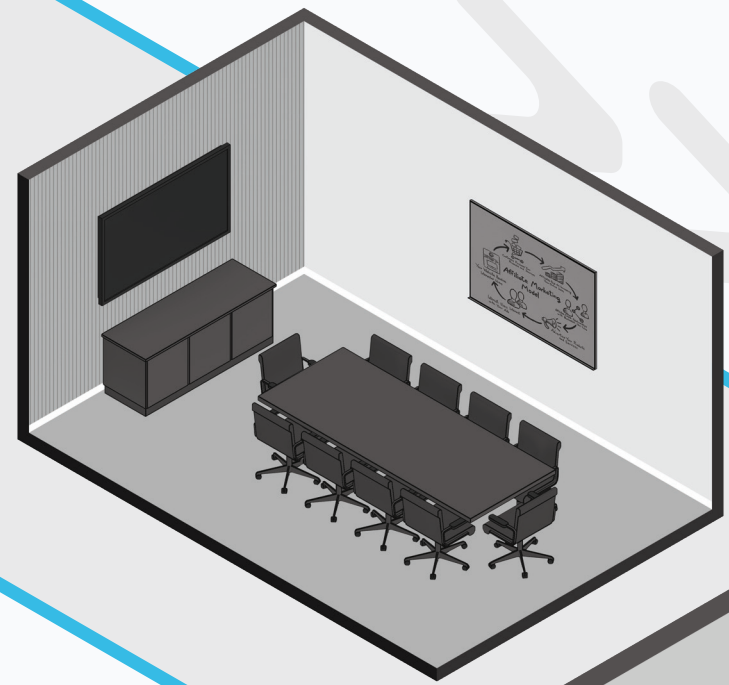2 Modify lighting to create a better VC experience.
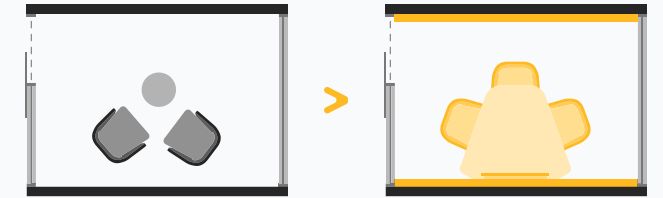
3 Place mid-tone accent wall across from technology.

4 Introduce or relocate acoustic wall panels accordingly.
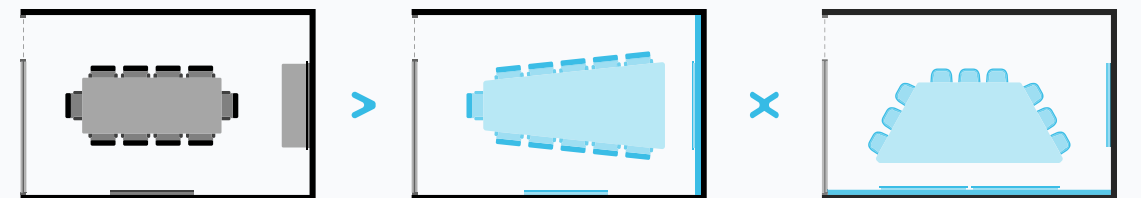
ONE-ON-ONE ROOMS

INTERVIEW ROOMS

CONSIDERATIONS

1. Place mid-tone accent wall across from technology.

2. Introduce individual face capture with one camera.

3. Introduce or relocate acoustic wall panels accordingly.

4. Consider a new table that supports better viewing angles.

MEDIUM CONFERENCE ROOMS

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CONCLUSION

Post Pandemic Collaboration

When it comes to planning collaboration spaces, thoughtful intentionality will optimize the participant experience and meeting outcome. The pre-pandemic philosophy of one-size-fits-all does not necessarily ring true today. Ultimately, an organization may choose that approach for its workplace, which does simplify the curation required to organize a meeting as well as the change management and education of staff as meeting contributors.

Although that experience may suffice for some meetings, for others it may lean toward inequality, a factor organizations will need to understand. From the available options, choosing what will work best for the organization and its culture is the challenge.

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