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(54) **CONFERENCE TABLE**

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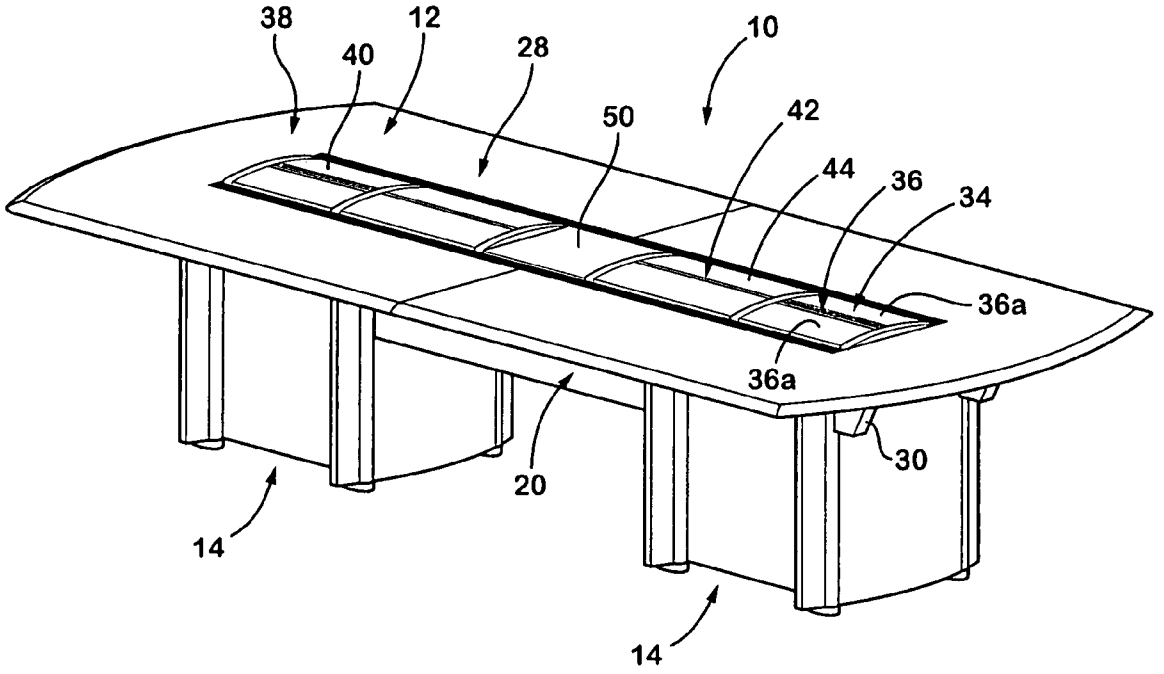
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A conference table includes a work surface supported by at least two supports and a plurality of receiving slots positioned generally beneath the work surface and accessible from at least one side of the conference table. The receiving slots are configured to receive electronic racking units therein, and include electrical connections for electrically connecting a power source to the racking units when the racking units are inserted into the receiving slots. The racking units are securable in the receiving slots and are generally concealable within the receiving slots via at least one movable cover. The table may include a plurality of lights positioned around the table and movable between a raised position, where the lights may illuminate the work surface, and a lowered position, where the lights may be positioned generally beneath the work surface. The table may include an accessory well for movably housing an accessory within the well of the conference table.



