

the connected workplace



Summary

The problem of creating an effective and connected workplace often boils down to a matter of space. This is particularly the case when an office has grown up in an ad-hoc manner with short-term solutions improvised to address a particular problem. These short-term improvisations have a tendency to become fixed, as the staff continue with the every day affairs of the business.

People are adaptable and surprisingly tolerant, but a lack of space can have unfortunate long-term effects on the smooth running of a business and its ability to achieve. A cramped and disorganised workspace and a lack of ergonomic furniture can be a major factor in low rates of staff retention, high rates of absenteeism, and poor business efficiency. It can also create a bad impression on visiting clients, especially if they are used to a different, better organised routine in their own places of work.

It is fortunate that developments in modern technology look set to significantly reduce the clutter that has become such a feature of offices over the last few decades. As the technology available to staff personally becomes more sophisticated and also more commonplace, the more we seem bound to lose the chunky desktop apparatus, the copiers and printers, the firm's landline telephones and the isolated work stations. Indeed, some thinkers in the field of office design have postulated a return, in a way, to a computer-less office, if by that we mean an office without the company's own hardware.

How Much Space?

"How much space do my staff need?" This is not an easy question to answer with any precision. The owner or manager who sets out to find the answer him or herself is liable to come to a decision without taking in all of the appropriate factors. In fact, he or she would be better to employ the services of a specialist company who will be able to make an informed decision based upon their experience and knowledge. An office fit-out specialist will give advice on such factors as how best to facilitate agile working, and what type of ergonomic furniture would be most suitable for use. They might also provide a space calculator for their customer.

The Space Calculator

This space calculator is a tool that enables the customer to make a preliminary estimate. It does not, of course, take the place of a qualified consultant, but it does make it possible for the customer to see his overall position and estimate how their requirements can be matched against the space available. Indeed it may reveal to the customer that there is more space available than he or she thought.

Considerations

Let us look now at the factors that a space calculator takes into account. The first question will almost certainly be "How many people need to use the office or offices?" Then questions such as whether the business has individual offices, whether it is

open plan, and whether hot-desking is utilised. The number of permanent, non-permanent and flexible workers will be taken into account.

The next factor to be considered will be how many meeting/training/general purpose rooms are needed, and what capacity they will be. Next it will be established what general facilities are required by the business and how many people will be using these facilities at their maximum level of utilisation.

Similarly the size of the communication or server room will be taken into account. In these cases, large is taken to refer to a room with up to thirty racks, medium up to fifteen racks and small, up to five racks. The filing and storage rooms are also suitably classified, as are copy/print areas, kitchenettes or tea points, cleaners' cupboards, cloakrooms and shower areas. Next, and a matter of concern for all conscientious employers, is the question of what kinds of staff welfare facilities will be available and also the capacity of these facilities. Again the classification is into large, medium or small areas. Are breakout areas required, and if so, how many people will be using them? What kind of ergonomic office furniture will be required? Will there be a large, medium or small full service restaurant? Will there be a gym or swimming pool available for use for employees? There certainly will be a first aid room and its capacity will be based on the health and safety requirements of the company.

The Future – a New Raison d'être

These questions will cover most businesses, but space is left for the customer to note any other requirements outside the general run of the questionnaire. Once the information has been compiled, the space calculator will work out the businesses' space requirements, giving figures under the headings of "generous", "average" and "minimum". It will also work out the overall space per person in the business. These answers will be given in both square metres and square feet.

The space calculator provides information that the customer can use to formulate and perhaps amend his or her own plans and requirements. It cannot, however, calculate such matters as how much space could be saved by the removal of obsolescent servers. As we noted in the second paragraph of this article, the proliferation of modern technology in the hands of people who use them naturally and for a variety of both work and social interactions seems set to free up much office space. As it becomes increasingly ordinary to "bring your computer to work" so the old fashioned desktops will disappear and desk set ups will have to change.

The modern, connected office will have to be able to accommodate all the different types of devices which employees might choose to bring in with them. The key point will be the workspace's connectivity, with its access to Wi-Fi hotspots and such facilities as cloud storage. Indeed, we might wonder whether, in the future, an office's connected status might become its principal *raison d'être*.

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