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The Power of the Huddle Room

Beyond the Hype - the real story, opportunity, and business case for smaller, less formal meeting and collaboration spaces.

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Huddle is More Than a Meeting Room

The enterprise huddle room has become the star of the show in the collaboration world. You can't visit an industry website, read an industry blog, or walk a trade show floor without being bombarded by the importance of having a large number of huddle rooms.

The analysts at Recon Research (RR) have been preaching about the significance of the enterprise huddle room for years – long before it was chic to do so. Early on, our team defined the enterprise huddle room, outlined the key functions needed in these spaces, and released the first defendable estimate of the number of huddle rooms around the world.

We've researched, analyzed, published on, and presented about huddle rooms in venues large and small. Suffice it to say, we know a thing or two about this concept. One thing we've come to realize is that there's more to the huddle room story than marketing hype.

BlueJeans

So, what's wrong with the huddle room concept? Nothing at all. But the huddle room is the revenue-generating, physical manifestation of a larger and more important story.

The real story behind the huddle room is people – and how they work.

The combination of these attributes – revenue generating and physical existence – have attracted vendors, service providers, channel partners, consultants, investment bankers, and others to the huddle room story like moths to a flame.

The story behind the huddle room story, however, is about people – and how they work. Stated differently, Huddle is not just a type of room. It's a mindset. An attitude. A movement.

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New Expectations Drive New Way of Working

What is driving the huddle movement? Expectations. Or more specifically, the new expectations of a new business climate involving a different set of customers being supported by a different workforce.

To meet the expectations of today's customers and workers, companies have had no choice but to change their way of doing business – including the way their people meet.

The table below highlights some of the key differences in how workers used to meet in the past (in the traditional business world) and how they meet today.

Yesterday	Today / Tomorrow
Formal	Less Formal
Leader	Leaderless (or multi-leader)
Presenting to others	Collaborating with others
Providing information / updates	Doing REAL work, creating real outcomes
Based in meeting room	Meetings are virtual – not location based
Using standard rooms	Using various spaces (closed, open, etc.)
Fully supported	Self-serve almost all the time

Unfortunately, most traditional AV meeting rooms were designed for the old-school way of working.

As shown in the image below, these "integrated" spaces were designed to be all-powerful, offering a broad array of features and functions to address every possible situation or need.

Notably, these rooms were intended to host formal meetings during which the session leader would present information and updates to others in the room. A one-way transfer of information with a few questions at the end.

Advantages
- All powerful
- Robust feature set
- Impressive look / feel

Disadvantages
- Expensive
- Complicated
- Long time to benefit (months)
- Hard to use
- Frequent failures
- Major support burden
- Difficult to change / update
- Risk of obsolescence

These rooms offered some key advantages, but many disadvantages as well. But most of all – these rooms didn't create the environment of teaming and collaboration craved by the younger workers.

In the last few years, leading-edge organizations came to realize that their inventory of all-purpose meeting rooms wasn't adequate to empower their users. They addressed this issue by introducing new, purpose-built spaces into their meeting room estate.
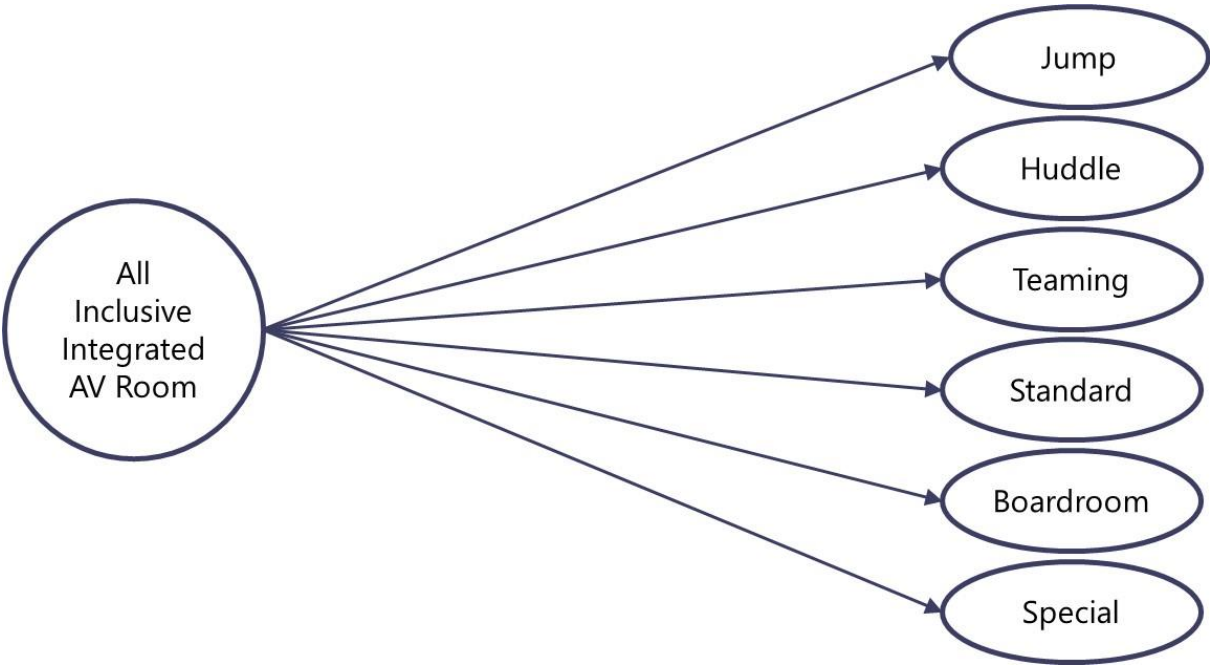
The diagram above brings the evolution of the meeting room into specific relief, and shows some of the new types of meeting rooms that our team is recommending to clients and seeing in the field.