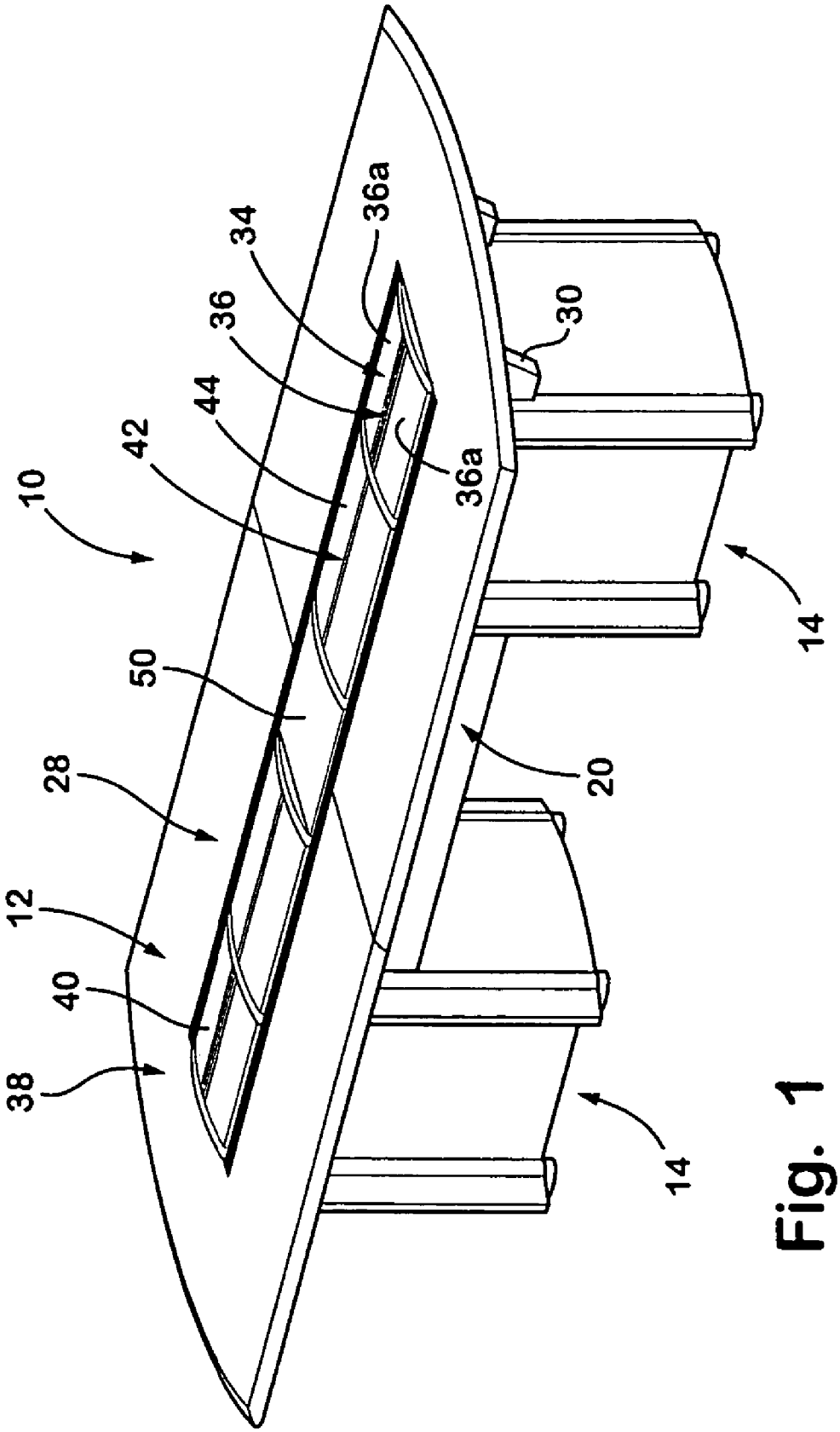


Fig. 1

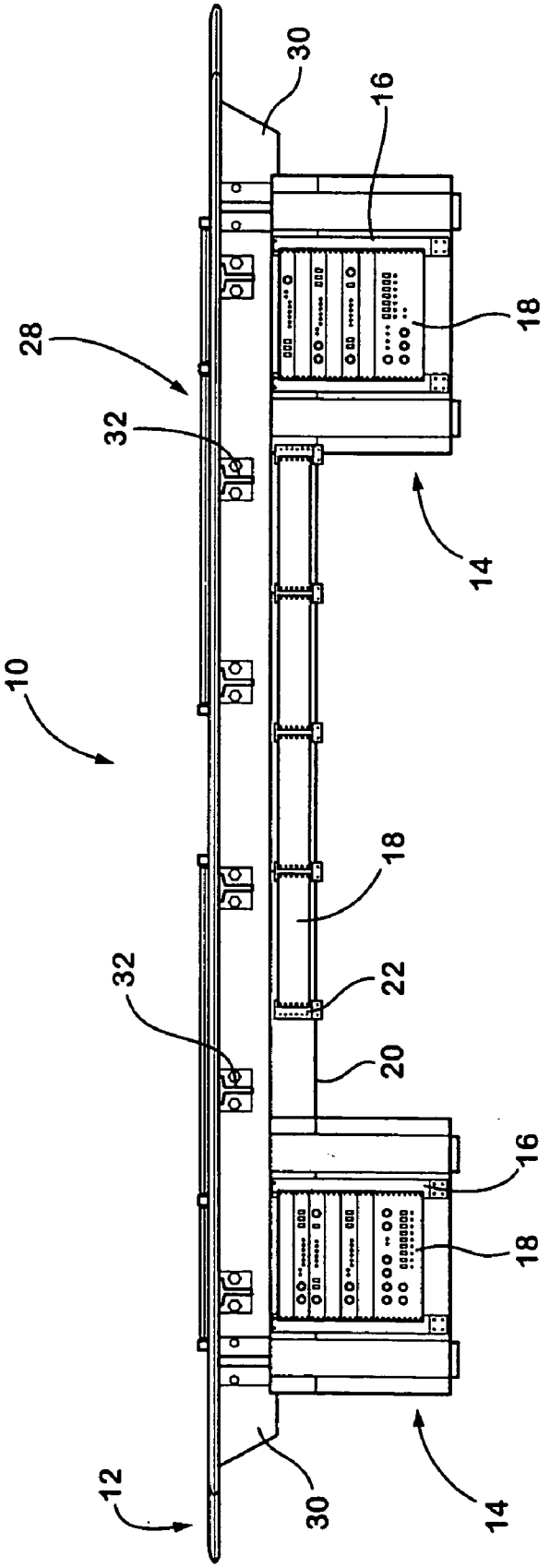


Fig. 2

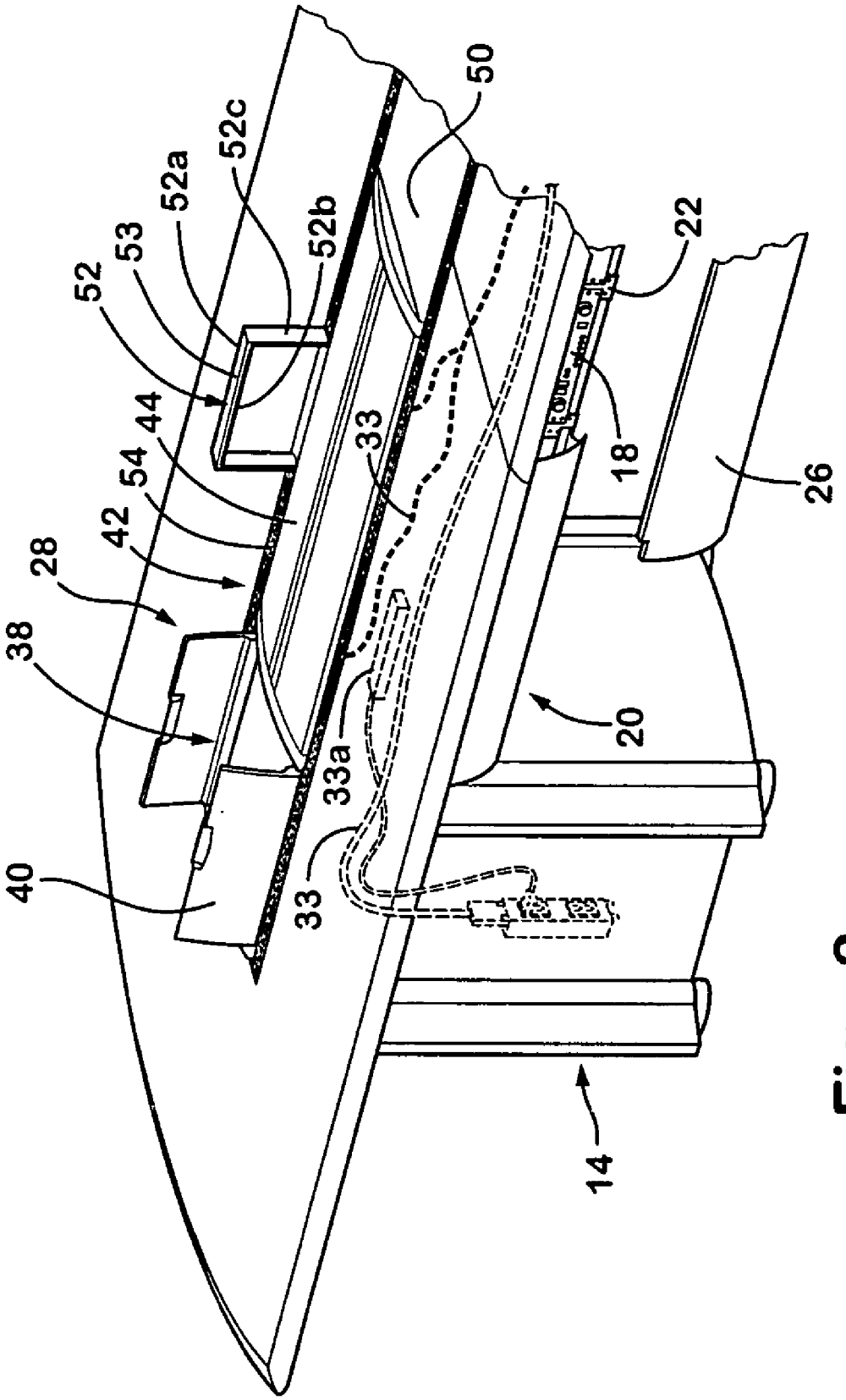


Fig. 3

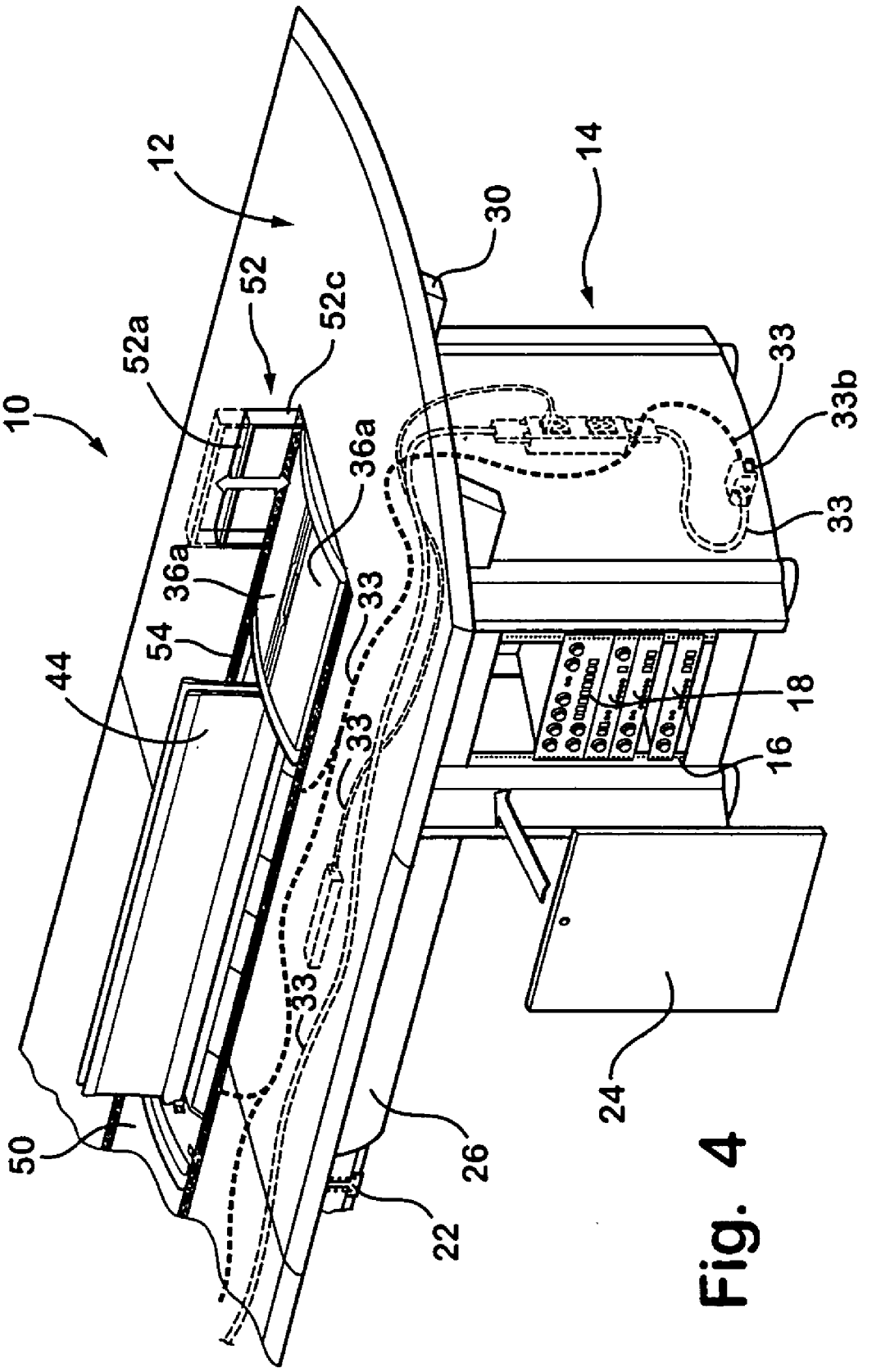

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Fig. 4

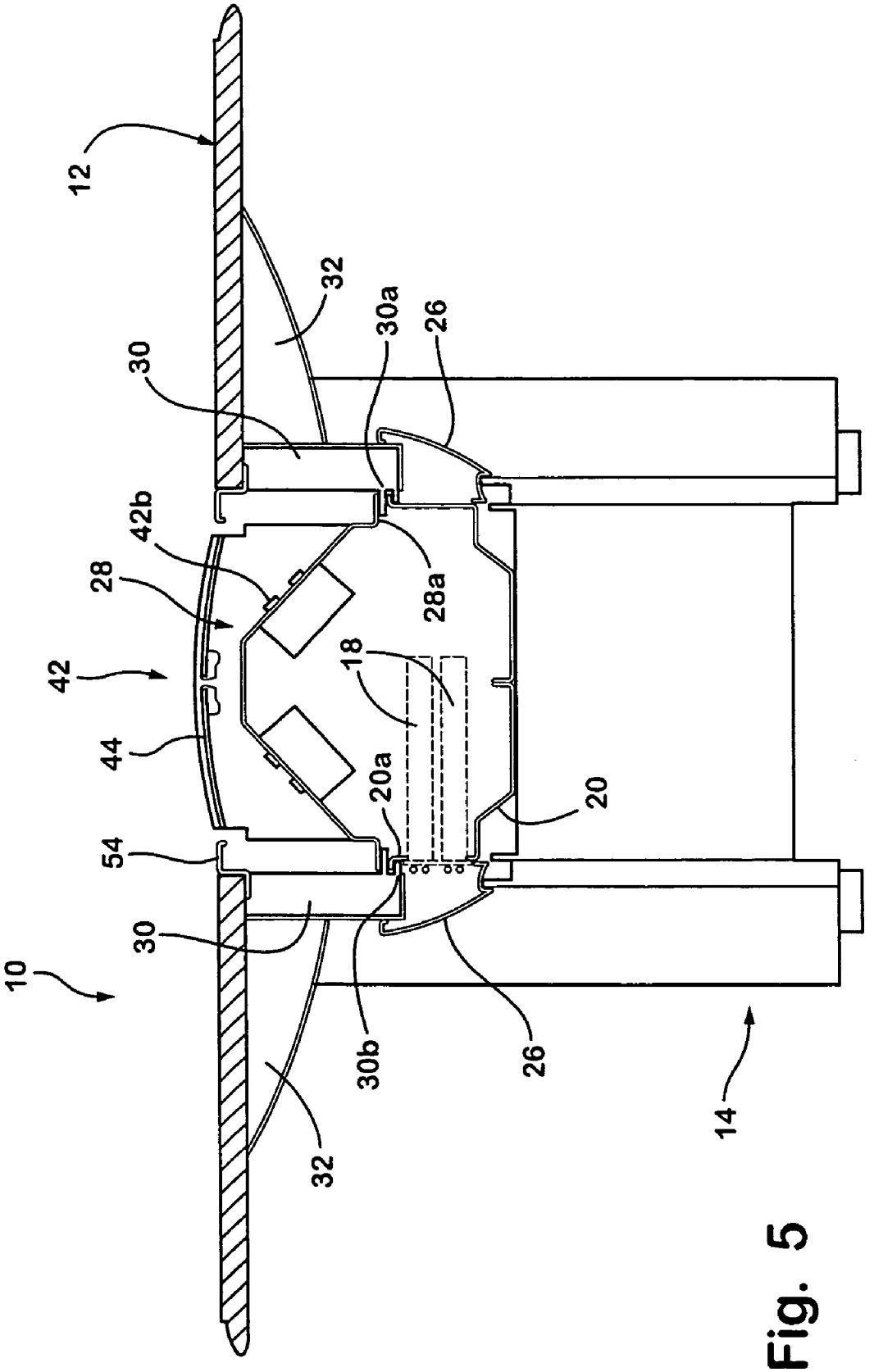
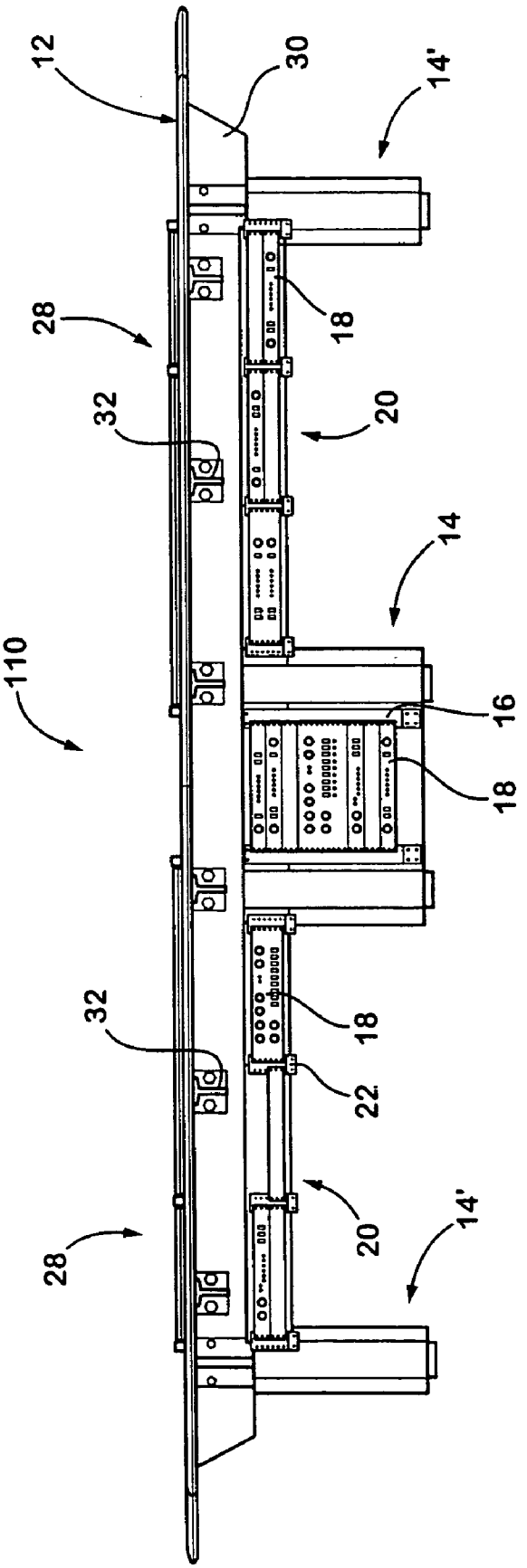


Fig. 5



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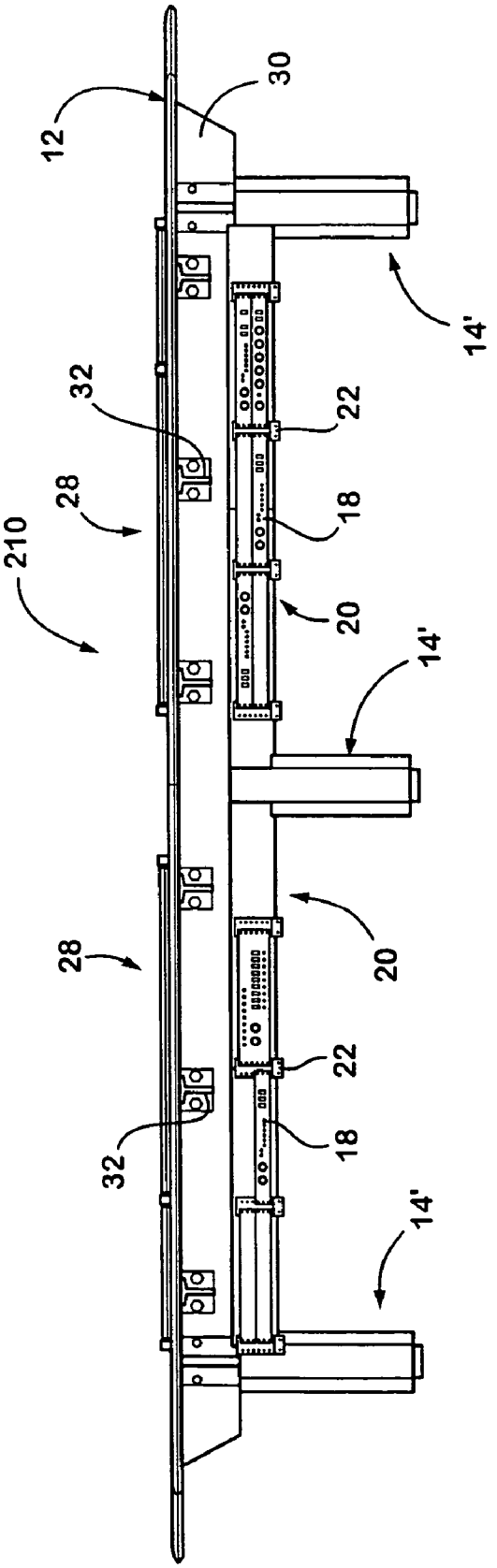


