

# Workplace distancing: the new normal

Rebooting the workplace

global



# Workplace distancing: the new normal

Getting ready for the 'new normal' will require us to rethink the ways we interact in the spaces we work. New questions are being asked about who needs to be physically present and how to support people in the office while keeping them safe, comfortable and connected.

In its recent and expansive [Work From Home Survey](#), Gensler reports only 12 percent of workers surveyed prefer to continue to work from home full-time after the pandemic is over. People still want and need to come to the office – to connect, collaborate and reinforce their belonging in their work community. For some, the workplace also helps provide work-life balance by better defining the boundaries of work and home. While it will need to be different from what we are accustomed to, the office isn't going away.

## Charting New Territory

Employees are counting on their companies to help them return to the workplace. Companies now face the rigorous challenge of protecting employee health. New protocols for deep cleaning and sanitization will be implemented along with protocols for social distancing.

As we enter this new era of work – where health and safety are primary considerations – we recognize that we are charting new territory. Planning solutions are evolving as we learn more about the pandemic and its impact on human health and well-being. Beyond simply expanding physical real estate (which is not an affordable option for many), it will require companies to rethink their spaces – how they're planned and how they're used.



# Six degrees of separation

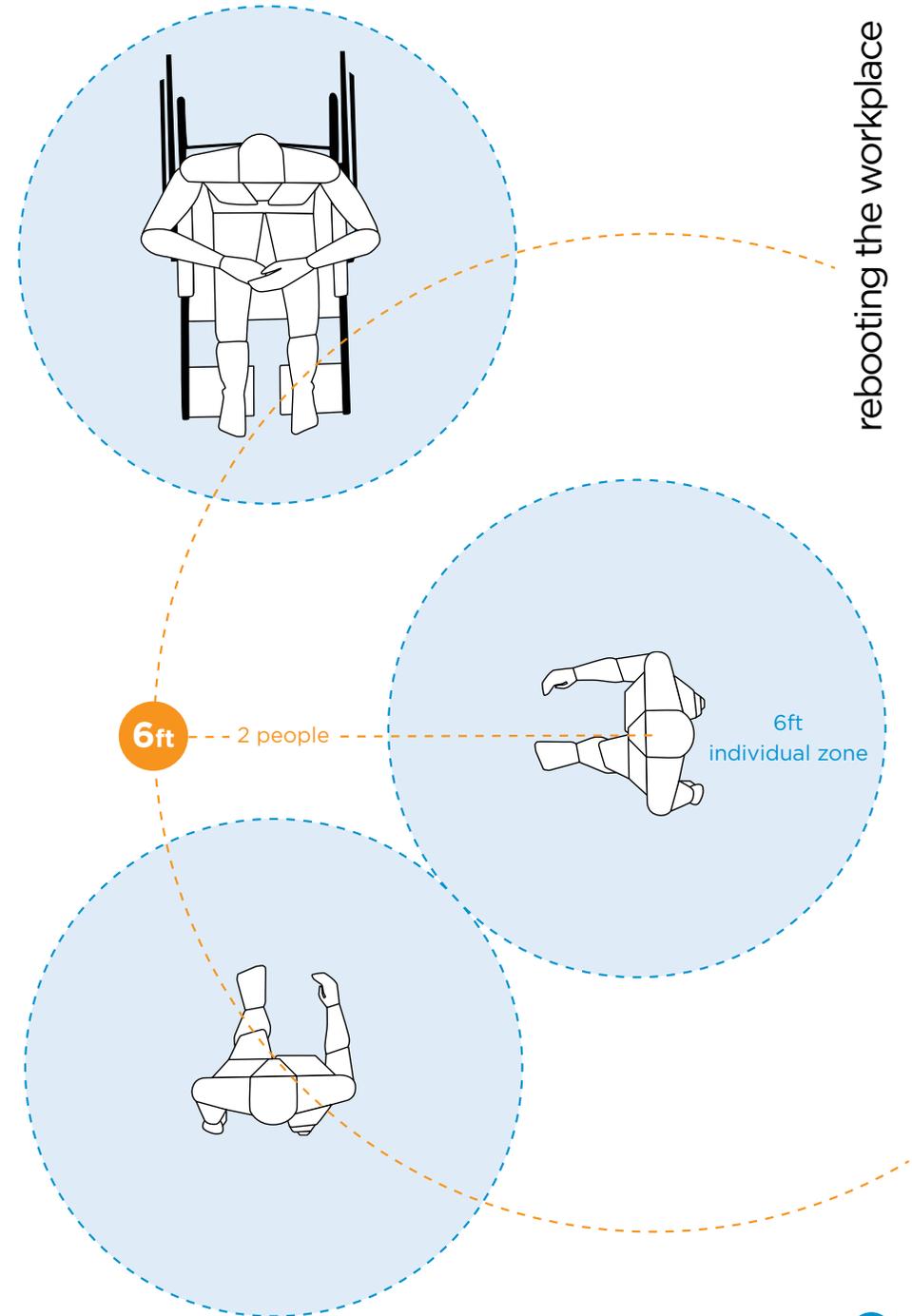
The distancing protocol to maintain 6ft between yourself and another person represents one of the greatest challenges in bringing people back into the workplace safely. The distancing protocol is a challenge to how we move about the office, how we engage and collaborate with colleagues and how we are fundamentally wired to socialize. If we look back over 60+ years of the modern office, everything that has been considered, analyzed, documented, designed and built into the current state of our workplaces has absolutely nothing to do with keeping 6ft away from the next person. On the contrary, our most recent design focus in the workplace has been to bring people closer together.