For example, jump rooms are small rooms intended to allow 2 or 3 people to escape the noise and frenzy of an open work space to discuss an issue or complete a task. Teaming rooms offer tools and systems, e.g. interactive displays and whiteboarding, to foster creativity and innovative problem solving.

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In recent years, RR has observed that users prefer to meet in smaller, less formal spaces. This concept of "meetings sliding downhill" is shown in the image below.
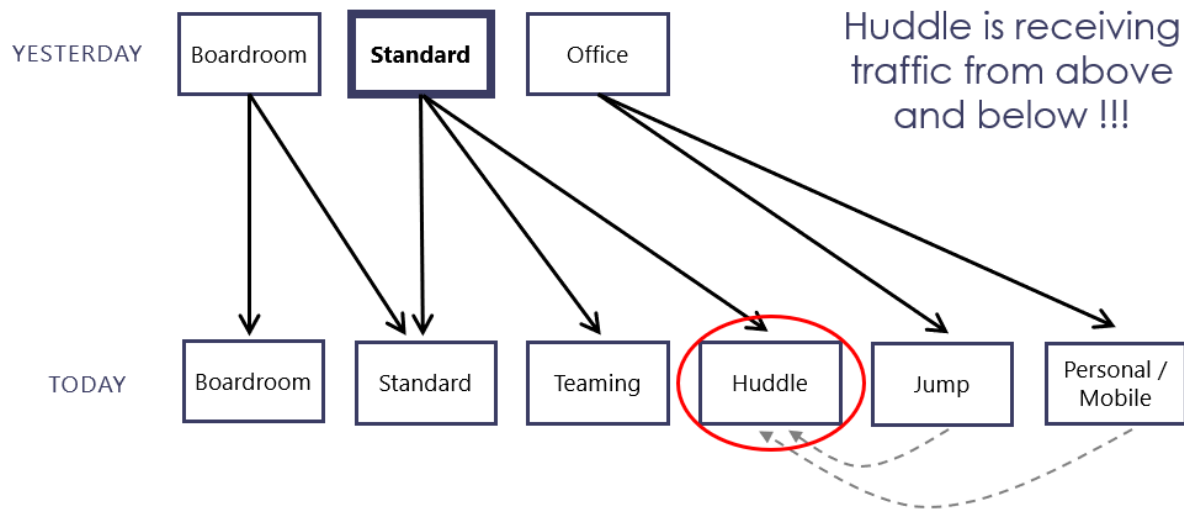
The image above highlights that many meetings previously conducted in "standard" integrated meeting rooms are now happening in smaller, less formal, and more purpose-driven teaming and huddle rooms.

We also see that in many organizations, meetings that used to happen in people's offices (before open floor plans), jump rooms, and even on the phone are actually transpiring in huddle rooms today. That's right – the almighty huddle room is seeing traffic from all directions.

Understanding the Huddle Room

First – what is a huddle room?