Fig. 7

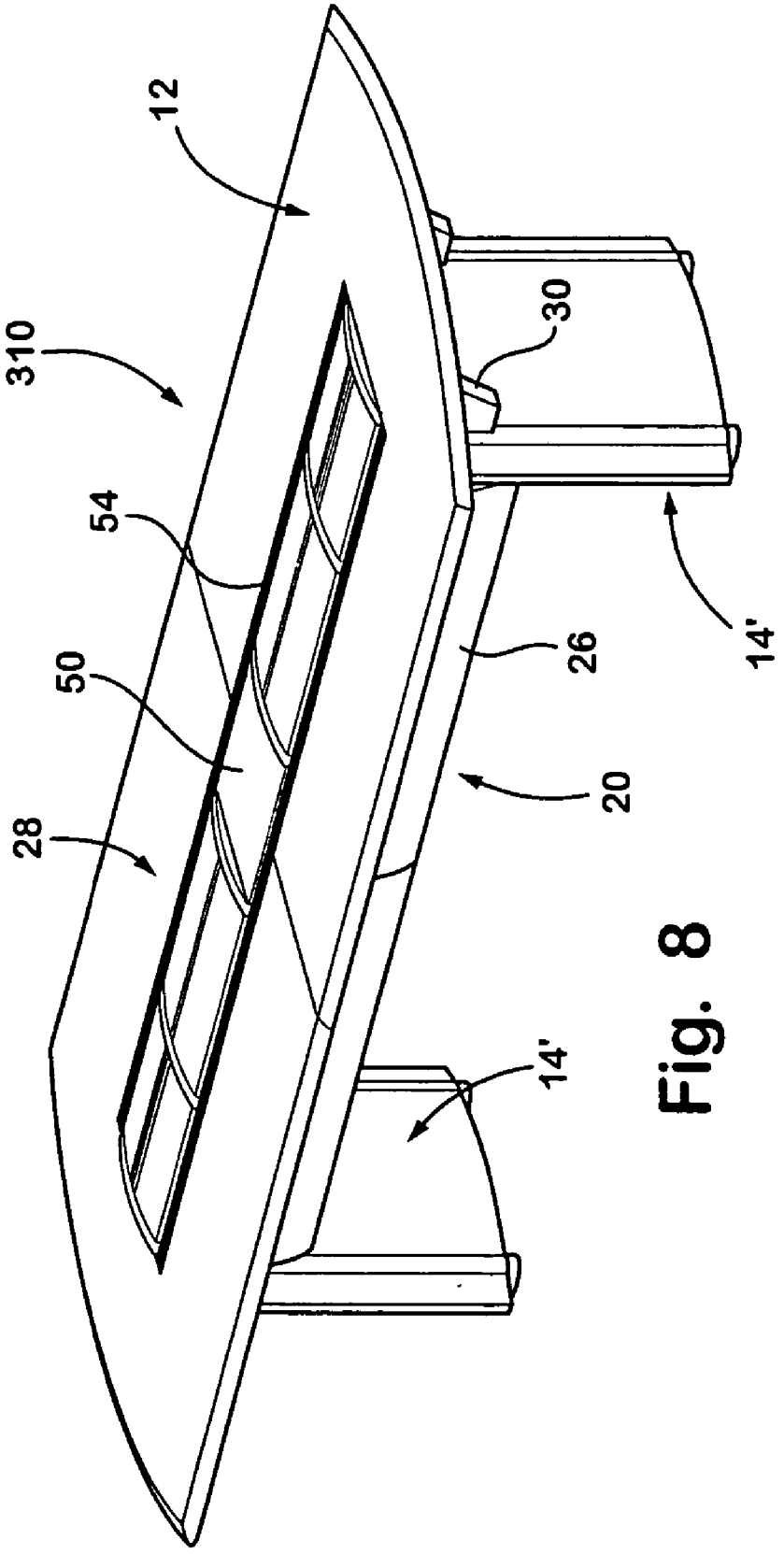


Fig. 8

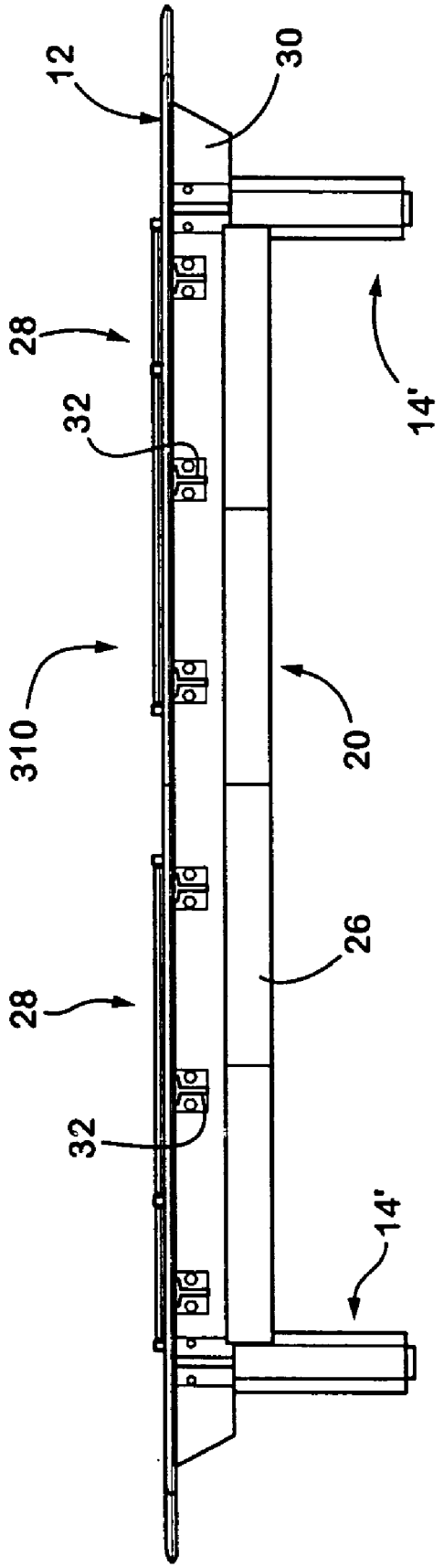


Fig. 9

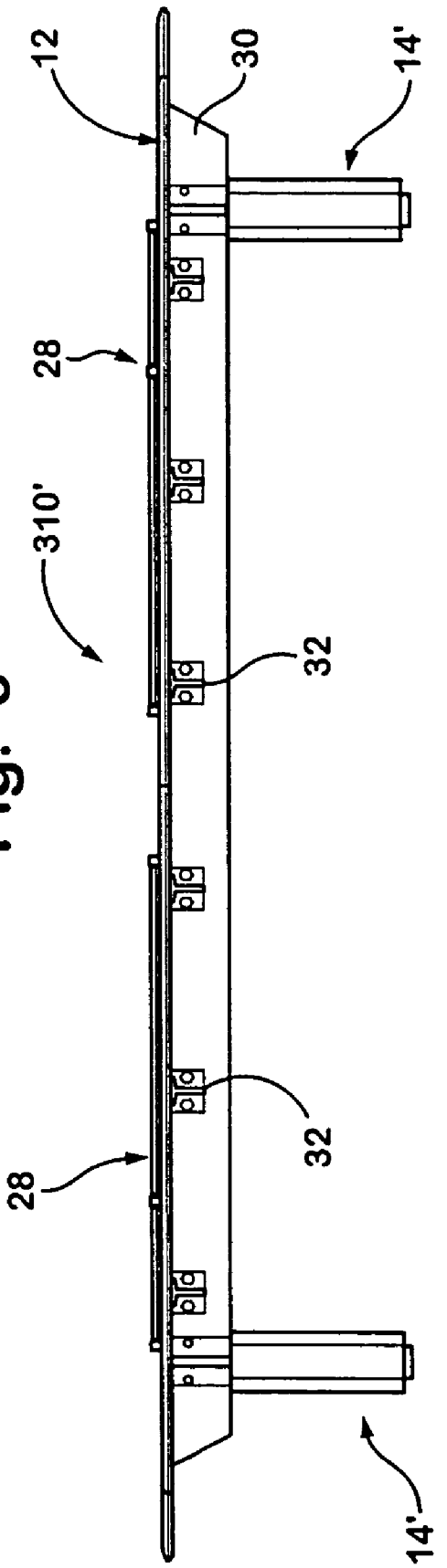


Fig. 10

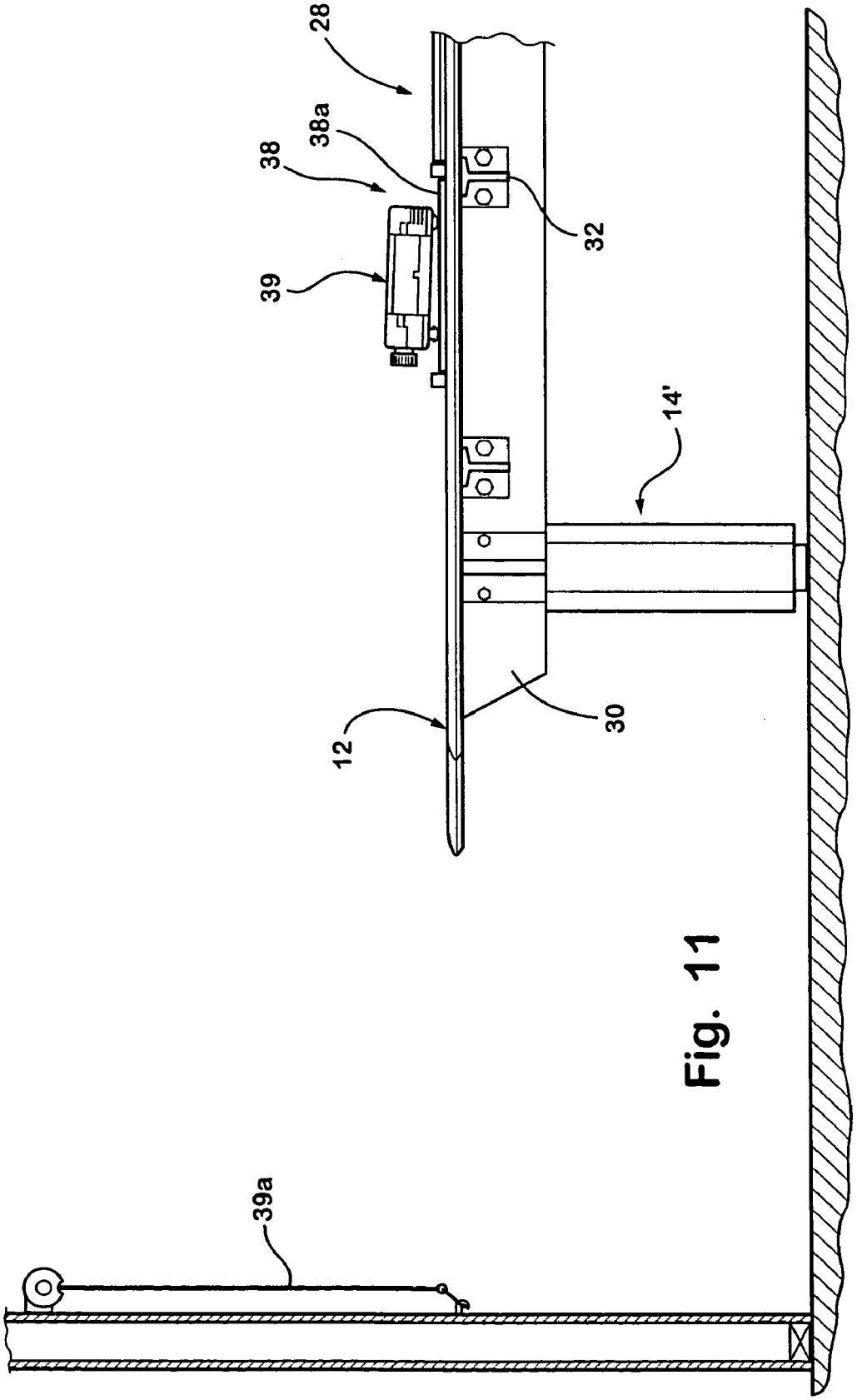