## Three Strategies for Rebooting the Workplace

In this document, we explore three planning strategies to adapt your existing workplace planning to support social distancing guidelines:

1. Shift scheduling the workforce
2. Reconfiguring the workplace
3. Redefining shared spaces

So, let's get started. We're ready to help you navigate the complexities of change and unlock the potential of your workplace and the people who inhabit it.



rebooting the workplace

# Strategy 1: shift scheduling the workforce

Some workplaces may achieve proper distancing protocols by altering employee work schedules. Staggering the workforce allows smaller groups to come in on alternate days or in rotating shifts (for example, morning vs. afternoon) to reduce density. This enables companies to limit the number of people present at a single location at any given time without the need to reconfigure furniture, add or reallocate space for individuals. Altering employee work schedules maintains individual

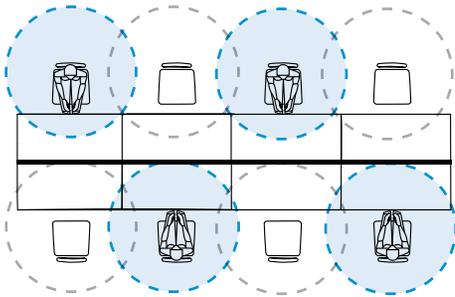
seating assignments, ensuring employees retain their own space. This strategy also benefits workers by reducing the need to use public transit at peak times and minimizing crowded elevators and public spaces in office towers.

**Strategy 1 requires no expansion in real estate and no reconfiguration of the floorplan to achieve proper distancing protocols.**

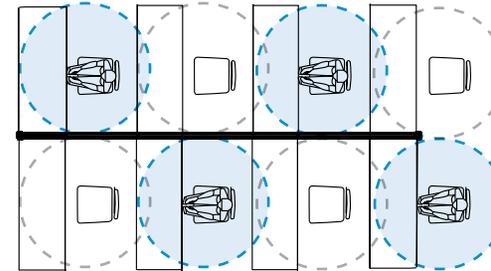
● Shift 1: Maintains assigned seats, no sharing

○ Shift 2: Alternating days or times (for example, morning vs. afternoon), assigned seats, no sharing

