



Knoll Workplace Research

Project Case Study: *Automotive*

Daimler Trucks

North America – Portland, OR

When Daimler Trucks North America decided to invest in a new headquarters for their design and engineering hub in Portland, Oregon, they wanted to take the opportunity to provide not only an attractive, useful space for their employees to work, but also improve productivity and company culture. They found in Knoll and furniture dealer Environments, a willing and knowledgeable partner to help carry this vision forward.

Knoll

PROJECT OVERVIEW

DRIVERS

- + Increase employee trust and communication
- + Integrate Daimler branding into interior spaces
- + Create more collaborative, open areas
- + Achieve LEED Platinum certification
- + Attract top design talent to Portland
- + Bring all employees onto one campus
- + Encourage a healthy lifestyle for employees

TACTICS

- + Employee surveys about workplace preferences
- + Smaller individual workspaces with lower horizon heights
- + Neighborhoods that encourage interaction
- + Excellent use of natural light and downtown views
- + Common areas with playful furniture and full connectivity
- + Proactive communication about new building and workspaces updates
- + Adjustable chairs, monitors and desks for individual comfort
- + Interior style that reflects Daimler products' colors and materials
- + Location on a bike path with showers and storage

OUTCOMES

- + 90%+ of employees located on one campus
- + Increased employee interaction and happiness
- + More meetings in open common spaces

- + Room for collaborative spaces without reducing headcount
- + On-track for LEED Platinum certification
- + New design standard to be used for Daimler globally
- + Better access to nature and outdoor recreation activities

SCOPE

- + 268,000 square feet
- + 1,100 employees

PRODUCTS

- + Systems Furniture: AutoStrada® Technology Spine Wall; Antenna® Workspaces Overhead Units, Privacy Screens, Worksurfaces; Anchor™ Pedestals; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Reff Profiles™ Panels, Desktop Power
- + Accessories: Highwire® Under-cabinet Lights, Sapper™ XYZ Monitor Arms, Orchestra® Collection
- + Tables: Antenna® Workspaces Tables, Dividends Horizon® Tables, Power Cube, Reff Profiles™ Tables, Toboggan™ Pull Tables
- + Lounge Seating: Architecture & Associés Sofa, Jehs+Laub Lounge Chairs, k.™ lounge Collection, Womb Chairs
- + Task and Side Seating: Generation by Knoll® Work Chairs, Life® Chairs, MultiGeneration by Knoll® Hybrid and Stacking Chairs

YEAR COMPLETED

- + 2016

Drivers

Rethink Workspaces Altogether

A 70-year old company with a well-established culture, Daimler Trucks North America hadn't spent much time reviewing its work environments or its effect on employee satisfaction.

Matt Markstaller, Real Estate Manager for Daimler Trucks North America, describes the planning of the new headquarters as the first time he and his team could really start fresh and think strategically about their workplace design. "It was an opportunity for us to not just evolutionize but revolutionize what we were doing," says Markstaller.

His colleague Amy McClaughry, Project Manager for the Property and Building Management Group, also felt the difference in what was possible, describing the design process as "inside-out." "We knew the most important thing that this building was going to do was support our workforce, inspire them and make them more innovative," says McClaughry.

In particular, the facilities team wanted to diminish the isolation that large cubicles can create. "It was too easy for employees to isolate themselves in their cubicles and then be unhappy about lack of communication," says Markstaller. "We knew that we wanted to do something different and bring the walls down."



Daimler's headquarters offers plenty of beautiful outdoor spaces for employees, including a bike path along the Willamette River.



Daimler Trucks North America's new headquarters in Portland is located on Swan Island, an industrial area along the Willamette River near the Pacific Coast of Oregon.



Daimler engineers' sketches of engines and parts have been incorporated onto the walls of the headquarters, showcasing the results of the intellect and hard work of its employees.

On every floor of the building, collaboration spaces encourage employees to gather, talk and share ideas. Every shared area offers electrical outlets for device charging, whiteboards and attractive, colorful, comfortable furniture.