Fig. 11

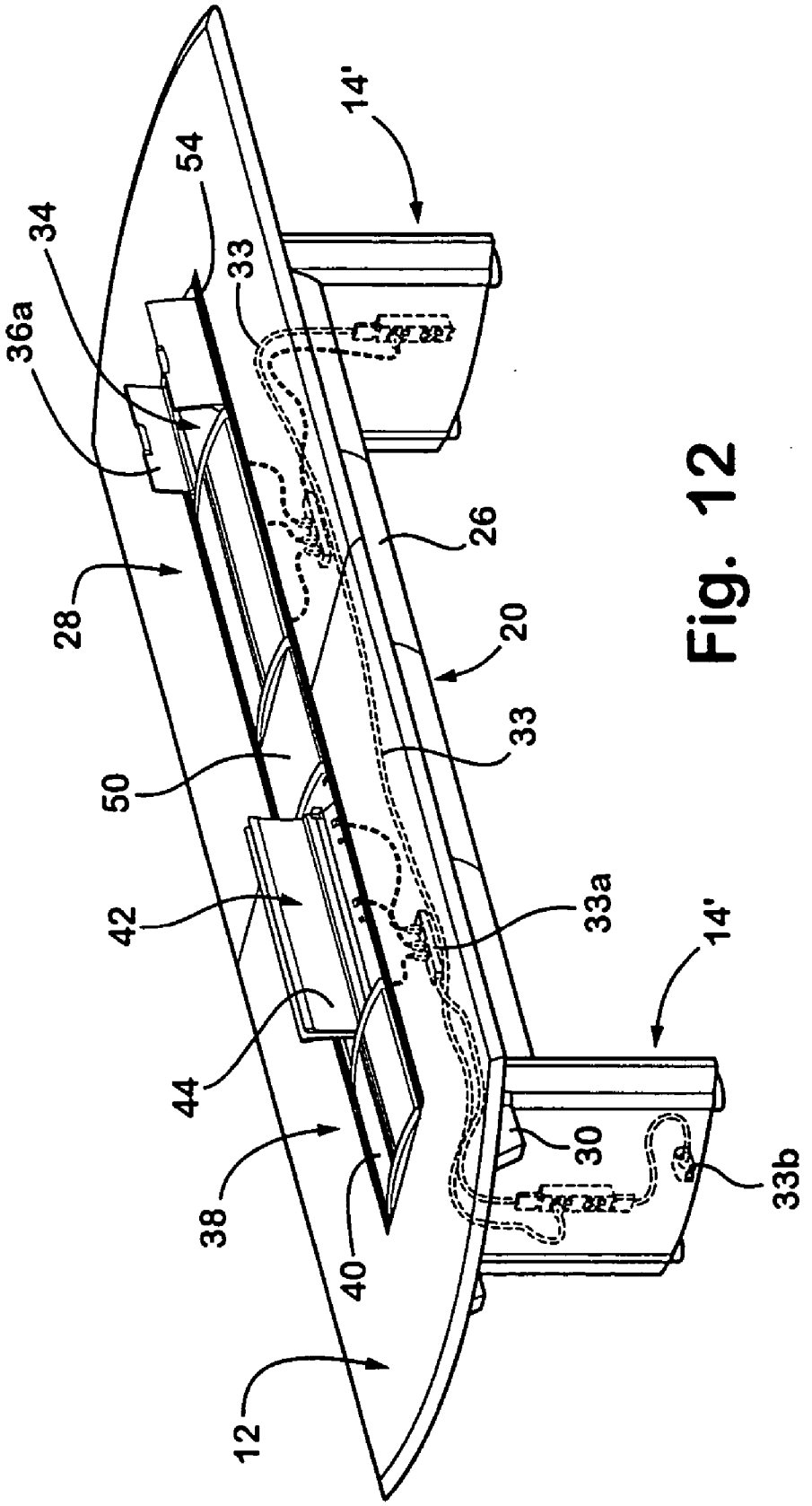
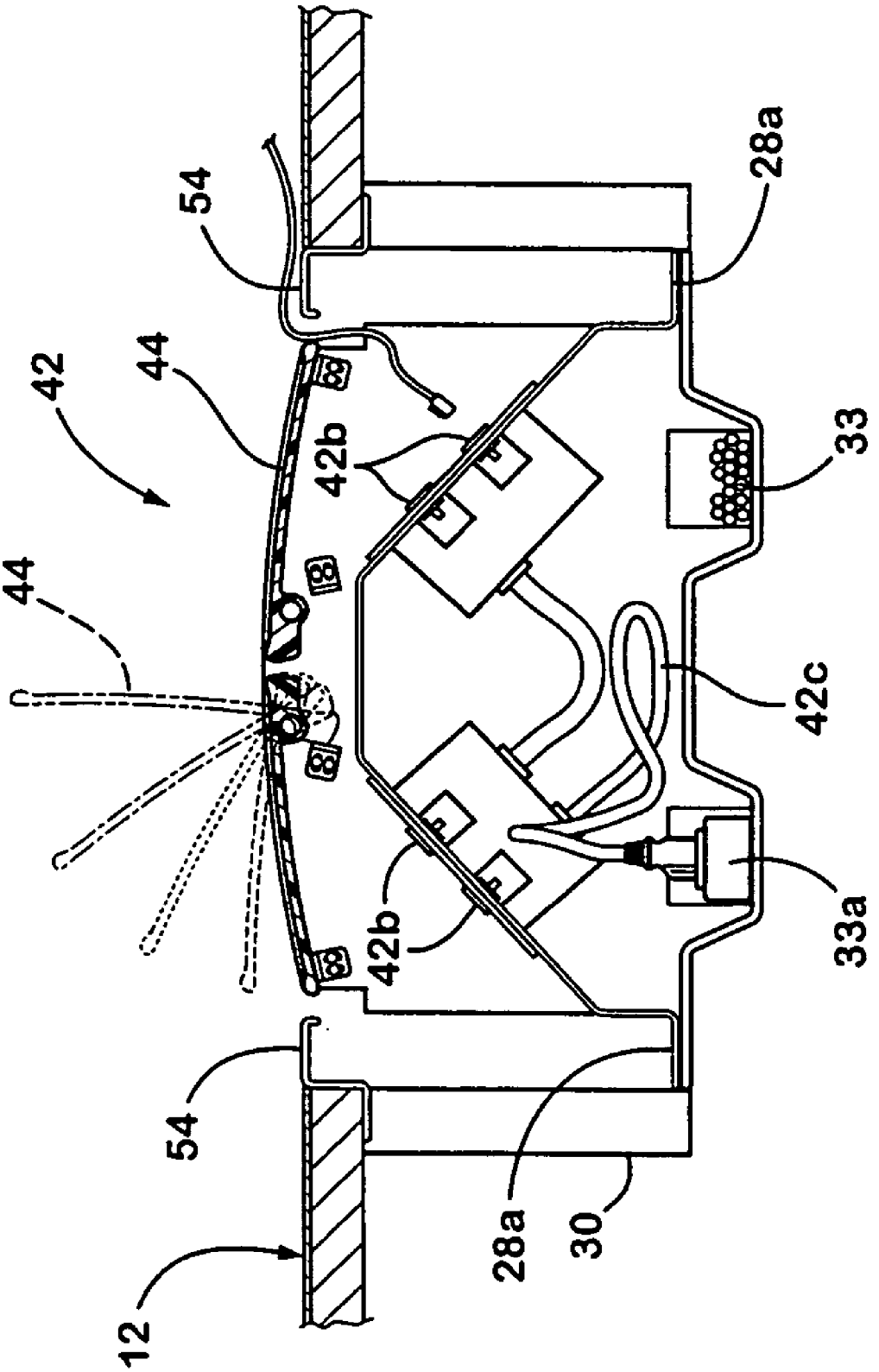


Fig. 12



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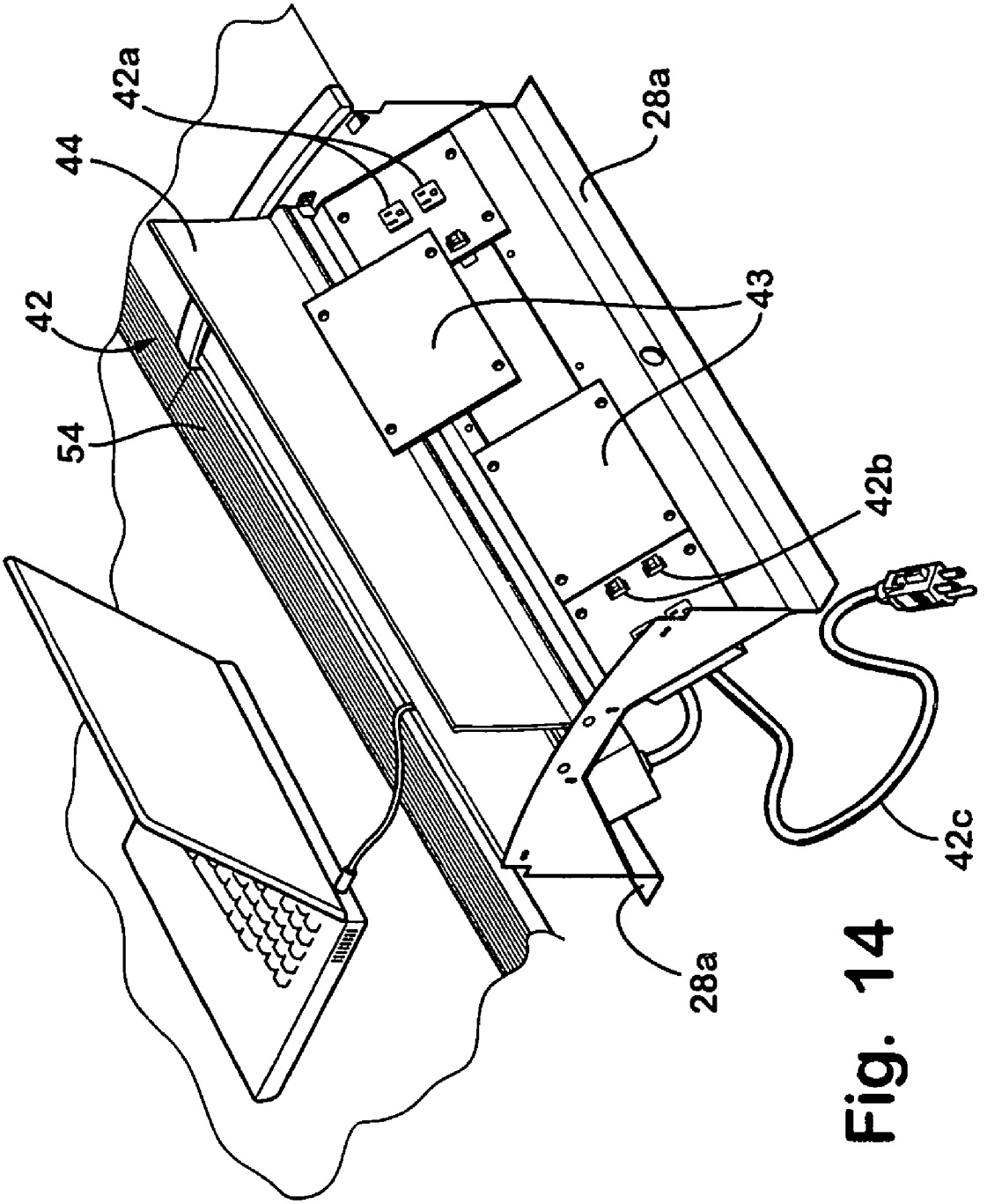

