



White Paper

Get into your comfort zone

How practical workspace technologies boost productivity

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Does your office or your workspace boost or hinder your productivity? At a time when the places where we work have been subject to great change, it's important to understand the basics of how to create a comfortable yet focused working environment.

For those who didn't previously have a home office, lockdown was an eye opener. While home comforts are often taken for granted, creating a space for productivity and concentration throughout the working day is often harder to achieve.

Every workplace is different but, for those with office space requirements, basic items such as desks, chairs and desktop computers are the mainstay of many workers' professional environment. Leaps forward in terms of design and technology have revolutionised the office workspace and how we work within it.

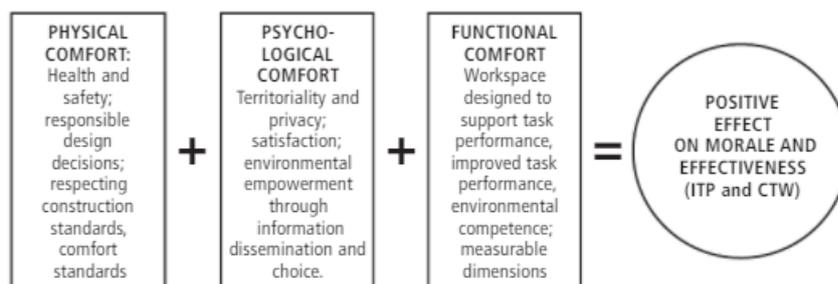
Why working environments matter

During the last few decades, there have been a number of high profile studies and surveys compiled on how the working environment impacts upon workers' happiness, comfort, wellbeing and, as a result, their productivity.

Office environment and workers' productivity started to become a serious talking point in the early 1990s when Adrian Leaman, Director of Research at the Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies at the University of York, presented [the idea of a relationship between worker satisfaction and efficiency](#)¹, and began drawing up questionnaires on the subject.

In 2004, Dr Jacqueline Vischer, a professor in the Department of Environmental Design at the University of Montreal, took the conversation further when she wrote a paper called [Designing the Work Environment for Worker Health and Productivity](#)², which made a more in-depth study of the correlation between the office worker's environment and their yield.

Many of her findings seem obvious now but when presented at the time they offered a new way of looking at environmental and psychological office dynamics.



(ITP = Individual tasks; CTW = Group work. Taken from 'Designing the work environment for worker health and productivity' by Dr Jacqueline Vischer, 2004)

1 <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/emerald-publishing/dissatisfaction-and-office-productivity-Z7AepZmARL>

2 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242353142_Designing_the_work_environment_for_worker_health_and_productivity

The productivity hole: how physical discomfort can cut productivity by 1.5 hours per day

In 2014, leading office design specialists Steelcase commissioned research company IPSOS to conduct [a survey into how office workers across the globe felt about their workspaces](#)³. One of the overwhelming facts to come out of the study was that office workers were losing around 1.5 hours of productivity every day due to distractions, which were mostly down to physical and physiological discomfort centred around their workstations.

Numerous factors impact on a worker's physical comfort and sense of wellbeing in the workspace. The chart below lists the obvious elements in the office workspace and, though the results of the survey which the chart is taken from depict rather bland findings, one can conclude that the issue which causes the most consternation is temperature closely followed by noise levels and air quality.