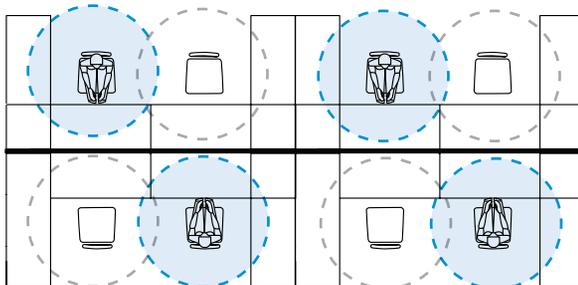
## Linear Benching Layout



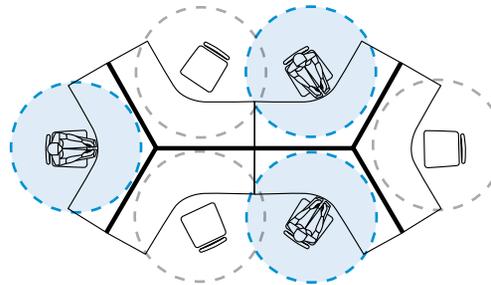
## 90° Benching Layout



## 90° Layout



## 120° Layout



# Strategy 2: reconfiguring the workplace

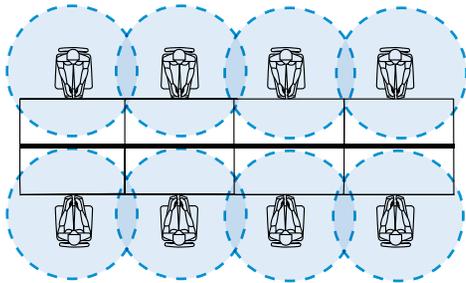
Some companies will require all or most employees to be in the office at the same time. To achieve proper distancing protocols, they will need to reconfigure their existing furniture and/or explore new furniture solutions. This will require finding more space through the acquisition of real estate or through the reallocation of existing space to accommodate larger furniture configurations.

Select employees may continue to work from home full-time, freeing up space for those in the office. Additionally, select collaborative or social areas (such as cafés and lounges serving as individual work areas) can be redeployed to allow for the creation of larger and more spacious workstation clusters. For example, a cluster of eight desks can be reconfigured to seat five.

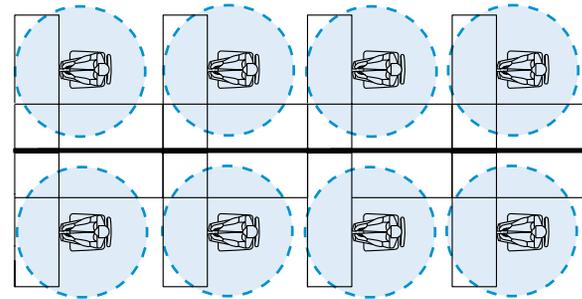
 6ft individual seating zone

## Benching A

Before



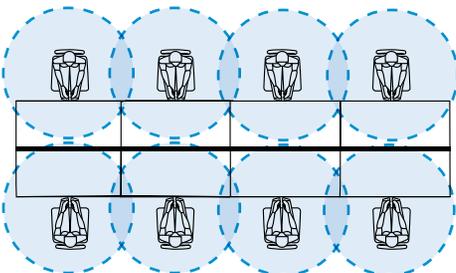
After



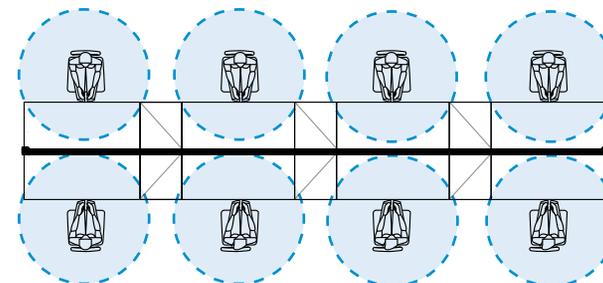
Add returns to create distance, and allow users to face forward.

## Benching B

Before



After



Add tower storage between people to provide additional distance.

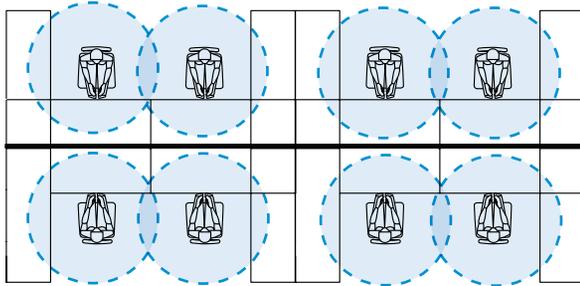
# Strategy 2: reconfiguring the workplace

Desks can also be offset and/or rotated to ensure employees don't face each other, while screens and dividers add another layer of protection. This approach maintains individual seating assignments, giving employees greater confidence as no one else will be in their personal space. New product solutions that facilitate proper distancing (while using more efficient use of space) can also help maximize the number of people in an existing space without sacrificing social distancing.