Fig. 14

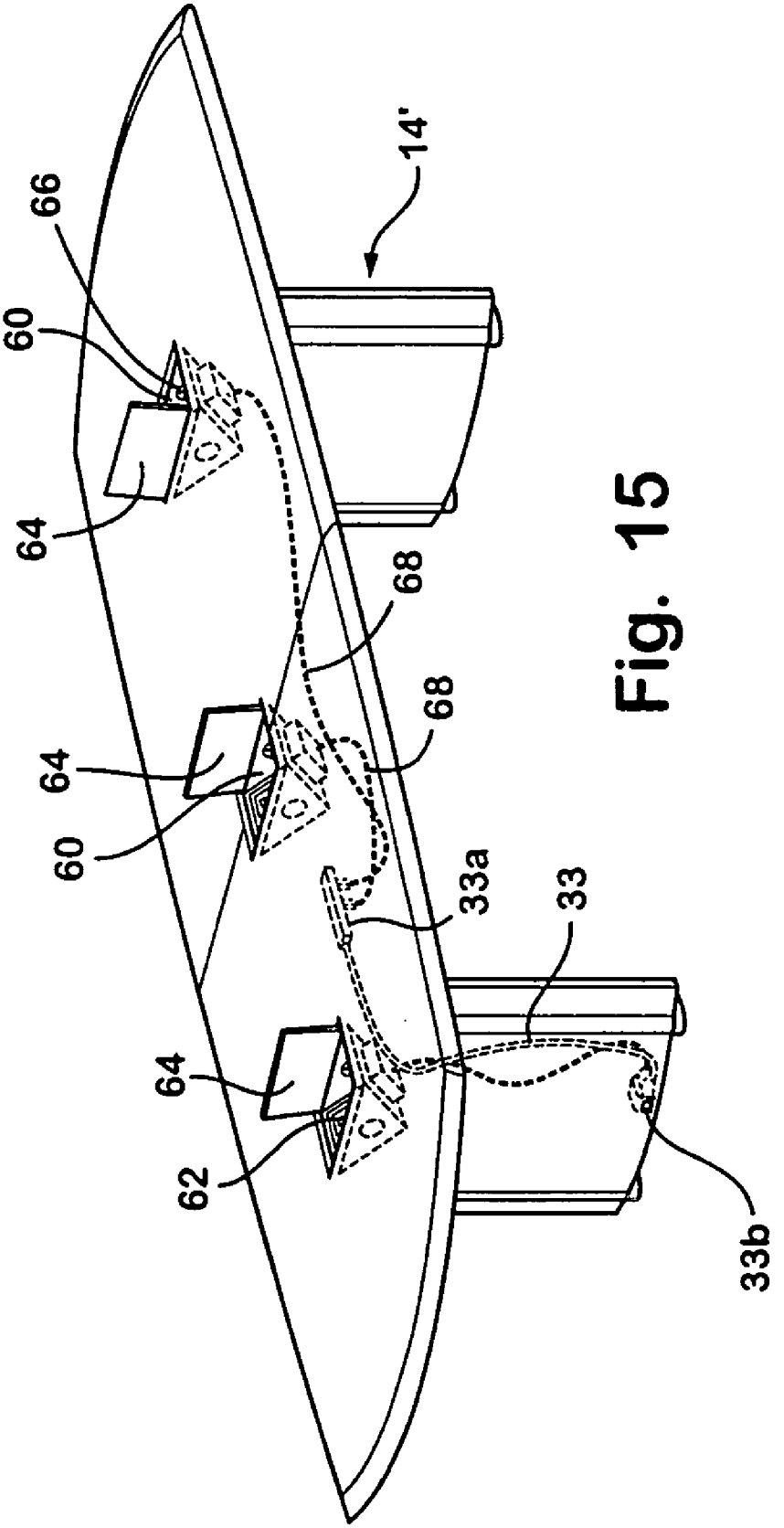

Fig. 15

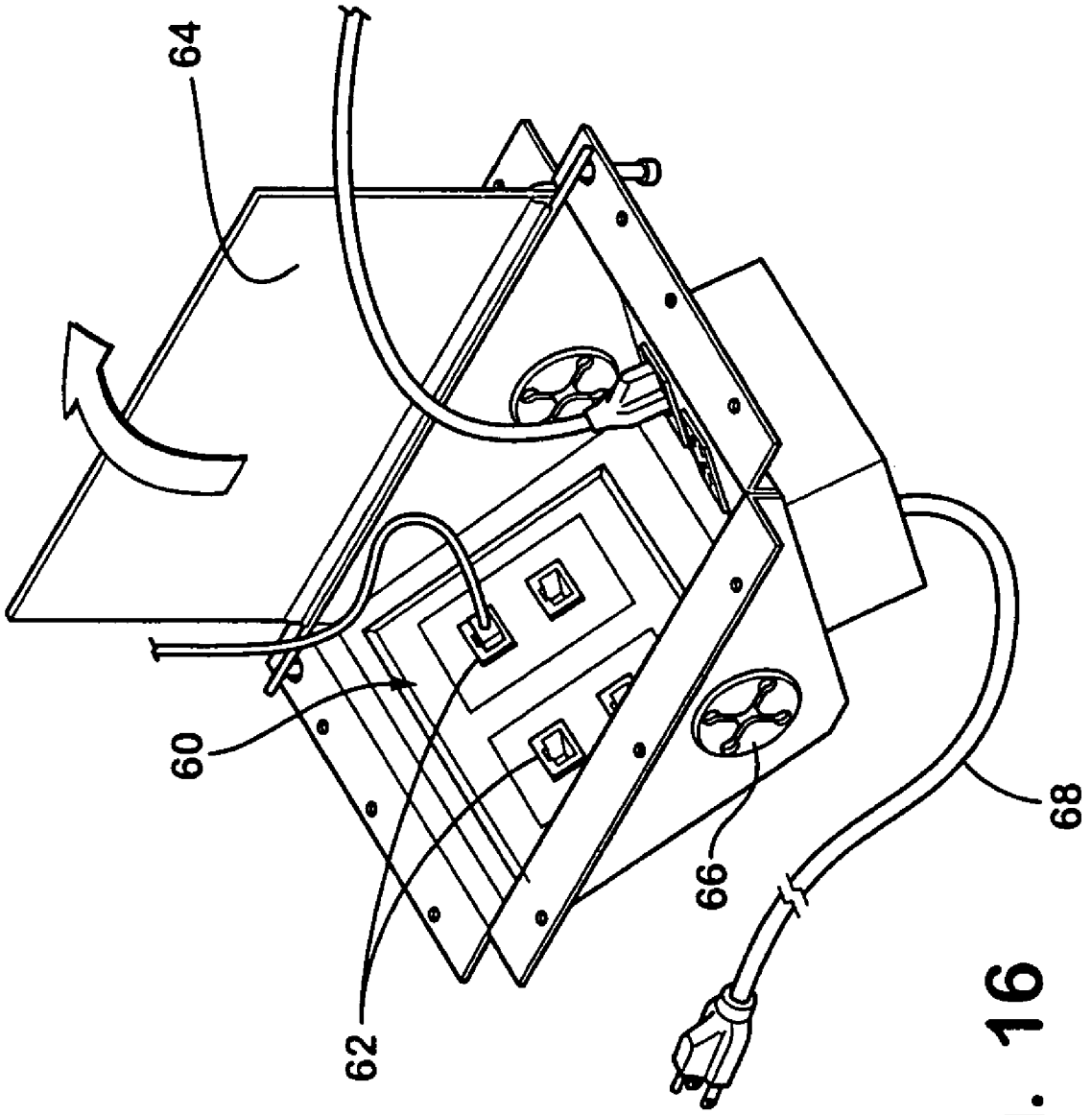

Fig. 16

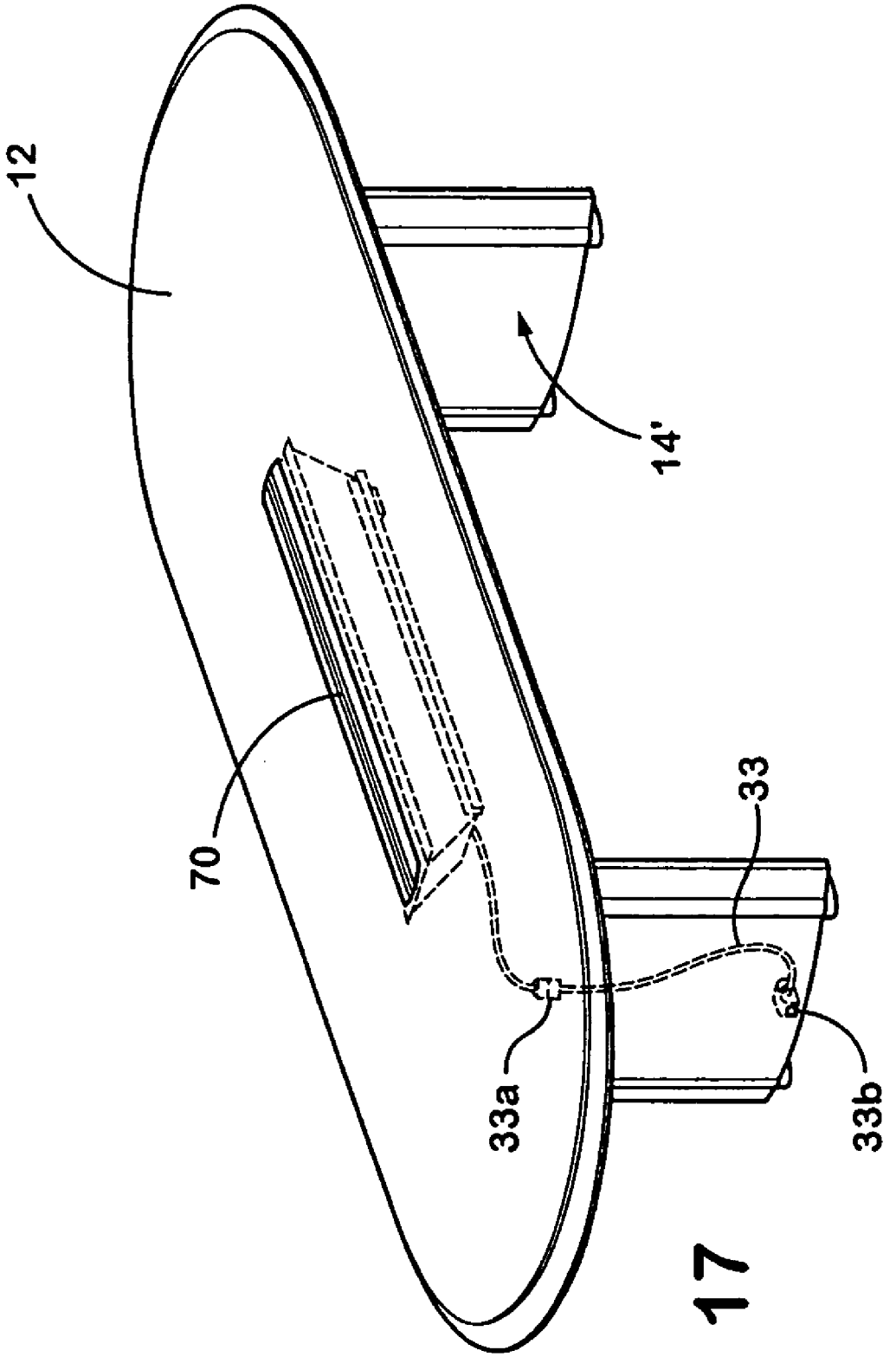

Fig. 17

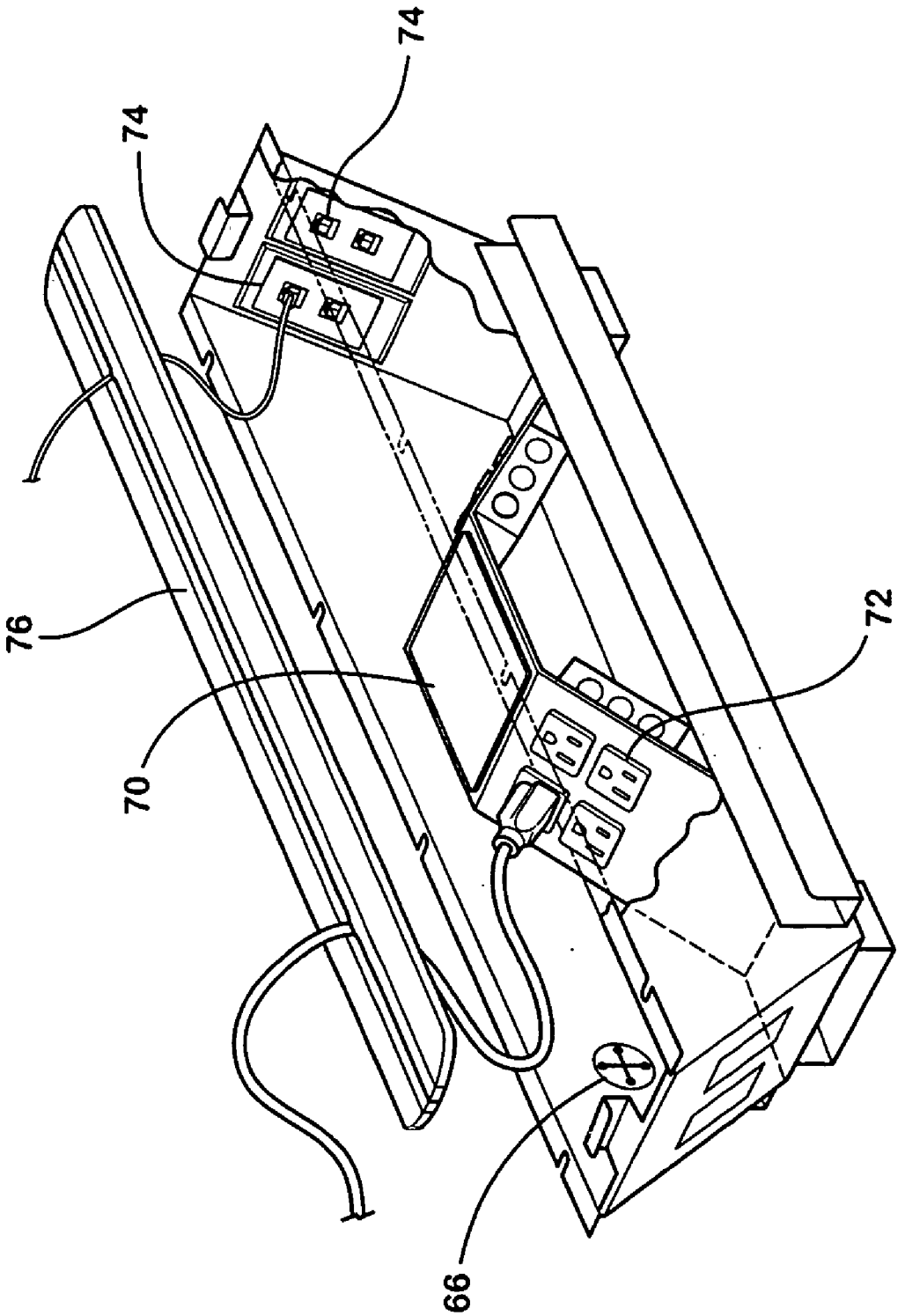

Fig. 18

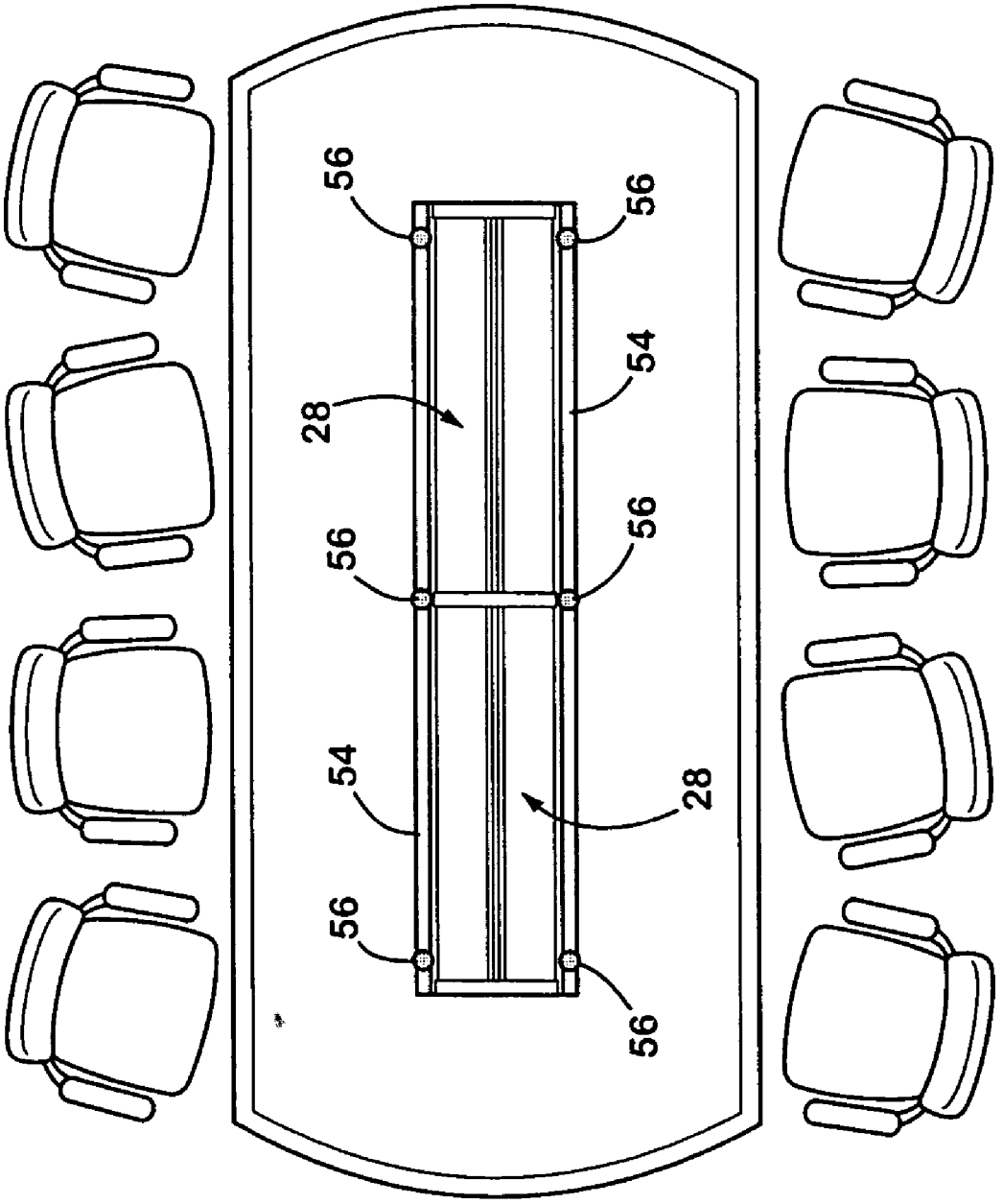

Fig. 19

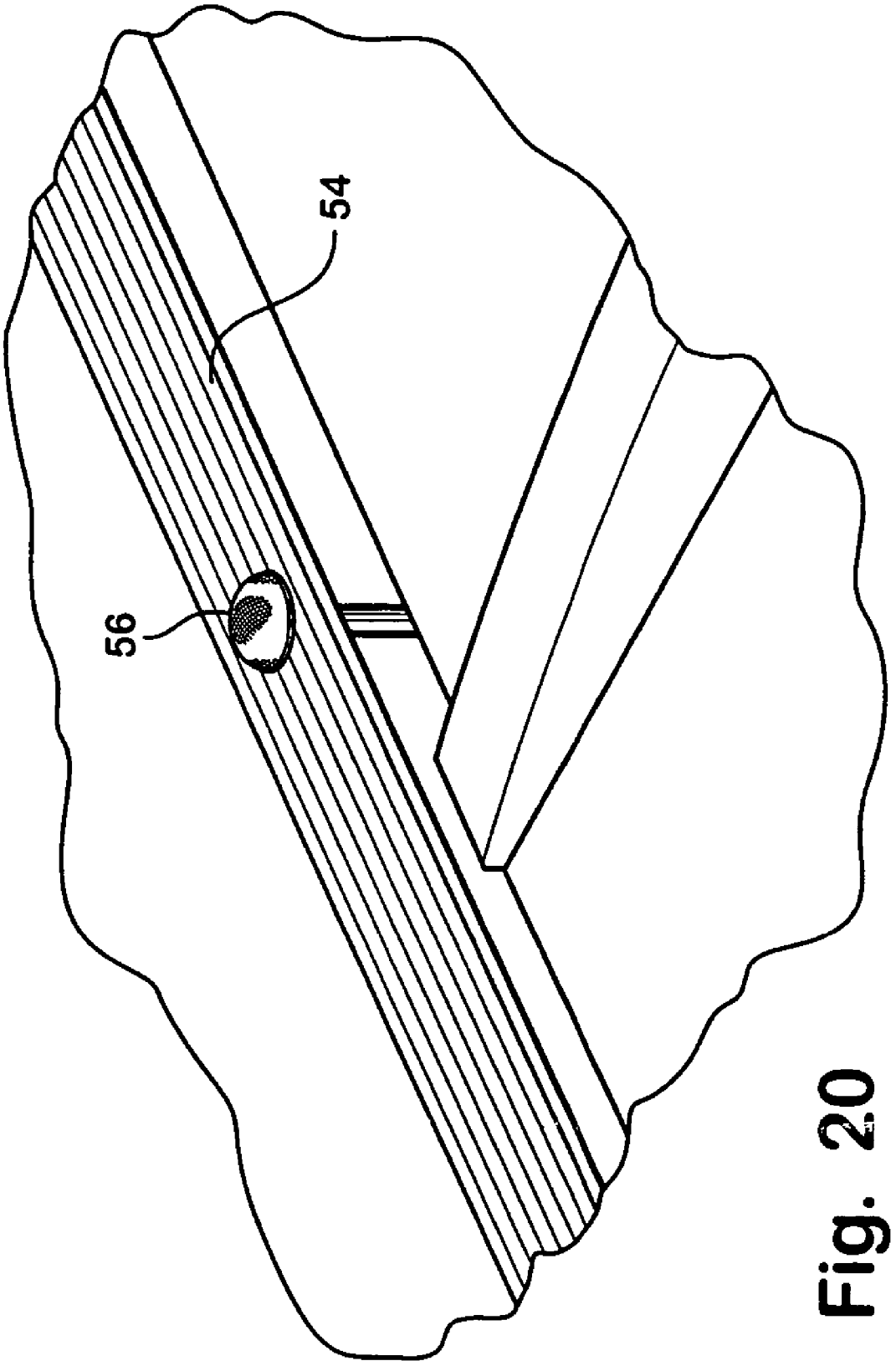

Fig. 20

CONFERENCE TABLE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates generally to conference tables and, more particularly, to conference tables at which electronic accessories and devices may be used or connected.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] It is known to provide a conference table that includes a large work surface that may provide for electrical connection or power supply to a computer or laptop or the like positioned at the table. The conference table may include a plurality of outlets and/or communication wiring or network or video cabling that may be accessible from the work surface. The outlets or connectors may be provided for plugging in a computer or the like while the computer is placed on the work surface. The outlets and connectors may be positioned within a channel along the work surface and may be covered with a removable cover. An example of such a table is shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,327,983.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The present invention provides a conference table that may receive or house a plurality of racking units or electronic accessories therein. The conference table may include electrical power supply connectors or other communication links and the like to the racking units as the racking units are received into the respective openings in the conference table. The conference table may also provide for other electrical connections, such as power connections, telecommunication connections, video and network connections and the like, for other electronic accessories and the like that may be positioned at the conference table. The connections may be readily accessed through one or more openings in the tabletop or work surface of the conference table. The conference table may also include one or more accessory wells for holding one or more electronic accessories therein. The wells may be raised upwardly so that the accessory is positioned generally at or above the tabletop or work surface, and may be lowered down into the conference table and closed over, such that the accessory is positioned within the well and covered by a cover generally at the work surface. The conference table may include lights or other accessories as well to provide an enhanced work surface at which the people sitting around the conference table may work or confer.

[0004] According to an aspect of the present invention, a conference table for a plurality of people to confer at includes a tabletop or work surface supported by at least two supports and a plurality of receiving slots or shelves positioned generally beneath the tabletop. The receiving slots are accessible from at least one side of the conference table and are configured to receive electronic racking units therein. The receiving slots include electrical connections for electrically connecting one or more electrical wires to the racking units when the racking units are inserted into the receiving slots. The wires may connect to a power source and/or other electrical accessories or units at or near or associated with the conference table. The racking units are securable in the receiving slots and are selectively concealable within the receiving slots via at least one movable or removable cover.

[0005] The receiving slots may be positioned within, beneath and along at least one side of the work surface and/or may be positioned within a column that defines at least one of the supports of the work surface. The conference table may include at least one accessory connector that is positioned within a recess of the work surface and that is accessible from above the work surface. The accessory connector is configured to connect to an accessory and may be connected to an electrical power source or communication link. The recess may receive an accessory therein and may be selectively accessible via opening a cover that is movably positioned at and at least partially over the recess. The recess may include a movable platform that may support an accessory and that is movable between a lowered position, where the platform and the accessory are at least substantially within the recess, and a raised position, where the platform and the accessory are elevated such that the accessory is at a level generally coplanar with the work surface.

[0006] The conference table may include a plurality of microphones spaced along the work surface for receiving vocal signals from a person sitting near the respective microphone. The microphones may be fixedly mounted to the work surface and may be positioned at least partially within and along a trim strip along the work surface. The conference table may include a plurality of lights that may be vertically movable between a raised position, where the lights function to illuminate at least a portion of the work surface, and a lowered position, where the lights are positioned below the work surface and substantially concealed by a cover portion of the lights. The lights may be automatically activated when moved to the raised position and automatically deactivated when moved to the lowered position. Each of the lights may include an elongated upper bar that houses the illumination source of the light. The elongated upper bar may define a cover portion that generally corresponds with the upper surface of the work surface at or around the light when the light is in the lowered position. The lights may be positioned along a trim strip of the work surface, such that the cover portions of the lights generally correspond with the surface of the trim strip at either side of the lights.

