

# how your office environment can affect staff productivity



## Summary

Can the office environment really make that much difference to productivity? The answer to that question is without a doubt, "yes". Anyone planning to either refurbish or relocate their office should devote some time to considering exactly how the new office will look. Naturally, the industry a business operates within will partly determine the layout and functionality requirements of the furniture. There may be a need for open area "breakout" points, quiet work spaces, or informal meeting areas, for example.

There are many factors which can affect both staff performance and how employees view themselves within a company. How well an office is adapted to being an agile working environment, and environmental factors such as the use of natural lighting, the colours used to design the workspace and the temperature of the office all have a role to play. Read on to find out how a company can design their workplace to become a productive, positive place for employees.

## Agile Working Environments

The precise definition of an agile working environment is a matter of some debate. Generally associated with flexible working, remote working and home working arrangements, "agile working" is in fact a much broader term which encompasses all manner of factors relating to working practices.

Agile working can be defined as the encompassing of modern technological devices, the principles of flexible and smart working and the individual working preferences of employees. By utilising modern technology, and making the most of remote mobile devices, workers are able to choose how and where they work, thus becoming "smart workers" who instinctively know how best to be productive.

The benefits of agile working are manifold. Office managers report greater productivity, improved morale and a heightened sense of purpose amongst employees able to choose their own working schedules. Allowing a worker the freedom to be an "agile worker" makes an employee more motivated and involved in their work. To facilitate agile working, employers must offer to their employees a wide range of options in terms of work spaces, flexible break out areas, seating arrangements and the ability to use portable devices both inside and outside the office. Arrangements for hot-desking are of particular importance here.

## The Affect of Colour on the Working Environment

Many studies have been carried out over the past fifteen years to determine precisely to what extent the colour of a workplace can affect the mood and performance of employees. Traditionally, offices would choose neutral palettes designed to reduce distraction and enable office workers to focus on the task at hand. In more recent times, however, research indicates that a wider palette can be used effectively in the workspace.

Studies show that people respond well to environments painted in any shade of blue. Green is also seen as an uplifting, calming colour, due to its association with nature and the outdoors. Depending on the amount of natural light in an office, other outdoor hues such as tan, khaki and some shades of yellow may also work well.

Other research indicates that red is a productive colour in offices where attention to detail is imperative. This is perhaps because the brain has to work harder to focus in rooms painted red. For an elegant, distinctive look, ideal for a fashion office or perhaps a luxury business, black and white is effective. Yellow and orange are cheery, positive colours that create a warm environment in breakout areas, canteens and bathrooms.

Dr. David Lewis ran another study into the effect of colour on working habits. He found that people performed best when working in an environment which contained their favourite colour. This suggests that the choice of colour in an office should perhaps be varied, in order to suit different people's needs.

**The Affect of Temperature on the Working Environment**  
Different studies have concluded varying optimal temperatures for workers. For instance, Cornell University suggested that 25°C is the optimal temperature for productive working. On the other hand, the British Government states that 23°C is the ideal temperature for offices. Elsewhere, the majority of studies suggest 21°C-23°C.

Bear in mind that as the temperature increases, productivity decreases considerably. At 25°C most people are 98% productive. This decreases to 95% at 27.5°C, 90% at 30.5°C and 85% at 33°C. A small increase in temperature, by as little as a 5-8°C increase, can have a substantial impact on productivity levels. The same can be said for the effects noted when the temperature decreases. At 19°C most people are 98% productive, whilst at 17°C productivity drops to 95% and falls even further at 15°C to 90%. Thus the importance of maintaining a steady, comfortable temperature cannot be overlooked when planning an office environment.

The temperature of an office will naturally depend on a variety of factors such as the season, the layout, the type of air conditioning installed and the ergonomics of the workspace. An office design agency will be able to measure and evaluate precisely how a workspace operates in terms of air flow and how conducive it is to maintaining an optimal temperature.

## The Benefits of Natural Lighting

Whilst overhead lighting can cause fatigue, eye strain and headaches, there is a high correlation between the amount of natural light in an office and the efficiency of employees. The recommended ratio of artificial light to natural light in an office is 1:5, as stated in European legislation. This is because daylight is good for the vision and encourages a healthy immune system.

Studies indicate that higher productivity is the result of an increased amount of natural light. People in offices exposed to a greater amount of natural light were shown to feel a higher level of satisfaction in their workplace, thanks to the variety and stimulation afforded by a view out of a window.

An office design agency will consider to what extent an office is currently exposed to natural light. They will then investigate ways in which more natural light can be incorporated into the office design, if possible.

### **Other Design Aspects**

Getting the colour, light, temperature and agile working aspects right in an office is in itself not enough to ensure increased staff productivity. An office designer will need to spend time considering other design aspects, such as the type of furniture used and how client facing areas are presented. Before doing so they must first get a feel for both the company ethos and how staff view themselves as members of the company.

Choosing comfortable, practical chairs and desk arrangements will allow your workers to sit comfortably and to work at their optimum level of performance. Low level furniture is preferred in many modern offices, as it is felt to encourage a free flow of ideas between workers, reducing the static hierarchy so common in old-fashioned workplaces, where the "boss" was separate to the rest of the workforce.

Other choices, such as the type of supporting furniture, for instance bookcases, cabinets and lockers, should take into account how the office will look to both employees and customers. At the same time, thought must be given to the design of client facing areas. Creating a positive, uplifting client environment may well enable staff to interact with clients in a more productive way.

### **Conclusion**

The way an office is laid out can have a positive or a negative effect on employees. Lighting, colour, temperature and agile working arrangements all have an effect on the productivity of employees. By reflecting carefully on how an office should look and feel employers can optimise their working space both for the good of their company and employees.

If you're dealing with sluggish staff or just want to boost the overall productivity of an office, using the services of an office design team may be all the action you need to take to achieve an altogether more positive working environment.

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