Simply stated – a huddle room is a <u>space</u> designed to support <u>informal</u>, and often <u>impromptu</u> / ad-hoc <u>working</u> sessions, involving a <u>small number</u> of local participants, and often some remote participants.
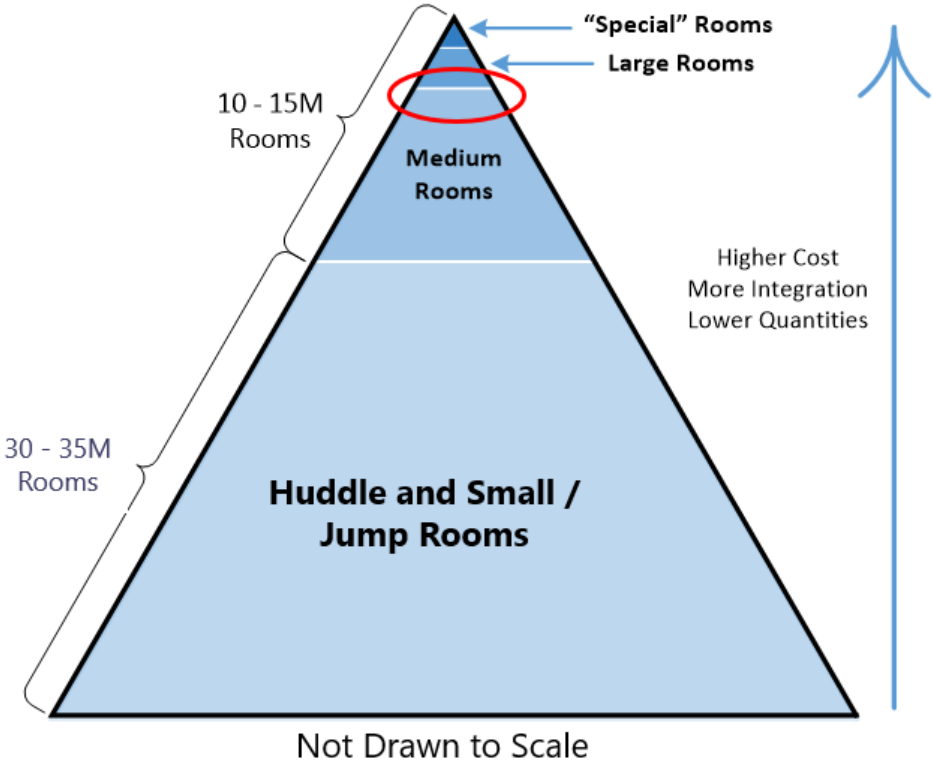

A huddle room is a space designed to support informal, ad-hoc working sessions, involving a small number of local participants, and often some remote participants.

How Many Huddle Rooms Exist in the World Today?

Our research indicates that there are approximately 30 – 35 million huddle rooms in the world today (see the bottom portion of the triangle in the drawing below).

"Special" Rooms
Large Rooms

10 - 15M Rooms

Medium Rooms

Higher Cost
More Integration
Lower Quantities

30 - 35M Rooms

Huddle and Small / Jump Rooms

Not Drawn to Scale

In addition, the number of huddle rooms is growing by ~ 15 - 25% each year, with much of this growth coming from large enterprises as they slowly (often painfully slowly) transform the mix of their global meeting rooms away from larger, formal meeting rooms toward smaller, more agile work spaces.

The red circle in the drawing above highlights the relatively small number of meeting rooms <u>traditionally</u> serviced by the professional audio-visual industry.

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What is the Proper Look and Feel for a Huddle Space?

Huddle spaces are not limited to a specific look and feel. Some have standard table seating, while others sport hi-top (bar-style) seating, couches or bean bags.

Some follow a traditional room décor, while others bring a completely different vibe.

But they're all huddle spaces that help address the informal, collaborative needs of the workers.

How Big is a Typical Huddle Room?

Huddle rooms cannot be defined strictly by size. Instead, a huddle space is an area optimized around supporting the needs of a small number of people.

Notably, some of the most heavily used huddle spaces are found within larger, open spaces such as the cafeteria, lounge, or game room. That's right – some huddle spaces have no walls at all!

You may have noticed the intentional change of terminology above. For the rest of this study, we will use the terms "huddle space" and "huddle room" interchangeably.

How Many Huddle Rooms Does My Organization Need?

The simple answer – probably a lot. The exact answer depends on a range of factors including:

- Your company's size (meaning number of employees who conduct meetings)
- Your company's work culture (are you a collaborative organization?)
- Where your people work (in the office, at home, on the road, at client sites, etc.)

Start with a ratio of 10 – 20 information workers per huddle room and adjust from there. For example, in heavily populated offices with open floor plans, a ratio of 10 workers per huddle room might make sense. Conversely, if the majority of the staff work in offices or on the road, a ratio of 25:1 might suffice.

What Facilities Work is Needed in a Huddle Space?

In most cases, little or none. Typically, the standard fit-out of the space, meaning the ceiling, floor, walls, and basic furniture, are more than adequate for our needs.