[0007] According to another aspect of the present invention, a conference table for a plurality of people to confer at includes a work surface supported by at least two supports, a plurality of work stations defined at least partially around the work surface, and a plurality of lights along the work surface. Each work station is configured for a person to sit at, and the lights are positioned generally at respective ones of the work stations. The lights are vertically movable between a raised position, where the lights function to illuminate at least a portion of the work surface at the respective work station, and a lowered position, where the lights are positioned below the work surface and substantially concealed by a cover portion of the lights. Each of the lights is independently vertically movable.

[0008] Therefore, the present invention provides a conference table that may house or receive a plurality of electronic accessories or racking units therein, and that may provide for electrical or telecommunication connections to the racking units and/or other accessories. The conference table of the present invention thus provides for enhanced and convenient storage for audio and/or visual equipment where they may

be easily or readily accessible by a person sitting at the conference table. The conference table of the present invention also provides for readily accessible connections for various electronic devices and, thus, provides an enhanced work surface at which people may work with their laptops and the like.

[0009] These and other objects, advantages, purposes and features of the present invention will become apparent upon review of the following specification in conjunction with the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] **FIG. 1** is a perspective view of a conference table in accordance with the present invention;

[0011] **FIG. 2** is a side elevation of the conference table of **FIG. 1**;

[0012] **FIG. 3** is a perspective view of one end of the conference table of the present invention;

[0013] **FIG. 4** is perspective view of the opposite end of the conference table of **FIG. 3**;

[0014] **FIG. 5** is an end elevation and partial sectional view of the conference table of the present invention;

[0015] **FIG. 6** is a side elevation of another conference table of the present invention;

[0016] **FIG. 7** is a side elevation of another conference table of the present invention;

[0017] **FIG. 8** is a perspective view of another conference table of the present invention;

[0018] **FIG. 9** is a side elevation of the conference table of **FIG. 8**;

[0019] **FIG. 10** is a side elevation of another conference table similar to the conference table of **FIGS. 8 and 9**, with the lower shelving removed;

[0020] **FIG. 11** is a side elevation of an end of a conference table of the present invention, with a projector raised upwardly by a retractable well of the conference table;

[0021] **FIG. 12** is a perspective view of another conference table of the present invention;

[0022] **FIG. 13** is an end elevation and partial sectional view of an access module for use with the conference table of the present invention;

[0023] **FIG. 14** is a perspective view of the access module of **FIG. 13**;

[0024] **FIG. 15** is a perspective view of another conference table of the present invention;

[0025] **FIG. 16** is a perspective view of one of the modules or bays of the table of **FIG. 15**;

[0026] **FIG. 17** is a perspective view of another conference table of the present invention, with a power module positioned along a center portion of the table;

[0027] **FIG. 18** is a perspective view of the power module of **FIG. 17**;

[0028] **FIG. 19** is a plan view of another conference table of the present invention, with a plurality of microphones positioned along the trim strips of the conference table; and

[0029] **FIG. 20** is an enlarged perspective view of the trim strip and microphone of **FIG. 19**.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0030] Referring now to the drawings and the illustrative embodiments depicted therein, a conference table **10** includes a work surface or tabletop **12** and a pair of generally vertical legs or columns or supports **14**, one at or near each end of the conference table **10 (FIGS. 1 and 2)**. In the illustrated embodiment of **FIGS. 1-5**, supports **14** comprise column supports that include a plurality of equipment racks or shelves or receiving slots **16** for holding a plurality of electronic accessories or racking units **18 (FIGS. 2 and 4)**. Conference table **10** may also include a lower shelf or trough **20** that extends generally along and beneath work surface **12** and that includes one or more equipment racks or shelves or receiving slots or racks **22** for receiving additional electronic accessories or racking units **18**. Conference table **10** may include a cover panel **24** for selectively accessing and concealing racking units **18** in column supports **14**, and may further include movable or removable cover panels **26** for selectively accessing and concealing the racking units **18** in the lower channel **20**. Conference table **10** may also include one or more accessory or power or communication modules **28** positioned generally along a center portion of the work surface **12** and accessible by people sitting by conference table **10**, as discussed below.