Featured Products: MultiGeneration by Knoll Hybrid Chairs

Attract Top Talent to Portland

Part of the reason CEO Martin Daum kept the North American headquarters in Portland was the city's reputation as a great place for design and innovation. It also hosts the headquarters for other world-class, design companies like adidas, Nike and Columbia Sportswear. Daum wanted the city and the building to attract the best talent possible. The facilities team knew the new space would need amenities to rival those in the tech industry and workspaces that inspire Daimler's greatest asset, innovative thinking.

McClaughry understood the challenge of representing the needs of her 1,000 colleagues moving into the space, "We want our employees to be happy and do their best work," says McClaughry. "Our job was to make this building so great that people would look forward to coming to the office."

Highlight the Daimler Aesthetic

In the past, Daimler's office spaces didn't tell a visitor much about the company's product, its success as an industry leader or the pride employees took in what they created. Many of the workspaces were very plain and had no elements connecting the workplace to Daimler's brand. The new headquarters needed to highlight Daimler's style, success and products.

"It was the plan to create an innovation center for Daimler and show off the work that they do. The minute you walked into the space it would be about the pride Daimler employees take in working for the company," says Gina Zaharie, who served as Senior Sales Representative for Knoll on the project.

Even bringing more of the Daimler team to their main campus on Portland's Swan Island, would help inspire a sense of unity. "A portion of the company was across the river. They would often have to come over from the other side of town to have in-person meetings," says Zaharie. The new headquarters would have nearly all employees working nearby each other for the first time.

Increase Trust Among Employees

With direction from Knoll and Environments, Daimler utilized online surveys, round tables and one-on-one interviews to gather data on employee satisfaction levels. The Knoll Workplace Strategy team also spent time working in-person with groups of employees to uncover areas of opportunity. "Daimler knew it was important to involve employees in the workplace redesign. They wanted employees to feel engaged and have a voice in the design process in order to create an environment that would build upon Daimler's strong culture and brand values," says Tracy Wymer, VP, Knoll Workplace Strategy.

"We found that we have a really good company. We have good pay, good benefits and an interesting product. But, we had trust and communications issues," says Markstaller.

Markstaller and his team knew that their current workplace layout—large, high-walled cubicles—prevented opportunities for connection. "It became obvious that the way to help foster trust and communication within the organization was through the design of their workspace" says Erica Keegan, Account Executive at Environments.





For employees who need private meeting space, MultiGeneration by Knoll Hybrid Chairs and a side table with a Reff Profiles credenza offer both meeting and storage areas.



Executive offices include wall-mounted monitors and full meeting tables to gather employees and discuss topics in private.

Featured Products: Reff Profiles System; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Generation by Knoll Work Chair; MultiGeneration by Knoll Hybrid Chairs



Workstations for managers include room for casual meetings with visitors. All meetings happen within the open floor plan, encouraging a sense of trust and teamwork amongst employees.

Featured Products: AutoStrada, Antenna Workspaces and Reff Profiles Systems; Anchor Pedestals; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Generation by Knoll Work Chairs; MultiGeneration by Knoll Hybrid Chairs; Sapper XYZ Monitor Arms

Create More Collaborative Spaces

During the surveys, many employees cited limited meeting space as a major pain point and blocker to productivity. Most of the Portland staff interact regularly with colleagues in Germany, but finding a meeting room with video conferencing capabilities had been a challenge.

“They tell stories about trying to reserve a conference room then getting bumped so many times that eventually the entire team has forgotten what they were going to meet about,” says Zaharie.

The goal was to create ample meeting spaces, both casual and formal, with outlets for technology, screens and comfortable furniture.

Tactics

A Holistic Kit of Parts

Markstaller kicked-off the redesign project with an RFP for furniture and expected to simply update the existing footprint. “We got pitched from everybody about how great their furniture was, then Knoll came to us with a new way of thinking about the whole project. This is exactly what we wanted to hear and we knew we had found the right partner to improve our space.” says Markstaller.

