



Designed to work

A well-designed office really does make an impact on employee productivity and job satisfaction, says Lizzi Hines. She shares the findings of a recent survey of office workers, and outlines the factors that can make a difference to the way we work.

Earlier this year, Spaceworks Design Group undertook a national survey of over 600 office workers around the country across a range of industries to ascertain whether a well-designed office does, in fact, have an effect on employee productivity and job satisfaction.

We embarked on this journey primarily for our own knowledge, but also to help our clients who are increasingly looking for measurable results. This type of research has consistently been conducted in other countries, but rarely has it been done here in New Zealand. As designers we wanted to know for sure if and how our designs were making an impact. The results were beyond our expectations.

The survey uncovered that a staggering 81 percent of New Zealand office workers believe the physical environment at their workplace has an impact on their happiness and job satisfaction and nine out of 10 workers agree that if they are happy at work, they are more productive.

This result clearly demonstrates that employees see a direct connection between their work environment and personal productivity and job satisfaction. As employee productivity has a direct link to the bottom line, this is a compelling result and we can now say with certainty that not having an inspiring office is a lost opportunity in achieving the best from our workers.

The *Spaceworks New Zealand Workplace Survey* was also conducted to ascertain whether office design can amplify a more efficient and valued workplace and if clever design can support and inspire worker collaboration, innovation, creativity and productivity.

As the New Zealand economy continues to gain momentum and we see nonstop advances in technology, a new generation of workers is leading the charge on how workplace design should better support them.

It is our job as designers to stay abreast of what's important to Kiwi office workers so our designs are future-proofed and reflect

the new way of working while remaining mindful of the growing ageing population.

Interestingly, over three-quarters of respondents said they were more likely to stay at their current company if they had an inspiring office to work in and almost six in 10 respondents stated that the office interior layout has a substantial impact on their decision to work for a company. However, only four in ten believe that their office is adopting new trends in the workplace design space, demonstrating a disparity between what Kiwi workers have and what they'd like.

Interestingly, the most important factor in increasing employee job satisfaction is giving staff their own desk. Good even air temperature came a close second and natural daylight was in third place.

To increase employee productivity, respondents said the most important aspects were having a good company culture, their own personal desk or space, and having good, even air temperature.

Other important factors contributing to improving employee output was having an environment that encourages collaboration, ergonomic furniture, quiet areas to break away from open plan and bookable meeting rooms.

Hot-desking is certainly the buzzword of the moment, but the survey results would suggest the hot-desk trend might not be suitable for some of our New Zealand employees and their productivity. There are certainly advantages to hot-desking as it promotes collaboration between different teams, encourages communication and provides diversity every day, which promotes creativity and innovation.

However, our research revealed that it's not as popular as we're led to believe and that is because office workers like to have their own space—their safe haven. Hot-desking certainly works for some businesses, but it's all about doing your homework before launching into all the latest design trends to ensure they are right for your business and employees.

Approximately 60 percent of businesses are open plan now and this has real consequences when we consider that employees need their quiet time just as much as they need opportunities for collaboration with colleagues.

As designers, it is our challenge to ensure an open plan office doesn't result in lost productivity. The research clearly shows that employees believe collaboration has a direct link to productivity and therein lies our conundrum. How does the design of an office promote teamwork and at the same time offer privacy?

Workplaces which are designed to encourage collaboration without sacrificing focus will always be more successful. The new age open plan which factors in informal meeting/breakout spaces



The New Zealand office of London-based accounting software firm Bankstream has a British theme.



The breakout area at Icehouse has plenty of space to encourage creative thinking.

and areas away from the working zones where employees can focus and make phone calls is the optimal solution. If meeting rooms are a problem due to space, create meeting areas with high backed sofas. Writable walls and pinboards are great for encouraging creativity, and get clever with storage—supply lockers for employees.

Before embarking on a new refit, the designers should take the time to gain a handle on how your business operates, the company culture and employee likes and dislikes. In order to create a space that will optimise productivity, it's incredibly important to understand how your workplace works. Simple observation can benefit:

- Are your staff are wearing headphones to block out noise so they can focus?

OFFICE DESIGN



Citrus colours brighten the meeting room at My Food Bag.

- Where are staff storing their belongings?
- Are they taking phone calls outside the office for privacy, and
- Do they need to be more creative and innovative?

There is much to consider; however, once you get a bird's-eye

view, you're able to piece together all the parts to make an office which will inspire and stimulate your employees.

We are a nation of innovative workers and entrepreneurs and there is so much untapped potential in many of our employees. By designing more offices which unleash greatness in all of us, we can produce better work.

We believe that innovation and creativity can be invigorated in myriad ways. Visually stimulating interiors with graphics, colours, textures and writable surfaces can amplify creativity. And a variety of work settings with low seating, standing desks and brainstorming and collaborative zones all help create interest, which in turn promotes innovation.

The companies that encourage employees' creativity and innovation by having a well-designed workspace will be ahead of the game both nationally and internationally.

LIZZI HINES is the MD of Spaceworks Design Group.
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