 6ft individual seating zone

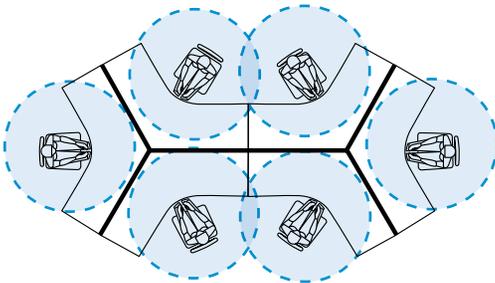
## 90° Layout

Before



## 120° Layout

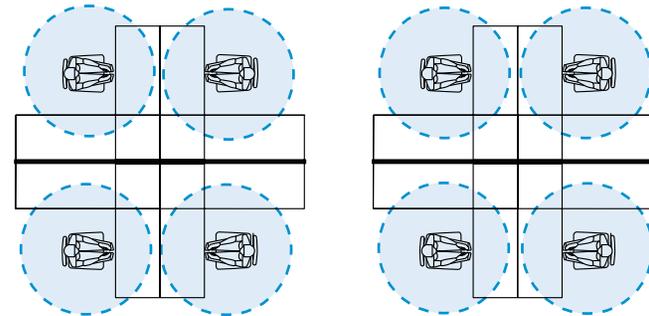
Before



For those companies where real estate expansion is a necessity to accommodate everyone, they may explore the concept of more agile, satellite offices. These offices could be closer to where employees live, reducing transit use while still enabling small groups of people to connect and work collaboratively. This ensures less exposure and potential risk than those working in a large central office with more people in one place.

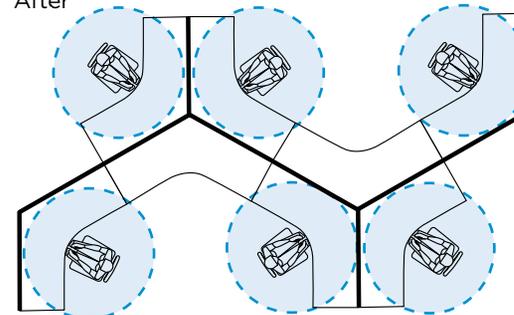
**Strategy 2 requires an expansion of real estate or reallocation of existing space to accommodate product solutions that maintain proper distancing protocols.**

After



The existing layout has been separated into two mirrored configurations for correct distancing.

After



Two new surfaces and four panels have been added to the existing layout for correct distancing.

# Strategy 3: redefining shared spaces

Collaborative work will not be eliminated in the workplace. The reason to have an office is the same as it's always been – to bring people together around a shared purpose and cooperative work.

However, the capacity of communal and shared spaces will need to be reduced. New directives for meeting rooms and kitchen spaces will identify how many people can be present at any given time. Eliminating chairs and offsetting lounge seating will safeguard social distancing while still providing opportunities to connect. Small collaborative spaces like huddle rooms may be redeployed as private offices. With an increase in the use of video conferencing, additional technology can be integrated into existing small meeting areas.

To safeguard employee health, aspects of the office layout beyond individual seating will need to be considered. Pathways through the office can be widened to create adequate distance between people walking as well as between people walking and sitting. Wayfinding can be added to direct the flow of traffic. Sanitation stations can be placed near meeting rooms and gathering places to encourage infection control and regular hand disinfecting.

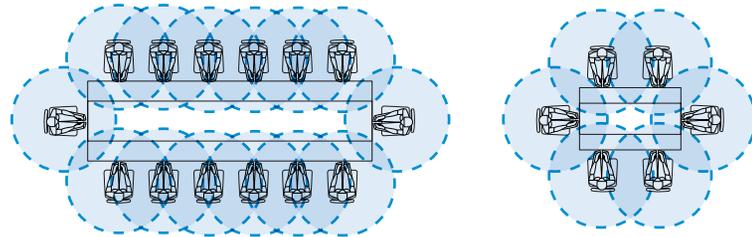
**Strategy 3 requires a reduction in seats in communal areas and/or reallocation of existing space for other functions to achieve proper distancing protocols.**