There are, of course, exceptions. For example, rooms with excessive ambient noise or exposure to strong sunlight or glare may require some remediation.

Remember - Huddle spaces are places where our users do real work. They are not customer experience centers (CECs), executive boardrooms, or conference centers. We are not trying to impress anyone, so save your money and use it to AV-enable more huddle rooms!

Huddle Space AV Systems

What Audio Visual / Collaboration Capabilities Should a Huddle Space Provide?

As a general rule, huddle spaces should support the following capabilities (listed in order of importance):

1) **Audio Conferencing** – the ability for the people in the room to participate in a phone call or audio conference.

2) **Content Sharing** – the ability for users to share content (e.g. a PowerPoint presentation, web page, Excel file, video, etc.) with others in the space.

3) **Video Conferencing** – the ability for the people in the room to participate in a video conference with one or more remote participants or sites.

In some organizations, content sharing is more critical than audio conferencing. In others, video conferencing is the #1 priority. In others, video is optional. Your requirements certainly may vary.

Important Note - you should resist the temptation (whether your own or temptation cultivated by others) to over-feature your huddle space. Less is more here. We say again … less is more.

What AV / Collaboration Technology is Needed in a Huddle Space

Sorry, but there are no steadfast rules here. Most huddle spaces include one standard flat-screen display, but if two screens are needed, that's just fine – space and budget permitting.

Some huddle spaces include device(s) on the table (e.g. a mic / speaker pod, a laptop connection point, etc.), while others are equipped with all-in-one "video-bars" mounted below the shared display.

Truth be told, there is no right or wrong way to AV-enable a huddle space. There is, however, a set of basic tenets to keep in mind when designing and selecting solutions for a huddle room.

Unlike their larger, more powerful, more complex, and more expensive big brothers (meaning integrated meeting rooms), huddle spaces are all about a single operative word --- "easy."

The AV technology used in a huddle space should be easy to buy, easy to install, easy to use, easy to manage, and easy to own. In reality, this means …

- Using as **few devices as possible** (to minimize cost and simplify procurement) from as **few vendors as possible** (to avoid integration issues, finger-pointing, and workflow problems)

- Using devices that can be **installed easily and quickly** by resources with **little or no experience** (to expedite installations, minimize cost, and allow for easy maintenance)

- Designing systems that can be **used by anyone** without requiring any training or support (to maximize adoption and utility, while avoiding excessive support cost)

Organizations should absolutely consider specific add-ons or upgrades that enhance the user experience. For example, using touch displays instead of standard displays adds additional functionality (whiteboarding, touch-control, etc.) with minimal increase in cost, and without impacting ease of use. Similarly, spending a bit more on a better performing audio system is usually a good investment.

But at the risk of being repetitive, when it comes to huddle space technology – less is usually more.

Should Huddle Space AV Systems be Monitored and Managed?

The answer depends on a wide range of factors including the size and geographical footprint of the deployment, and the users' tolerance for occasional AV issues during meetings.

At RR, we are <u>strong</u> believers in remote monitoring and management because these systems:

- Protect the meeting experience and avoid wasting the users' time

- Dramatically increase the efficiency, scalability, and responsiveness of support staff

- Provide valuable insight into the meeting environment, allowing organizations to right-size their meeting environment, make the right investments, and empower their users.

In the ideal world, virtually all user-facing technology would be proactively monitored and managed.

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including huddle space AV systems,
would be proactively monitored and managed.

Fortunately, organizations have many options for their AV estate including on-premises (CPE), cloud, or hybrid monitoring / management systems, and the use of a managed service provider.

For additional information, see RR's <u>Comparison Matrix of Monitoring and Management Platforms</u>.

How Can Organizations Choose the Right AV Systems for their Huddle Spaces?

Many people think the #1 priority for a huddle room AV system is low cost. After all, these spaces are intended for informal, ad-hoc meetings including everyday workers. Given this, quality doesn't really matter. This is absolutely wrong.

Huddle rooms may be small, and the meetings they support may be informal, but the people in these meetings are expensive, and their time matters. We must provide them with a suitable AV experience.

The process for choosing the huddle room AV solutions is no different than any other selection process.

Step 1 - Determine which features and attributes (comparison categories) matter to their company and users – ideally by creating a decision matrix like the example below.

Huddle Space AV Solutions – Comparison Categories	Recon Research Importance Factor (5 = High)
Ease of Deployment	2
Feature Set	3
Ease of Use and Workflow	4
Quality of Experience (audio, video, content)	3
Monitoring, Management & Support	3
Trust in Vendor / Service Provider	4
Cost (Total Cost of Ownership)	4

The matrix above also includes an initial set of importance factors (weights) that Recon Research believes would address the priorities of most medium to large enterprises. The specific comparison categories, as well as the importance factor for each category, should be adjusted as required.

