



CFI for Legal “Interior Space Utilization Trends”

The legal community is not immune to the cost and profit pressures of the broader business world. Economic forces have caused this segment to seek new ways of containing and reducing overhead expenses, while enabling best practices in the field of law.

The purpose of this document is to provide a three level analysis of how the general law industry has approached their office space over the past years. This analysis will cover Historical Space Utilization Metrics, Drivers for Change, and Current Utilization Trends. With this information, stakeholders serving the legal community may derive valuable insights on how to approach office space design and layout to be aligned with the broad direction of this industry.

HISTORICAL SPACE UTILIZATION METRICS

Concepts of hierarchy and seniority have been strongly reinforced by physical space allocations. Legal office environments are steeped in traditional layouts and have been guided by the perspectives of the “boomer” generation. The following serves as the baseline of what has been done in these occupancies:

TYPE	LOCATION	SQ FOOTAGE
Partner office	Exterior view, corners	225
Associate office	Interior view	150
Support staff	8x8 workstations or built in millwork	64
Conference room(s)	Exterior views	300
Law library	Interior	300-750

DRIVERS FOR CHANGE

DRIVER	RESULTING CHANGE(S)
Technology/digital media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in size of legal libraries • Support/Lawyer ratio approaching 3-4:1
Rising cost of travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Video and Teleconferencing
Increased collaboration/teaming/ more egalitarian culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creation of team/project rooms • Updating to "café" environments • Establishing universal office size
Rising cost of real estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associates sharing private offices • Establishing a universal office size • Designing for long term flexibility • Utilization of modular interior elements • Early term renegotiation of leases

CURRENT UTILIZATION TRENDS

The legal industry admits that change comes slowly. Like most industries, the law field has changed over the years because of variations in the economy, politics, and technology. These and other factors are shifting how firms approach and offer work, and how they use and design the office environment. Where change is taking place, the following are being seen as areas of significant movement in response to the "drivers" stated above.

TYPE	LOCATION	SQ FOOTAGE
Universal office (for all)	Glass fronts and side walls	160
Support staff	6x6 workstations with access to daylight and views	36
Conference centers	Large conference rooms that can be subdivided for smaller events and meetings. They contain built-in AV, catering kitchens, touchdown spaces, and full array of business services for the firm and clients.	500-1500
Law library	Large libraries are becoming more compact and digital	200-525
Caserooms/workrooms/practice suites	Large open rooms that are subdivided to support teamwork, meetings, training	Varies
Lunchroom/Cafes	Upgraded traditional cafeterias resembling lounges for work, talk, and relaxation	Varies

SUMMARY

At most big law firms, private offices are the rule. A strict hierarchy prevails: administrative support in open pods, paralegals in workstations, associates in offices by windows, partners in larger offices, and senior partners in corner locations with the best views. The traditional law firm layout has not really changed very much. At best, it has become more efficient.

Yet, change is coming slowly, pushed by clients to cut costs. Some law firms are experimenting with layouts that reflect new organizational structures and new ways of working.

Law firms are seeking greater teamwork, collaboration, and openness (both physical and cultural.) Space planning must answer the question- how will they work in the future and plan for it today?

ABOUT CFI



Based in Mountainside, NJ, CFI is a full service interiors provider serving clients based in the NJ metropolitan area- wherever they have projects in North America. We represent a wide array of manufacturers of furniture and interior elements for corporate, education, healthcare, and government environments. Our team consists of designers, project managers, applications experts, and a dedication to excellence unparalleled in the contract furniture industry. Please visit www.cfioffice.com to learn more.

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