 6ft individual seating zone

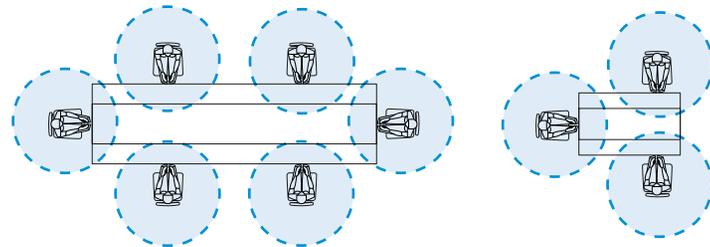
## Boardrooms

Reduced capacity in meetings and alternate work areas

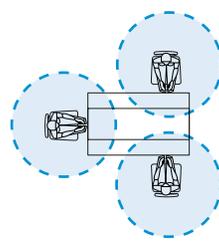
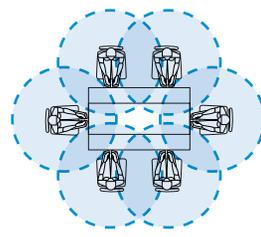
Before



After



From 14 to 6 people

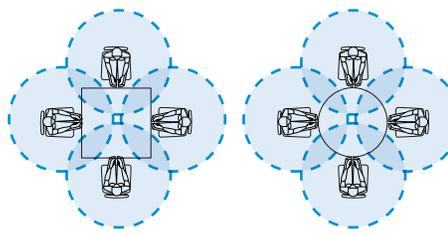


From 6 to 3 people

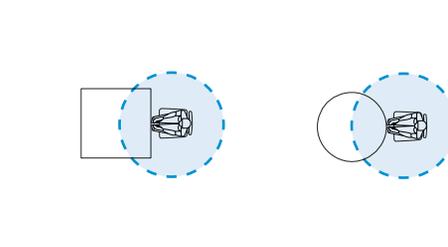
## Café + small meeting areas

Reduced capacity and/or conversion of area to individual work space

Before



After

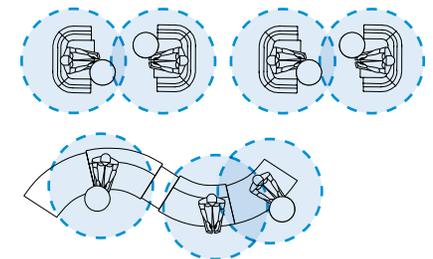


From 4 to 1 person

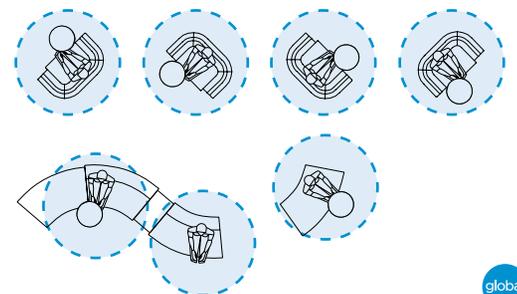
## Lounge areas

Increased spacing and/or conversion of area to individual work space

Before



After



Furniture adjustment required.

# Three strategies, one objective

Maintaining 6ft of separation between people in today's open and collaborative workplace plans can be difficult. The impact of social distancing has us rethinking every aspect of office life, from busy lunchrooms to expansive social and collaborative areas to individual workspaces. However, through shift scheduling, reconfiguration