Knoll and Environments focused on the entire space rather than just the primary workstations. Thanks to this bigger vision, they won the project and, after some analysis, suggested moving from a 6x8 to a 6x6 individual workstation for each employee and providing more shared spaces. This was going to be a vast change for Daimler; however, the direction provided by Knoll and Environments gave them confidence in the strategy. “They guided us and applied knowledge from things that worked in the past to get a certain result. Their expertise helped minimize the risk for us in getting a good result with a rather large change that we didn’t have experience with,” says Markstaller. “We did work sessions with different groups—HR, IT, Accounting—to identify how they work, what they have today and what they would change. We took a really nice blend from what we were hearing,” says Zaharie about the new workspace layout.

Daimler’s new 6x6 workstations are setup in an L-shaped with an AutoStrada® technology

spine wall that holds all electrical and data, and has both a markerboard and tackboard. Each station has an ergonomic Generation by Knoll work chair, a Sapper™ XYZ monitor arm, a height-adjustable sit-stand desk and Anchor™ pedestal file cabinets underneath their workspace to regain some of the space lost from the previous, U-shaped workstations. The stations also have low horizons to maximize natural light.

Daimler utilized the 6x6 workstations throughout their new facility then customized the shared and breakout areas to meet the needs of the individual departments.

Workspaces are setup in neighborhoods of 16 to 18 people and designed from a “holistic kit of parts” so that workstations and shared spaces could be brought together in unique ways, creating a customized space for each group.

50-inch high file cabinets provide separation between different neighborhoods.

Room to Collaborative and Connect

Moving to 6x6 individual workstations freed up floor space without reducing headcount. That extra space translated into group areas.



Top: Employees can connect and relax in comfortable, shared areas with beautiful views of surrounding hills, the Willamette River and downtown Portland.

Featured Products: Architecture & Associés Sofa; k.™ lounge Stool; Power Cubes; Womb Chairs

Bottom: High ceilings, ample space and healthy snacks all encourage Daimler employees to spend time away from their desks working in this on-campus cafe.



Left: Glass walls for meeting rooms allow for privacy but still let in natural light. A bold, red Womb chair and the artwork both keep Daimler's products top of mind.

Right: Larger, private meeting rooms allow teams to connect with colleagues around the world, particularly at Daimler's worldwide headquarters in Germany.

Featured Products: Life chairs, Dividends Horizon Table, Reff Profile Credenza



"These spaces encourage teams to get up, work together, improve communication and foster trust within the group," says Keegan.

Daimler intentionally selected a neutral and timeless color palette for the workstations, such as the aluminum and silver AutoStrada panels to reflect Daimler's products and a neutral palette of tans, taupes and greys. The only occasional pop of color in the workstations is on privacy screens or the seats of the Generation by Knoll® work chairs.

This strategy allows for greater attention on the lively colors in the shared areas. The design team gave these collaborative spaces some extra energy with colors and textiles, encouraging a sense of playfulness. "Daimler was intentional with the colors and there are some wild ones—bright yellows, oranges, reds and some really fun textiles," says Zaharie.

In addition to shared areas within the neighborhoods, every floor has public amenities located in a central hub, such as the larger conference rooms, break rooms, restrooms and elevators. "You see activity in this area on every floor. You have interactions waiting for the elevator or waiting to get into your conference room. It creates a bit of excitement on the office floor," says McClaghry.

Supporting Change with Education

Daimler's greatest concerns regarding the proposed changes for the new space

were noise and personal privacy. The Knoll and Environments team conducted work sessions and roundtables to address fears about going to a more open and collaborative work environment. "At first, Daimler employees were viewing the new workspace as something being taken away from them," says Keegan.

Change communication included in-person meetings, pre and post-occupancy surveys, roundtables to educate employees on changes coming and why the new design was important for moving the organization forward. There were "how-to" materials created for the company's intranet site on adjusting chairs, monitors arms and desks.

"Overall, the biggest worry from employees was noise. What we've experienced with the new workspace is that, when you open up the sightlines there's a natural phenomenon of people being aware of each other and bringing their voices down. It happens seamlessly," says McClaghry.

