

# Open Spaces

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Somewhere in the 60's, something terrible happened. Someone, out of hatred and ignominy, tore down the walls of his or her office, and showed to the corporate world a new way of working.

The Open Space was born. And since that day, we have had 4 major economic crisis: 1973, 1987, 2000 and 2008.

OK, OK. I am exaggerating. Maybe the concept of open space has nothing to do with the rapidly increasing cycle of economic disasters in the last 40 years. Maybe yes, or maybe not; I am not here to argue. But one thing is sure: our industry changed substantially the day somebody thought that the open space was a good idea for software development teams as well.

## Bad Idea

So, here is my personal opinion on open spaces: they are a disaster, a cancer for the industry.

I know that many developers work best in them, but in my personal experience, the best software is made in silence, in peace. No good software can be achieved in the middle of laughter, coffee machines grinding beans, conversations, phone rings, cell phone buzzers, people sneezing or having an impromptu design meeting two desks away.

Yet, this chaotic environment is exactly what the industry offers to those poor souls looking to solve problems. Because our job as software developers is primarily to use code to solve problems; and if one can hardly concentrate for a few hours to solve those problems, one should not expect the solution to be sound, simple or otherwise viable.

Stating the obvious, open spaces are noisy, and that's bad.

## But what about teamwork?

The biggest rationale behind this disastrous situation is that open spaces are supposed to increase *teamwork*. Behind this magic word, managers expect large pools of very expensive souls to solve increasingly complex problems.

The problem is, open spaces are terrible places to solve problems, and since most management gurus talk about open spaces as the solution to all evils in the corporate world, and because open spaces are inherently cheaper than any other office organisation pattern, companies of all sizes end up replicating a model of incoherence and pain that should disappear from the face of Earth.

## Possible Solutions

It is naive to believe that these words will shatter the corporate world to its core and remove the open space cancer from the world, as much as I wish this to happen one day. But there are solutions that could be implemented relatively easily that could increase the quality of the software produced in most organisations by an order of magnitude:

1. Keep open spaces *only* for group activities. Do not allow any developer to perform any kind of “solo” activity in them, but use them in scenarios that involve many members of the team at the same time: team coordination sessions, team building, marketing and design brainstormings, idea gathering, end-user testing sessions, etc.
2. Reserve one or two offices for private work. These offices should be reserved at any time for the development team, so that teams of at most three developers can lock themselves in for a few hours and solve problems in them. When the doors of these offices are closed, *nobody* should interrupt the developers working in them, and inside of these rooms, silence must be respected: cell phones are set to “airport mode” or at least set to vibrate, and no music is allowed (other than with headphones, that is.)
3. Or, you know, just adopt remote work. This is a trend that the pandemic, and the subsequent “big quit” have accelerated.

These steps are simple, and take into account the fact that software development is **both** a group and an individual activity at the same time. Work environments must provide teams and individuals with the possibility to work as they see fit, and most organisations usually have available offices that could be used this way.