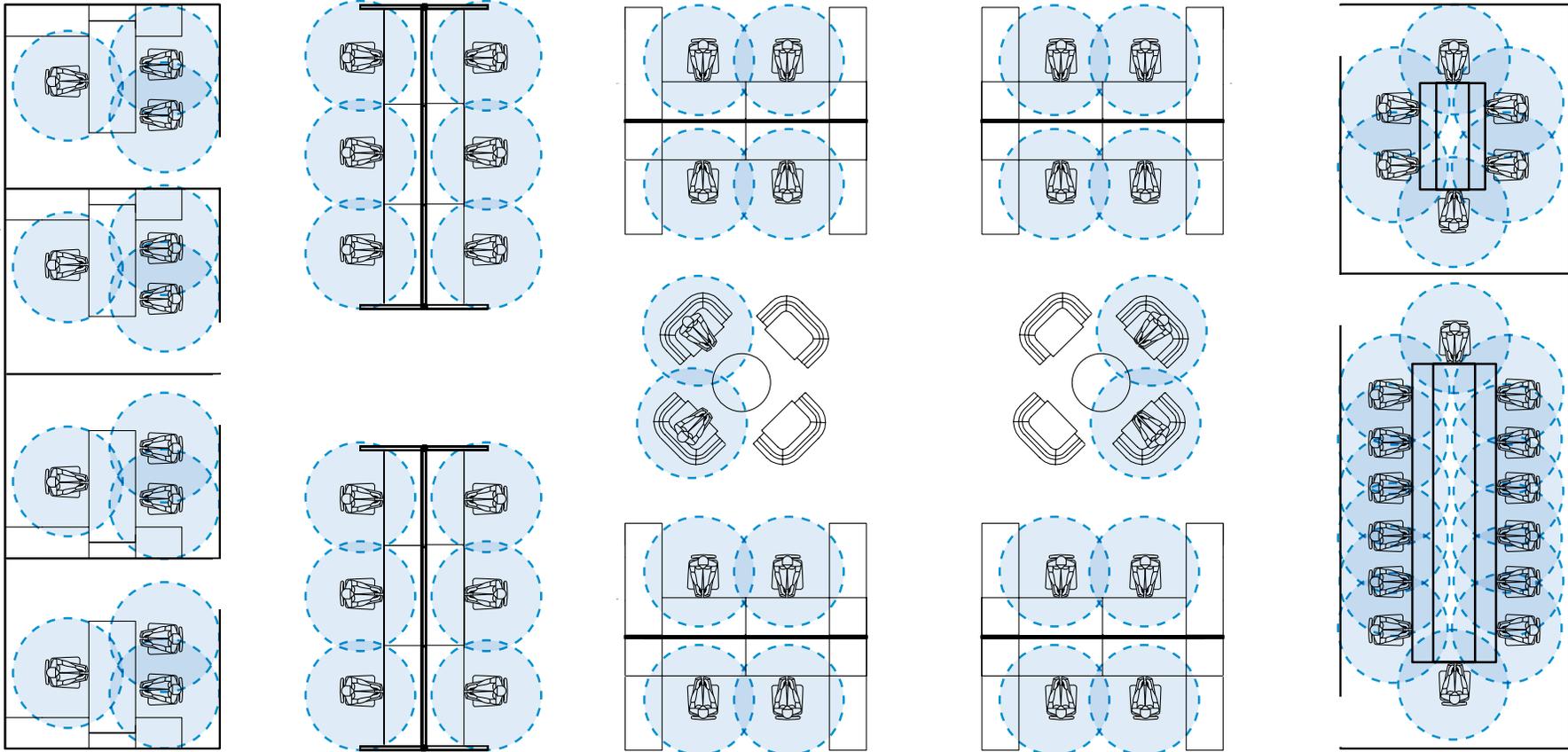
and the redefinition of shared spaces, we can address these new challenges. Using these strategies alone or in combination, can allow you to tailor a solution that meets your needs and creates a safe environment for everyone.

 6ft individual seating zone

## Before

Individual and collaborative settings that do not reflect social distancing

Occupancy: 32 people  
Maximum capacity: 68



# Creating a safe environment for today and tomorrow

In the floorplan below, we have incorporated all three strategies to accommodate the same number of employees overall, while reducing both the occupancy and capacity at any given time to maintain social distancing.

Schedules for those at the six-person benches are staggered so that every other person is occupying the office on alternating days/times.

The four-person workstation clusters have been rotated to accommodate appropriate distancing. To reduce capacity, some seating from the boardrooms, meeting rooms and private offices has been removed. Finally, the lounge seating has been rotated to afford additional spacing.

With this approach, it is easy to scale occupancy and capacity as needs evolve.

 Shift 1: Maintains assigned seats, no sharing

 Shift 2: Alternating days or times (for example, morning vs. afternoon), assigned seats, no sharing

## After

Occupancy reduced: 32 to 26 people.

Maximum capacity: 47