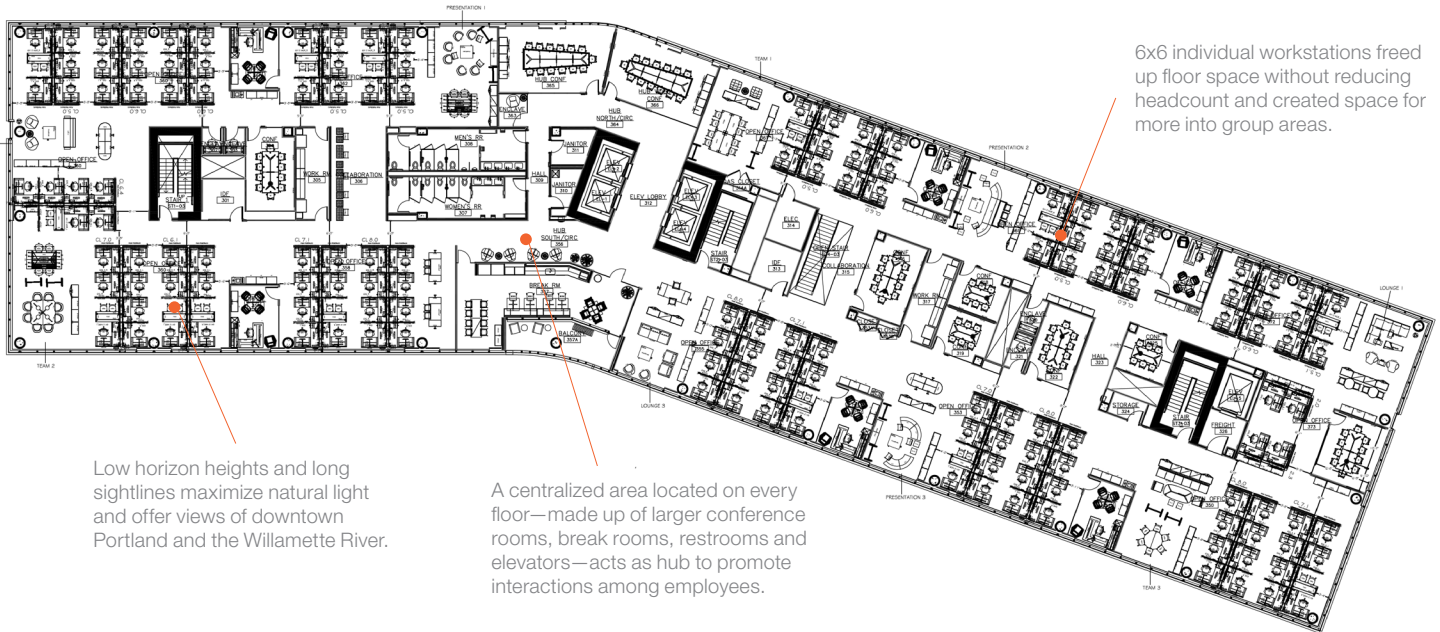
Moving Toward LEED Platinum

Beyond employee happiness and improved trust, Daimler wanted the new space to highlight the company's commitment to environmental stewardship.

"Daimler Trucks North America makes the most fuel efficient trucks in the market. It was important to our management that our building reflect the same type of efficiency that

Typical Open Office Floor Plan

Within the open office floor plate, workspaces are setup in neighborhoods and planned using a “holistic kit of parts.” Workstations and shared spaces are planned together in unique ways to create customized space tailored to each group’s needs and functions.



our products do,” says McClaughry. She says they viewed the construction of the building as an opportunity to display their point of view on environmental responsibility. Plus, being efficient makes sense. “Fuel for trucks means money out of our customer’s pocket. Likewise, we don’t want to waste resources heating and cooling our building,” says McClaughry.

The design team is pursuing a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum rating, the highest possible. Besides removing trash cans from every workstation, building a bike trail and investing in a very smart HVAC system, adding access to natural light and views were an important part of the new space to enhance employee well-being. And, for the team they were one of the most enjoyable parts of the project.

“We’ve got the best view of Portland because we are outside of the downtown area and see the city from the other side of the river. We really took advantage of the landscape and created an enhanced user experience,” says McClaughry.

The LEED Platinum certification is still in the works but the process is well on its way.

“It’s the story behind the closed parts of the building. It’s a sense of pride knowing it’s running as smartly as our trucks do,” says McClaughry.