Step 2 - Create a rating scale that makes sense for your organization. For example, for the "Ease of Deployment" category, a rating scale might include the following:

- 1 – solution requires both significant time and specific expertise to deploy
- 3 – solution requires either significant time or specific expertise to deploy
- 5 – solution can be deployed quickly and easily by most IT resources

Step 3 - Define the minimum rating a solution must achieve in each category to be considered a viable option. For example, the matrix below indicates that a solution must have an ease of deployment rating of at least 3 to be considered.

Huddle Space - Features / Attributes	Recon Research Importance Factor (5 = High)	Minimum Rating (1 – 5)
Ease of Deployment	2	3
Feature Set	3	2
Ease of Use and Workflow	4	3
Quality of Experience (audio, video, content)	3	3
Monitoring, Management & Support	3	3
Trust in Vendor / Service Provider	4	2
Cost (Total Cost of Ownership)	4	3

Step 4 - Rate each solution under consideration in each of the comparison areas.

Important Notes

1) Solutions that fail to meet any of the minimum ratings should be disqualified.

2) Some ratings may be counter-intuitive. For example, a rating of 5 in the Cost category actually means the product / service offers a very low total cost of ownership.

3) Some categories may require information from third parties (e.g. analyst firms like Recon Research). For example, the Quality of Experience rating requires first-hand experience with each offering, which you may not have at this stage of the decision-making process.

Huddle Space - Features / Attributes	Recon Research Importance Factor (5 = High)	Minimum Rating (1 – 5)	Solution A (5 = High)	Solution B (5 = High)
Ease of Deployment	2	3	4	3
Feature Set	3	2	4	2
Ease of Use and Workflow	4	3	4	3
Quality of Experience (audio, video, content)	3	3	3	4
Monitoring, Management & Support	3	3	4	2
Trust in Vendor / Service Provider	4	2	2	5
Cost (Total Cost of Ownership)	4	3	3	4
Calculated Selection Score			**73**	**74**

Step 5 – Determine the Selection Score for each solution using a sum product (the sum of the products of the importance factor by each solution's rating in each category).

In the matrix above, solution A scored higher in 4 of the 7 categories, but solution B scored better in the areas that really matter and thus scored slightly higher overall.

Step 6 – Perform additional due diligence to finalize your selection. In this case, and especially if you're planning to AV-enable many huddle rooms, the additional due diligence would likely include one or more meetings with each solution provider, product demos and/or POCs (proof of concepts).

What Role Do Cloud Services Play in the Huddle Discussion?

Cloud services are a key enabler behind the huddle room concept, mainly because they address many of the key huddle tenets. They are easy to buy, install (or activate in this case), use, etc.

Cloud Conferencing Services are inherently huddle-friendly because they offer support for large scale environments without adding complexity, management burden, or infrastructure cost.

Could an organization with a few hundred huddle rooms handle their conferencing on an internally-deployed and managed collaboration platform? Absolutely. And some do. But as the deployment size grows (par for the course in huddle), the cost and burden of owning and managing your own conferencing platform also grows – in many cases exponentially. Cloud calling services allow organizations to avoid much of this burden.

Referring back to our decision matrix exercise above, cloud services have the potential to improve a solution's ratings in almost all of the comparison categories. For example, some cloud services include web portals that i) simplify system deployments, and ii) offer remote monitoring and management.

Conclusion

Huddle is not just a type of room. It is a concept. An attitude. A way of collaborating and working that requires a n entirely new type of meeting environment.

Unlike larger meeting rooms which are optimized for formal, leader-led sessions, huddle spaces are designed to allow real people to do real work – quickly, conveniently, and easily.

Organizations seeking to empower their users should AV-enable as many of their small meeting rooms as possible. But in the huddle game, accessibility, scalability, and simplicity (easy to buy, easy to install, easy to use, easy to support and manage, etc.) are the most important factors for success.

About Recon Research

Recon Research (RR) is an analyst and market research firm focused on the enterprise communications space. Our areas of coverage include unified communications, video conferencing, collaboration and ideation, audio visual AV solutions, wireless presentation, and more.

RR provides enterprise customers, vendors, channel partners, and investment professionals with the information and insight needed to make fact-based decisions.

What makes RR different is the depth of our knowledge and experience that comes from 15+ years of company briefings, market analysis, and hands-on testing of communication products and services.

For more information, visit us at www.reconres.com.

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