[0031] Work surface **12** may be supported on supports **14** by a pair of longitudinally extending beams or support members **30** that extend substantially the length of the work surface and that at least span the gap between the supports to provide support over substantially the entire length of the work surface **12**. The beams **30** may comprise a metallic material, such as an extruded aluminum material, and may connect to a plurality of side braces **32 (FIGS. 2 and 5)** that may extend outwardly from the beams **30** to provide additional support toward the lateral sides of the work surface **12**. The work surface **12** is thus supported by the beams **30**, braces **32** and supports **14**, and thus may comprise a lighter weight or less rigid material than conventional tabletops or work surfaces, without affecting the structural integrity of conference table **10**. As shown in **FIG. 5**, beams **30** may includes flanges **30*a***, **30*b*** extending laterally inwardly therefrom for engaging corresponding grooves or flanges **28*a*** of the center accessory modules **28** and for engaging flanges or lips **20*a*** of the lower shelves or troughs **20** to support the various accessories/racking units and electronic connections and circuitry that may be implemented with the conference table **10**, as discussed below. Because the beams are spaced apart along and below the work surface, the accessory or center modules may be positioned at a generally central region of the work surface and between the beams, such that the accessory modules and the like may extend below the work surface, yet may be substantially hidden or concealed by and supported by the beams.

[0032] Although shown in **FIGS. 1-5** as having a pair of column supports **14** at opposite ends of the table, clearly other support configurations for the conference table may be

implemented, without affecting the scope of the present invention. For example, a conference table **110** (**FIG. 6**) may include a center column support **14** and a pair of leg supports **14'** at opposite ends of the table, or a conference table **210** (**FIG. 7**) may include three leg supports **14'** spaced along the conference table, or a conference table **310** (**FIGS. 8 and 9**) may include just a pair of opposite leg supports **14'**. In the illustrated embodiment of **FIG. 10**, the conference table **310'** is substantially similar to conference table **310**, but does not include the lower trough or shelf for receiving and supporting racking units along and generally underneath the work surface of the conference table. The conference tables **110**, **210**, **310**, **310'** are otherwise substantially similar to conference table **10**, discussed in detail herein, such that a detailed discussion of the conference tables will not be repeated herein. The similar components and modules and the like of the conference tables are shown with similar reference numerals in the associated drawings. In each embodiment, the work surface and support members or beams may be substantially similar, with different vertical supports or legs or columns supporting the beams and work surface, which may in turn support different accessory or center modules, lights, lower channels or troughs, and the like at and between the beams, depending on the particular application of the conference table.

[**0033**] As best shown in **FIGS. 3, 4**, and **12**, conference table **10** may include the electrical wiring **33**, such as power cords or cables and/or data cables and/or other communication lines or cables or the like routed through and along the conference table and substantially concealed therewithin. The wires and cables and cords **33** connect the various connectors or outlets **33***a* or the like of the center modules **28** of the conference table to an output wire or connector **33***b* that connects the electrical or communication system of the conference table to a power source or communication network or the like. The conference table thus may be positioned in a conference room and the connectors **33***b* for electrical power and communication signals may be plugged into or connected to the appropriate wires of the conference room, whereby the multiple outlets and communication lines and the like of the conference table will receive the power and data and the like via that connection. Because the wiring **33** and connectors **33***a*, **33***b* are routed along the conference table **10**, the accessories or racking units may be readily connected to the power source or appropriate network or the like without requiring separate wires to be individually run from each accessory to the desired power source or network connections.

[**0034**] As best shown in **FIGS. 2-5**, racking units **18** may be attached to the brackets or racking attachments **16**, **22** of conference table **10** to substantially fixedly, yet removably, retain the racking units **18** to conference table **10**. The column supports **14** and the lower troughs **20** may include racking attachments **16**, **22**, respectively, for receiving the racking units therein. The racking units **18** may be readily inserted into the racking attachments **16**, **22** of the column supports **14** and lower trough **20**, whereby the electrical connections to the corresponding wiring may be made as the racking units are inserted into the racking attachments.

[**0035**] As can be seen in **FIGS. 3 and 4**, racking units **18** may comprise typical racking units having a front panel and controls and a mounting plate at the front panel for connecting or securing the racking unit to the respective brackets, such as via fasteners or the like. The racking units may comprise electrical circuitry and connectors, which may not be contained within a casing or housing, and which may readily connect to corresponding connectors or wires of the conference table. For example, the racking units may include plugs or connectors or wires that readily connect to the corresponding connectors or wires of the conference table as the racking units are inserted into the shelving areas of the column support or lower trough, such that additional wiring connections and cables or cords or the like are not required. The connectors of the conference table may connect the racking units (such as via the wiring **33** routed along the conference table) to appropriate outputs or controls or circuitry at the table to achieve the desired connection and operation of the racking units.

[**0036**] Racking units **18** thus may be electronically connected to the appropriate connectors and wiring as they are attached to the racking bracketry **16**, **22**. The wiring may be routed in and along the conference table **10** when the table is assembled, as can be seen with reference to **FIGS. 3 and 4**. The racking units and racking shelving or receiving slots of the conference table thus provide for connection of the desired electronic accessories or units to the conference table without requiring individual wiring of the components after they are positioned at the conference table. The racking units may provide for various audio and visual equipment that may be desired to control speakers and/or other audio equipment and/or projectors, cameras and/or other video equipment or the like, without affecting the scope of the present invention. Because the electrical wiring is already installed in the table, and because the racking units may be readily connected to the electrical wiring as they are inserted into or received into the racking shelves, the conference table **10** may be readily configured to have the desired components or accessories or racking units at a desired location depending on the particular application of the conference table **10**, without requiring individual or separate wiring for the components to be installed after the table is assembled.

[**0037**] After the racking units **18** have been installed and secured to the racking brackets **16**, **22**, the covers **24**, **26** may be positioned at the racking units to generally conceal the racking units within the column support **14** or lower trough **20**, respectively. The covers may be readily removed or opened by a person sitting at the table to access the racking units or accessories. For example, the covers **24**, **26** may be readily removed from the conference table to provide access to the racking units, such as shown in **FIGS. 3 and 4**.

[**0038**] As can be seen in **FIG. 5**, the lower trough **20** may include a flange or lip **20***a* for engaging a corresponding groove or lip **30***b* of elongated beams **30** to attach the lower trough **20** to the beams **30** of conferencing table **10**. The lower trough or channel **20** thus may be readily installed to conference table **10**, if desired, by slidably inserting the lip **20***a* into the groove or channel **30***b*. Optionally, the lower trough may be readily removed from the table if such a configuration is not desired or necessary for the particular application of the conference table (such as shown in **FIG. 10**).

[**0039**] Conference table **10** may also include one or more center modules **28**, which may also be mounted to or attached to or supported by the flanges **30***a* of the longitu-

dinal beams **30**, such as shown in **FIG. 5**. The center modules **28** may include an accessory compartment or well **34** for receiving and storing various equipment or accessories, such as laptop computers, keyboards, remote control devices, projectors, telephones and/or the like. The storage well **34** may provide a generally fixed shelf (not shown) that may be positioned beneath the level of the work surface **12** and may support the equipment or accessory therein. The storage well **34** may include a cover **36**, such as a pair of synchronized doors **36***a*, to substantially close the well and conceal the accessory or equipment therein. In the illustrated embodiment, the doors **36***a* are gull wing type doors that may pivot to a generally vertical and open position, and that may retract or slide downwardly along the sides of the well to be positioned substantially at or below the level of the work surface when in the opened position, such that the well is substantially open for access to the equipment or accessory contained therein.

[**0040**] Optionally, the storage well may comprise a retractable or adjustable well **38** (**FIGS. 1, 3** and **11**) that may house or receive other accessories or equipment, such as projectors and the like. Retractable well **38** may include an equipment support platform **38***a* (**FIG. 11**) that may be vertically adjusted to move the platform **38***a* and the accessory **39** supported thereon between a lowered position, where the platform and the accessory are positioned within the conference table and generally or substantially below the work surface **12**, and a raised position (as shown in **FIG. 11**), where the platform **38***a* and the accessory **39** are positioned generally at or above the level of the work surface **12**. The platform **38***a* may be electronically controlled, such that the platform may be raised or lowered in response to a user input, such as a switch or button or the like, which may be positioned inside the retractable well **38** or elsewhere at the conference table. The retractable well **38** may be substantially covered or concealed by a pair of synchronized doors **40** or the like, which may open and close (such as in a similar manner as discussed above with respect to doors **36**) as the platform is raised or lowered. In the illustrated embodiment, the retractable well is positioned toward an end of the conference table, such that when the accessory **39** is a projector, and the projector is raised to its operating position at or above the work surface, the projector may project toward a projection screen **39***a* without having other accessories or doors of other modules of the conference table interfere with the projected image. However, a retractable well and any accessory or equipment contained therein may be positioned elsewhere along the conference table, without affecting the scope of the present invention.

[**0041**] Optionally, the center modules **28** of the conference table of the present invention may include one or more access modules **42** (**FIGS. 1, 4, 5** and **12-14**), which may be substantially concealed behind a pair of gull wing doors **44**. Each access module **42** may provide multiple electrical outlets **42***a* (**FIG. 14**), telecommunication connectors **42***b*, such as RJ-11 connectors, RJ-45 connectors and/or the like, and/or other connectors or interface cards or the like as may be desired for the particular application of the conference table. As shown in **FIG. 14**, one or more blank interface cards **43** may be provided within the access module **42**, and may be removed and replaced with the desired connections and links or the like as desired. The access module or modules **42** thus provide for electrical and telecommunication connections for laptops and other devices that people may utilize at the conference table, and may be readily accessible by opening one or both of the doors **44**. The cord or plug or connector or the like of the device may then be readily plugged into the appropriate outlet or connector of the access module to provide the electrical or telecommunication connection to the device. The interface cards and connectors **42***c* of the access module **42** may be connected to the appropriate wiring **33** that is routed within and along the conference table **10**, such that additional wiring is not needed to connect the various devices to the appropriate power source or telecommunication link or the like.

[**0042**] The access modules may provide power connections and voice/data connections concealed beneath the dual gull wing doors **44**, which may comprise a metallic material, a veneer material or a glass material or the like. The access modules may be provided in various lengths, depending on the particular application of the conference table. Each access module may be equipped with multiple outlet receptacles and RJ-11 (voice) and RJ-45 (data) snap-in connectors, all of which may be accessible from either or both sides of the access module. The quantity of receptacles and connectors may be selected and changed depending on the length of the access module and/or on the length or application of the conference table. The access module or modules may also be equipped with blank interface cards, which may serve as the mounting platform for additional separately specified voice or data connectors or the like, as may be desired after the conference table is assembled.

[**0043**] Optionally, the center modules **28** of the conference table of the present invention may further include a fixed shelf **50** (**FIGS. 1, 3, 4, 8** and **12**), which may provide a platform or shelf at the center portion of the table for supporting commonly used equipment or components, such as a speaker telephone or the like. The speakerphone or the like may be positioned on the shelf **50** and, thus, may not have to be moved into and out from the different access modules or retractable wells or storage wells or the like of the conference table. The wiring or electrical connections to the speakerphone or other accessory positioned at the fixed shelf may be readily connected to the appropriate connectors at the access module adjacent to the fixed shelf.

[**0044**] Optionally, and as shown in **FIGS. 3 and 4**, conference table **10** may include one or more, and preferably a plurality of, presentation lights **52** positioned along one or both sides of the center modules **28**. The lights may be selectively and independently raised and lowered to provide illumination (when raised) and to substantially conceal the lights (when lowered) when they are not in use. The presentation lights **52** may be activated to provide ancillary lighting to illuminate the work surface area in the vicinity of the lights, such as when the conference room lights may be dimmed, such as for presentations or the like. For example, each light may be positioned at a respective work station (an area at which a person may sit and work during a conference at the table) and may be independently raised/lowered and activated/deactivated by a person sitting at the respective work station to provide selective illumination of the work station as desired.

[**0045**] In the illustrated embodiment, the presentation lights **52** include a generally horizontal upper bar **52***a* that houses the illumination source or light bulb **52***b* or the like. The upper bar **52***a* is connected between a pair of generally

vertical supports **52***c* to support the upper bar and the illumination source generally above the work surface when the presentation light is in its operable position. As can be seen with reference to **FIGS. 3 and 4**, the presentation lights **52** may be raiseable and lowerable between a lowered position, where an upper surface **53** of the upper bar **52***a* of presentation light **52** may generally correspond with the work surface **12** or a trim strip or rail or trim portion **54** along the center modules **28**, and a raised position, where the illumination source is positioned above the work surface. Preferably, the trim rail **54** and the presentation lights **52** share the same aesthetic upper surface details, such that when the presentation lights are in their lowered position, the trim rail and presentation lights provide a substantially uniform trim strip along one or both sides of the center modules. In the illustrated embodiment, the presentation lights may be vertically adjusted via sliding of the vertical supports **52***b* along and within corresponding channels or raceways within the conference table, such as between the center modules **28** and the support beams **30**.

[**0046**] The presentation lights may be raised and lowered via a touch and release mechanism, whereby pushing downward on the presentation light when it is in its lowered position releases the light, such that the light may raise upward to its raised position in response to a biasing member or spring or the like within the presentation light and/or conference table. Optionally, pressing the presentation light and allowing the presentation light to be raised to its elevated position may also function to activate the illumination source, such that the presentation light is on when in its raised position. Pressing downward on the presentation light to move it back to its retracted or lowered position may then also function to deactivate the illumination source to turn off the presentation light when it is stored in the conference table.