Complete Leadership Buy-In

An essential element to moving through so much change together was the total buy-in and support of the Daimler Trucks North America’s leadership team. Previously, leaders had large offices on the periphery of each floor. In the new space, executives moved to smaller private offices and many managers joined their teams in open workstations. “Daimler executives led—and live—the change to the new workspace by example” says Wymer.

Markstaller considers the move a healthy one for managers and their teams. He now conducts nearly all of his team meetings out in the open spaces, rather than in meeting rooms. “I’ve had hundreds of meetings in our collaborative area and it’s made me aware that there’s nothing I really need to discuss that I care if anybody hears about. That realization caused me to consciously understand that I trust everybody in my group,” says Markstaller.



Open meeting spaces with abundant access to natural daylight encourage employees to get away from their desks and promote interaction between colleagues.

Featured Products: MultiGeneration by Knoll Hybrid Chairs



Within each department's work area, some managers have modified, larger footprints that include an additional table for conversations with employees.

Featured Products: AutoStrada, Antenna Workspaces and Reff Profiles Systems; Anchor Pedestals; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Generation by Knoll Work Chairs; Sapper XYZ Monitor Arms

More Amenities for Employees

Thanks to the online employee surveys, Daimler collected a lot of useful information about amenities their employees would like. "We're always looking to attract and keep top talent. For us, having a fitness room; a coffee shop with local coffee; a beautiful, outdoor patio space overlooking the Willamette River; a large conference center; an on-site cafeteria; lockers and bike storage was critical when we developed the non-office perks," says McClaughry.

To add more residential-style amenities, McClaughry and her team also included shuffleboard, ping pong tables, lawn games, and TVs for employees to relax and enjoy. McClaughry acknowledges that this is a big cultural shift for Daimler.

"We've always been traditional, a bit more heads-down. I think we're starting to embrace what extra breaks can do for someone's productivity and the creativity they can bring to their job," she says.

Reset the Daimler Aesthetic

With the new headquarters building, the Daimler design team took the opportunity to develop an architectural ethos that would guide the design for the headquarters and also other projects to come. "We wanted to create something that wasn't a generic headquarters building but where, walking in the door, it felt like Daimler," says McClaughry.

The assembled a team of people from across the company developed the ethos. Rather than simply select an architectural style, they relied on the company values—innovation and technology leadership; global presence and network; operational excellence and sustainability; high performing and inspired people—to set the direction. The resulting ethos not only reflects the company values, but also their products with imagery of trucks, including the shiny chrome, brushed silver, metal and the primary colors you see on truck cabs. This isn't the place for a water color landscape," says McClaughry.

Mid-project, Daimler's parent company updated the Daimler logo from blue and white to silver on silver. But, the impact was minimal. "Fortunately, we had already pulled all these colors from our trucks and the school buses we make," says McClaughry.

In their elevator areas they took design sketches that were created by their engineers and had them reproduced in their replication facilities onto steel and aluminum. The team went to a high level of detail in pulling the actual manufacturing components of what they do into the design elements of the building. "Fortunately, in the manufacturing industry, when you make something it really helps you identify what your space should look like," says McClaughry.

Daimler integrated its products into the esthetic of the building as a way to encourage employees to take pride in their work, as well as educate visitors about the company's place as the global leader in energy-efficient engines.





Employees workspaces offer below-desk storage for personal items, as well as a tackboard, whiteboard and other accessories that allow for customization and personalization of their space.

Featured Products: AutoStrada, Antenna Workspaces and Reff Profiles Systems; Anchor Pedestals; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Generation by Knoll Work Chairs; Sapper XYZ Monitor Arms

Outcomes

Greater Trust and Collaboration

As the project took shape, increasing trust and collaboration became essential outcomes. But, making those shifts happen required big changes. “A low-risk solution for me would have simply been to give everybody what they had. To make these changes we were taking a risk,” says Markstaller.

McCloughry says the team spent a lot of time thinking about getting people to get up from their desks, interacting with people from other departments and sharing ideas. “The entire building is designed to support that kind of random interactions,” says McCloughry.