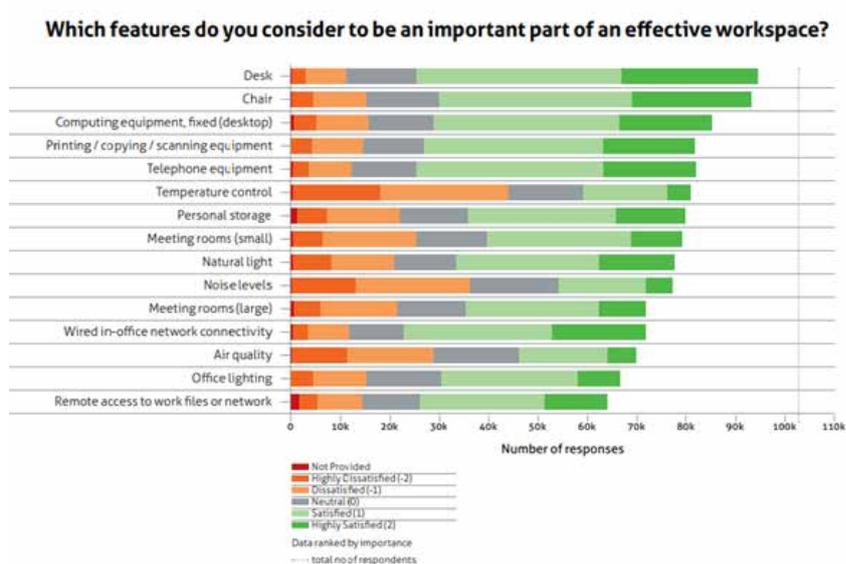


Chart taken from the [Leesman Review Issue 17⁴, 2015](#)

3 <https://www.steelcase.com/research/articles/topics/employee-engagement/boosting-employee-engagement-place-matters/>

4 <https://www.ecophon.com/globalassets/media/pdf-and-documents/uk/leesman-review-issue-leesman-review-issue-17.pdf/>

Hot desking

These intangible aspects of office working life are the most difficult to improve, or at least regulate. Over the course of the last fifty years, technology has come to our aid time and again in dealing with these issues. Once prohibitively expensive solutions have gradually become more affordable, as well as accessible, to a wider range of businesses as technology and its manufacturing techniques have developed over the years.

However, as this study, conducted in 2015, clearly shows, even in the 21st century temperature control is still a massive problem for many office workspaces. Simply installing heating and/or air conditioning doesn't solve the problem of too cold or too hot.

Furthermore, heat generated by extreme weather brings with it other problems. When the sun shines on one side of an office building for the whole of a long, hot summer afternoon, there is not only an impact on the temperature and air quality of the office space, but also on the light and visibility in the space.

A whole host of reflective panels, adhesive window coverings as well as shutter, blinds and shades have been used to help deter the light and heat of high summer. Ultimately, the only real solution is to implement a combination of air-conditioning and physical blinds or shutters.

For this problem, at least, it seems as if technology can only go so far in countering the issues generated by bright light and intense heat. Just closing the blinds is sometimes the best you can do.

Noisy neighbours

Second to air temperature and air quality comes the issue of noise levels. Many modern office spaces are designed along the lines of open-plan layouts which bring with them a whole host of environmental problems.

Key factors such as the height of ceilings, whether stairwells are open or closed off, and the number of workers using the space all impinge upon sound levels and how noise reverberates through the space.

However, often the only solution in controlling noise in these open spaces is to redesign them, creating inner walls and false ceilings to manage sound transmission effectively. Again, the solutions look towards practical innovation rather than advancements in technology.

The changing landscape

Now, in the midst of a pandemic and even in a post-Covid era, the nature of office working will change. As remote working shifts back from being a mandatory requirement to becoming a desirable option, many businesses are rethinking the physical nature of their office workspaces.

If more people are wanting to work flexibly, either 100% from home, or flexibly with part of their time spent in the office and the rest working remotely, businesses not only need to think about the nature of the space but how much space they will need in the first place.

Moving into the future with the possibility of more office staff working remotely, technology clearly plays a major role as office-life is translated to numerous virtual activities (see [Tools for teamwork: what are the most useful apps for collaborative working?](#)). With workers going from their dining room table or a coffee shop, people's physical requirements may only be partly the responsibility of their company.

Control over workers' environments becomes impossible when people move between so many different locations. Perhaps in future, the only responsibility that a business will have in looking after their workers' physical wellbeing will be when workers are briefly stationed in the office (which may now have radically altered to a hot-desk lounge environment), and with the supply of suitable, portable technology hardware such as laptops, printers and smartphones.

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