[**0047**] Optionally, and as shown in **FIGS. 19 and 20**, the conference table of the present invention may also or otherwise include a plurality of microphones **56** positioned along the trim rail or trim rails **54** along the center modules **28**. The microphones may comprise a microphone system that provides enhanced reception of people's voices at various locations along and around the conference table to provide for enhanced teleconferencing capabilities and the like. In the illustrated embodiment, low profile microphones **56** may be installed on or partially in the trim rail **54**, with the wiring to the microphones running along the trim rail to an appropriate connector or wiring within the access modules or other center modules of the conference table, or to one or more connections for connecting to one or more of the racking units positioned at or inserted in the column support or lower shelf of the conference table. The low profile microphones may receive less tabletop sound reflections over conventional microphones, and may be used in conjunction with an automatic/gated mixer that automatically deactivates all of the microphones of the system except the one that is receiving a vocal signal, thereby further enhancing sound clarity of the microphone system.

[**0048**] Optionally, and as shown in **FIGS. 15 and 16**, the conference table may include a plurality of access or tech bays or modules **60** spaced along the conference table that provide for connections of accessories or equipment, such as laptops and the like, to corresponding receptacles and connectors and jacks **62** within the bays **60**. The tech bays **60** provides for easy tabletop accessibility to the power and voice/data connections and may feature a flip-up door **64** that conceals the power and voice/data connections **62** when it is closed. The number of bays along the conference table may be selected depending on the length of the conference table and particular application of the conference table. The connectors **62** of bays **60** may be connected to the appropriate wiring **33** of the conference table via plugs or connectors **68**. Optionally, the bays **60** may include gripper grommets **66** at one or both sides thereof to facilitate receiving and holding cords and cables that may be routed into the bay or out from the bay and underneath the conference table.

[**0049**] Optionally, and as shown in **FIGS. 17 and 18**, a generally central relocated power center **70** may be provided along the conference table and may provide multiple power receptacles **72** and voice/data jacks **74** for connections to the appropriate accessory or equipment at the conference table. The power center **70** may be concealed by an access cover plate or door **76** that may substantially cover and conceal the power center, but that may allow the cords to the accessory or equipment to be routed therethrough, such that the power center may be utilized while still being covered and, thus, may provide an aesthetically pleasing appearance to the conference table when in use. The length and number of receptacles and connectors of the power center may vary and may be selected depending on the length of the conference table and/or the particular application of the conference table.

[**0050**] Because the center modules and lower channels or troughs may be readily inserted into the channels or grooves extending along the beams (as shown in **FIG. 5**), the conference table of the present invention may be assembled in different configurations depending on the desired features and particular application of the conference table. For example, a conference table may be assembled with the well or wells at a center region if desired or with or without the lower channel or trough (which may be provided if racking units are desired along the conference table or if the trough may be necessary or desired to cover or hide the wells if they extend substantially down under the work surface). The wires and cords and cables and the like may be routed along the modules and/or beams to the desired locations while the modules and beams are accessible and before the work surface is attached to the beams and/or modules. After the selected modules and lights and microphones and trim strips are arranged in the desired manner on the work surface and along the beams, the beams (and the work surface and modules attached thereto) may be attached to the desired or selected or appropriate column supports and/or leg supports to complete the assembly by the conference table.

[**0051**] Therefore, the present invention provides a conference table that may be configured to have one or more storage wells and racking units and power connections and telecommunication connections, depending on the particular application of the conference table. The conference table may receive a plurality of racking units therein to substantially fixedly retain the desired components and to provide the electrical connections thereto when the components or units are mounted to or attached to the conference table. The conference table may further include one or more storage wells or retractable wells for receiving and storing one or more accessories or the like within the conference table. The

conference table may also include multiple power and/or data and/or communication connections for readily connecting or plugging a cord or cable or the like of a computer or laptop or accessory or the like to the appropriate connectors of the conference table. The conference table may further provide presentation lights for selectively illuminating an area or work station of the work surface to provide enhanced illumination when the lights of the conference room may be dimmed, such as for presentations or the like. The work surface and the modules and racking units and lights may be mounted to or attached to and supported by a pair of longitudinally extending support beams, such that the work surface or tabletop of the conference table need not provide structural rigidity to the conference table.

[0052] Changes and modifications to the specifically described embodiments can be carried out without departing from the principles of the present invention, which is intended to be limited only by the scope of the appended claims, as interpreted according to the principles of patent law.

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A conference table for a plurality of people to confer at, said conference table comprising:

a work surface supported by at least two supports; and

a plurality of receiving slots positioned generally beneath said work surface and accessible from at least one side of said conference table, said receiving slots being configured to receive electronic racking units therein, said receiving slots including electrical connections for electrically connecting a power source to said racking units when said racking units are inserted into said receiving slots, said racking units being securable in said receiving slots and being generally concealable within said receiving slots via at least one movable cover.

2. The conference table of claim 1, wherein said receiving slots are positioned beneath and along at least one side of said work surface.

3. The conference table of claim 1, wherein said supports comprise at least one column configured to house at least some of said receiving slots.

4. The conference table of claim 1, wherein said electrical connections connect to a power supply via an electrical cord extending from said conference table.

5. The conference table of claim 1 including at least one accessory connector positioned within a recess of said work surface and being accessible from above said work surface, said accessory connector being configured to connect to an accessory and being connected to an electrical power source or a communication link.

6. The conference table of claim 1 including at least one recess formed in said work surface, said at least one recess being configured to receive at least one accessory therein.

7. The conference table of claim 6 including at least one accessory connector positioned within said recess, said accessory connector being configured to connect to said accessory and being connected to an electrical power source or a communication link.

8. The conference table of claim 7, wherein said at least one recess is selectively accessible via opening of a cover that is movably positioned at least partially over said recess.

9. The conference table of claim 8 including a movable platform that is movably positioned in said recess, said movable platform supporting said accessory at least partially within said recess.

10. The conference table of claim 9, wherein said platform is movable between a lowered position, where said platform and said accessory are within said recess, and a raised position, where said platform and said accessory are elevated such that said accessory is at a level generally coplanar with said work surface.

11. The conference table of claim 10, wherein said cover is positionable to generally cover said recess and said accessory when said platform is in said lowered position, and said cover is positionable to be remote from an opening of said recess when said platform is in said raised position.

12. The conference table of claim 11, wherein said platform and said cover are operated generally in unison, said cover being automatically moved to be remote from said opening when said platform is being raised toward said raised position.

13. The conference table of claim 6, wherein said at least one recess provides at least one connection for providing electrical connection to a portable accessory positioned at said conference table.

14. The conference table of claim 1 including a plurality of microphones spaced along said work surface for receiving vocal signals from a person sitting near a respective microphone.

15. The conference table of claim 14, wherein said microphones are fixedly mounted to said work surface.

16. The conference table of claim 1 including a plurality of lights along said work surface, said lights being vertically movable between a raised position, where said lights function to illuminate at least a portion of said work surface, and a lowered position, where said lights are positioned below said work surface and substantially concealed by a cover portion of said lights.

17. The conference table of claim 16, wherein said lights are automatically activated when moved to said raised position and automatically deactivated when moved to said lowered position.

18. The conference table of claim 16, wherein each of said lights includes an elongated upper bar that houses an illumination source, said elongated upper bar defining said cover portion, said cover portion generally corresponding with the surface of said work surface at said light when said light is in said lowered position.

19. The conference table of claim 18, wherein said lights are positioned along a trim strip of said work surface, said cover portion of said light generally corresponding with an upper surface of said trim strip.

20. The conference table of claim 1 including a pair of longitudinally extending support beams, said support beams supporting said work surface and being supported by said at least two supports.

21. A conference table for a plurality of people to confer at, said conference table comprising:

a work surface supported by at least two supports;

a plurality of work stations defined at least partially around said work surface, each of said work stations being configured for a person to sit at; and

a plurality of lights along said work surface, said lights being positioned generally at respective ones of said

work stations, said lights being movable between a raised position, where said lights function to illuminate at least a portion of said work surface at the respective work station, and a lowered position, where said lights are positioned below said work surface and substantially concealed by a cover portion of said lights, each of said lights being independently vertically movable.

22. The conference table of claim 21, wherein said lights are automatically activated when moved to said raised position and automatically deactivated when moved to said lowered position.

23. The conference table of claim 22, wherein each of said lights includes an elongated upper bar attached at an upper end of at least one generally vertical support, said generally vertical support vertically moving along a track to vertically move said light between the raised and lowered positions.

24. The conference table of claim 23, wherein said upper bar houses an illumination source for illuminating said at least a portion of said work surface.

25. The conference table of claim 24, wherein said elongated upper bar defines said cover portion, said cover portion generally corresponding with the surface of said work surface at said light when said light is in said lowered position.

26. The conference table of claim 21, wherein said lights are positioned along a trim strip of said work surface, said cover portion of said light generally corresponding with an upper surface of said trim strip.

27. The conference table of claim 21 including receiving slots positioned generally beneath said work surface and accessible from at least one side of said conference table, said receiving slots being configured to receive electronic racking units therein, said receiving slots including electrical connections for electrically connecting a power source to said racking units when said racking units are inserted into said receiving slots, said racking units being securable in said receiving slots and being generally concealable within said receiving slots via at least one movable cover.

28. The conference table of claim 27, wherein said electrical connections connect to a power supply via an electrical cord extending from said conference table.

29. The conference table of claim 21 including at least one accessory connector positioned within a recess of said work surface and being accessible from above said work surface, said accessory connector being configured to connect to an accessory and being connected to an electrical power source or a communication link.

30. The conference table of claim 21 including at least one recess formed in said work surface, said at least one recess being configured to receive at least one accessory therein.

31. The conference table of claim 30 including at least one accessory connector positioned within said recess, said accessory connector being configured to connect to said accessory and being connected to an electrical power source or a communication link.

32. The conference table of claim 31, wherein said at least one recess is selectively accessible via opening of a cover that is movably positioned at least partially over said recess.

33. The conference table of claim 32 including a movable platform that is movably positioned in said recess, said movable platform supporting said accessory at least partially within said recess.

34. The conference table of claim 33, wherein said platform is movable between a lowered position, where said platform and said accessory are within said recess, and a raised position, where said platform and said accessory are elevated such that said accessory is at a level generally coplanar with said work surface.

35. The conference table of claim 34, wherein said cover is positionable to generally cover said recess and said accessory when said platform is in said lowered position, and said cover is positionable to be remote from an opening of said recess when said platform is in said raised position.

36. The conference table of claim 35, wherein said platform and said cover are operated generally in unison, said cover being automatically moved to be remote from said opening when said platform is being raised toward said raised position.

37. The conference table of claim 21 including a plurality of microphones spaced along said work surface for receiving vocal signals from a person sitting near a respective microphone.

38. The conference table of claim 21 including a pair of longitudinally extending support beams, said support beams supporting said work surface and being supported by said at least two supports.

39. A conference table for a plurality of people to confer at, said conference table comprising:

a work surface;

a pair of longitudinally extending support members that extend at least partially along an underside of said work surface to provide support of said work surface;

at least two generally vertical supports supporting said support members;

a plurality of receiving slots positioned generally beneath said work surface and accessible from at least one side of said conference table, said receiving slots being configured to receive electronic racking units therein, said racking units being securable in said receiving slots;

a plurality of lights positioned along said work surface, said lights being vertically movable between a raised position, where said lights function to illuminate at least a portion of said work surface at the respective locations of said lights, and a lowered position, where said lights are positioned below said work surface and substantially concealed by a cover portion of said lights; and

a recess in said work surface and a movable platform movably positioned in said recess, said movable platform supporting an accessory at least partially within said recess, said platform being movable between a lowered position, where said platform and said accessory are within said recess, and a raised position, where said platform and said accessory are elevated such that said accessory is at a level generally coplanar with said work surface.

40. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said receiving slots include electrical connections for electrically connecting a power source to said racking units when said racking units are inserted into said receiving slots.

41. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said electronic racking units are generally concealable within said receiving slots via at least one movable cover.

42. The conference table of claim 39, wherein each of said lights is independently vertically movable.

43. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said lights are automatically activated when moved to said raised position and automatically deactivated when moved to said lowered position.

44. The conference table of claim 43, wherein each of said lights includes an elongated upper bar attached at an upper end of at least one generally vertical support, said generally vertical support vertically moving along a track to vertically move said light between the raised and lowered positions.

45. The conference table of claim 44, wherein said upper bar houses an illumination source for illuminating said at least a portion of said work surface.

46. The conference table of claim 45, wherein said elongated upper bar defines said cover portion, said cover portion generally corresponding with the surface of said work surface at said light when said light is in said lowered position.

47. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said lights are positioned along a trim strip of said work surface, said cover portion of said light generally corresponding with an upper surface of said trim strip.

48. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said movable platform is positioned along a generally central region of said table and between said pair of support members.

49. The conference table of claim 39 including at least one accessory connector positioned within said recess, said accessory connector being configured to connect to said accessory and being connected to an electrical power source or a communication link.

50. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said at least one recess is selectively accessible via opening of a cover that is movably positioned at least partially over said recess.

51. The conference table of claim 50, wherein said cover is positionable to generally cover said recess and said accessory when said platform is in said lowered position, and said cover is positionable to be remote from an opening of said recess when said platform is in said raised position.

52. The conference table of claim 39, wherein said at least one recess provides at least one connection for providing electrical connection to a portable accessory positioned at said conference table.

53. The conference table of claim 39 including a plurality of microphones spaced along said work surface for receiving vocal signals from a person sitting near a respective microphone.

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