When Erica Keegan of Environments looks back on the project, she’s impressed by just how far Daimler’s leadership was willing to go to improve its company culture. “Introducing this open concept supports the trust factor. Daimler was willing to go with it. Take the risks,” says Keegan.

According to Markstaller and McCloughry, the energy of employees in the new workspaces is high and the frequency of interaction between staff is up exponentially. “Moving out of my private office helped me understand other people better, be more connected to them and help them be more connected to me,” says Markstaller.

Taking This Design to Other Spaces

The new headquarters holds about 1,100 Daimler employees. Next door, the original corporate headquarters hosts approximately the same number of engineers. Daimler plans to remodel that building starting in 2017, implementing the same design elements from the new headquarters.

“We want to get everyone into a similar experience as soon as possible. We’re going to remodel our other facilities, well over a dozen buildings on Swan Island. It will take us time but we feel strongly that we have a solid corporate standard. We’re ready to deploy that wherever, whether in Portland or one of our North Carolina facilities,” says McCloughry.

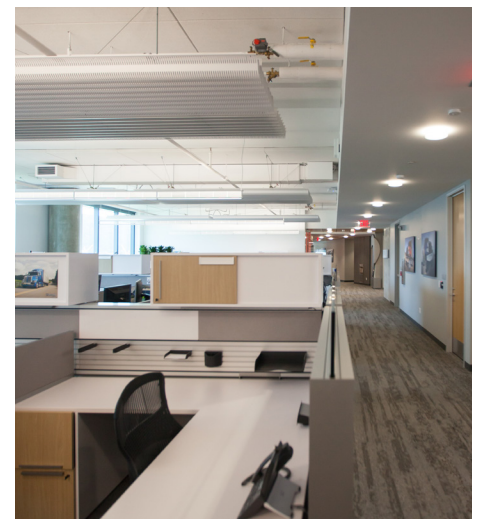
A Whole New Approach to Work

The commitment to increasing interaction came from the top. “It’s not just something that they’re speaking about but are practicing themselves,” says Zaharie. “Daimler created public spaces and meeting areas without walls or sound barriers to create a community anchored in trust.”

Markstaller recalls people being worried about needing more privacy, not wanting others to see their work. He is impressed at how the furniture and layout has taken a leading role in changing the culture.

Within the open floor plan, taller walls with whiteboards and corkboards serve as dividers between departments or teams.

Featured Products: AutoStrada, Antenna Workspaces and Reff Profiles Systems; Anchor Pedestals; Universal Height Adjustable Bases; Generation by Knoll Work Chairs





Visibility between floors and into meeting rooms, as well as to the exterior of the building, encourage the values of connection, transparency and trust that Daimler wants its employees to feel.

Featured Products: Life Chairs

For example, Markstaller is grateful he can hear conversations that keep him educated on his team’s work. And, when he has a conversation and misses a detail, his team can quickly set him straight. “I love it because I don’t know everything that’s going on in my department. Sometimes I paint a high-level picture to keep the conversation moving but then people can catch me up. It ends up being really efficient,” he says.

Markstaller credits a shifting culture on creating places for people to meet and not letting them isolate themselves. “We’ve found that you can drive culture through the workspaces itself. Even though I try to be an open manager and try to communicate well, it is a lot better with the new arrangement,” he says.

Appreciative Employees

How have employees responded to the new headquarters?

“The pulse of the employees coming in is overwhelmingly positive,” says McClaughry. “Being in facilities, there’s a tendency to feel a bit pessimistic about asking people to change. I can tell you that I have never had so many congratulations and so many thank yous. It’s been overwhelming. It far exceeded my expectations in how well people adapted so quickly,” says McClaughry.

Markstaller agrees, saying, “When we first started talking about this we had plenty of negative reaction. Now the staff would rather be in the new building with the new furniture than the old building with the old furniture,” says Markstaller.

A veteran of workplace transformation, Zaharie gives Daimler full credit for its success. “Daimler’s done a phenomenal job from beginning to end—opening the spaces up, bringing down the horizon lines, creating spaces that encourage people to get up and get out of their workstation,” she says.



Daimler Trucks North America

Customer Profile

Daimler Trucks North America is an automotive industry manufacturer of commercial vehicles headquartered in Portland, Oregon, and is a wholly owned subsidiary of the German Daimler AG.

Project Team

Knoll, Inc.: Knoll, Portland, OR

Knoll Furniture Dealer:
Environments, Portland, OR

Cover: The bright blues and reds in shared areas represent the bold, primary colors used to paint Daimler’s world-renowned, high-efficiency trucks and buses.

Feature Products: k. lounge, Power Cube, Toboggan Pull Table

Learn More — Click [here](#) to learn more about Daimler North Truck America and hear stories from members of the project team.

The Challenge to Change: Research, Risks, Rewards

Daimler Trucks North America's decision to build a new headquarters in Portland, Oregon sparked a cultural shift for the company. Their original goal of constructing a building gave way to a new mission to create a stronger community. Daimler surveyed its employees before construction and picked up on the need for greater connection. Their design team suggested elements that would facilitate that connection but employees had to be open to smaller individual workspaces, trading them for more shared areas and other updates. Daimler's work to set priorities, communicate them openly and boldly move forward provides a model for successful workplace change. Now they are now enjoying that stronger community they took the risk to create.

▶ Research Brings Insights

Despite being a successful company with a long history of engineering innovation, Daimler had little experience thinking in new ways about its employees workspaces, particularly in terms of employee satisfaction and productivity. When surveyed, the employees in their Portland offices expressed a sense of isolation and a desire for stronger, mutual trust. Daimler's headquarters team knew that lower horizons, smaller individual spaces and more collaborative areas would reduce isolation. But, all of these changes would stretch employees comfort zones so they made a plan to embrace and support employees however they could.

▶ Explaining the Advantages

Fortunately for Daimler, their move to a more open, collaborative environment had research and the Knoll and Environment team's experience supporting it. Both Knoll and Environments provided case studies and documentation of the results of lowering sightlines, bringing groups into closer proximity, creating shared areas to work away from desks, open meeting rooms and getting managers into common work areas as much as possible. Daimler presented this research to employees at roundtable discussions and fielded their questions, including concerns about noise levels and privacy, before the move took place.

▶ Test Run Before Team Moves In

In order to ensure the best outcomes possible, the facilities team moved into the new headquarters several months before other departments. They were the first to experience the smaller individual workspaces and the collaborative areas. The experience was a positive one. "I came out of my office and went to a workstation. It personalizes me to my staff a lot more. Even though I had an office with an open door before, people were kind of tentative before they would come in. From our experience, the change to the new environment has enhanced our team culture." says Matt Markstaller, Real Estate Manager.

▶ Offering Plenty of Information

The facilities team anticipated some resistance to the new space and with lots of expertise and information from Knoll and Environments prepared ways to support employees. They created a calendar of move-ins dates by floor and by department. They also posted move-in materials on the Daimler's intranet, prepared by Knoll and Environments, that explained the furniture and how to use and adjust it. Before move-in, Daimler held a workplace exhibit in the lobby of an existing building, allowing employees to see and test new furniture and technology. Informational meetings were also held in old office spaces prior to move-in dates to address questions, as well as pre and post-occupancy surveys as groups moved in. And, Knoll representatives were on-site every move-in day to help employees adjust their monitor arms, chairs and sit-to-stand desks.

▶ Total Commitment from the Top

Daimler's executives and managers took a crucial leadership role by embracing the new office layout. "They've done a phenomenal job creating spaces that encourage people to get up, get out of their workstation and come be part of the organization," says Gina Zaharie, the Knoll representative on the project.

▶ New Global Standard for Daimler

One of the most exciting outcomes of the new space is its likely influence on future Daimler office builds or remodels. Because employee response to the space has been so positive, Daimler's facilities team plans to convert all the Portland offices to the new layout, and the Daimler global team of partners is considering using the layout in their workplaces, as well. "It was a pretty big undertaking to not only create this big, beautiful building but to somehow brand it in a way that reflected the entire company. I think it's been really successful. It far exceeded my expectations," says Amy McClaughry, a project manager for Daimler.