

# FOUR TELL-TALE SIGNS

YOUR OFFICE IS DUE  
A REFURB



A dysfunctional workspace can impact your business performance. After all, your office is the stage upon which your business activities are played out. For instance, your physical working environment has the power to foster communication, promote modern ways of working and boost employee effectiveness. Yet, an outdated or poorly-equipped office can hamper all of these.

Fortunately, the symptoms of a dysfunctional workspace are easy to spot. Here are four tell-tale signs your workspace is due a refurbishment:

## 1. A Productivity Slump

Have you noticed a slump in your employees' productivity? Perhaps deadlines have been missed, targets haven't been met or objectives remain unfulfilled. Many factors can contribute to a dip in performance, not least of all the economy. However, don't overlook the influence your workplace can have on your employees' output.

According to a study by design and architecture firm Gensler, the working environment can influence and improve the productivity of office workers by as much as **19%**. So, good office design has the potential to improve the performance of your staff.

! The working environment can improve productivity by 19%

A key area to consider is whether your layout and furnishings support your employees' day-to-day activities and modern ways of working. Successful office design underpins the smooth-running of a department – like this example from Sarah Moseley, who works as a sub-editor for a publishing firm:

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Working on a busy production desk, it's essential that my office is well organised. The energy my company has invested in admin and storage solutions helps keep our day-to-day work running smoothly.

”

By carefully considering the functionality your staff need from the office, you can build an environment that makes their day-to-day tasks more streamlined and efficient. Rapid developments in technology, and shifting working cultures, have changed the way people work. In order to maximise employee effectiveness, workspaces have to evolve to support these modern ways of working. Andrew Shears, National Interiors Sales Manager at InteriorsTeam, summarises:

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The way we use office spaces has changed to reflect modern ways of working. Monitors have shrunk, leading to smaller workstations and formal meeting rooms have given way to informal, collaborative spaces. Today's workplaces have to be a lot more versatile.

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If your workspace hasn't kept up with these changes, you may find there is a mismatch between the way your employees are trying to work and the environment they are working in.

However, successful space-planning and up-to-date fittings and fixtures are only one aspect of a high-performing workspace. More subtle aspects of the working environment can impact performance too – such as noise, temperature and air quality.

As part of its mission to promote sustainable building design, The World Green Building Council (WGBC) has conducted extensive research into the interaction between buildings, the environment and employee well-being. Its findings show 'research clearly demonstrates that the design of an office has a material impact on the health, well being and productivity of its occupants.'

Factors invisible to the naked eye influence your business performance

WGBC published powerful statistics in support of this claim in its report 'Health, Well being & Productivity in Offices':

- » **66%** drop in performance when exposed to distracting noise
- » **11%** gains in productivity associated with improved air quality
- » **10%** reduction in performance associated with temperature extremes (15°C and 30°C)

Although invisible to the naked eye, these factors are influencing your business performance. Altering these variables could boost the number of deadlines hit or targets met. If you want to get the most out of your staff, consider this guidance from employee engagement specialists Best Companies. In its study 'Are distractions ruling your workplace', Best Companies advised:



Open plan offices can be a real boost to creativity, but be sure to consider the acoustics of your space. Are your people being overwhelmed by the amplified noises of photocopiers, chitchat, slamming doors? While some people work well in a noisier environment, others prefer much lower noise levels when it comes to boosting their concentration. Consult with your staff to find out how they are responding to the space they work in.



If you want to create an environment that promotes peak performance, start by considering your employees' day-to-day activities. Then design a comfortable, distraction-free environment which has the functionality for these activities to be completed efficiently.

## 2. A Communication Breakdown

How would you rate your employees' team spirit? Do they readily collaborate with one another and share knowledge? Or do they avoid interacting and work in silos? Your workspace design can have a huge impact on how easily and how often your staff communicate with one another.

If you're experiencing a communication breakdown, take a look at your workspace design. **45%** of UK workers feel their current office design does not promote collaboration. Why is this important? A workspace that promotes interaction allows ideas and information to flow more freely between staff, creating a cohesive working environment. This is supported by data gathered by management publication, the Harvard Business Review:



Our data suggest[s] that creating collisions – chance encounters and unplanned interactions between knowledge workers, both inside and outside the organization – improves performance.



With this in mind, employers would be wise to heed the advice from the CEO of leading telecommunications company Telenor, who encourages employers to 'think of offices not as real estate but as a communication tool.'

We've seen the importance of collaboration for effective business-as-usual activities. Yet, the benefits go further. Collaboration can also be a source of competitive advantage. Improved networking can stimulate creativity within your workforce, which can spark innovations that will set you ahead of your competitors. If you want proof, look no further than technology giants Apple, Samsung and Yahoo which have all embraced this phenomenon in their workspace design.

Scott Birnbaum, Vice President of Samsung Semiconductor quipped that 'the most creative ideas aren't going to come while sitting in front of your monitor.' Instead, collaboration and innovation occur when 'people collide.'

Steve Jobs famously altered the design of the Apple Headquarters to ensure that the wash rooms and shared spaces were at the centre of the open plan layout, as he wanted to force chance encounters and encourage serendipity. Yahoo also values these informal interactions. Its Chief of Human Resources acknowledged:



Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions.



Is your workspace helping to grow close working relationships? Or does it create division and siloed working? If the latter, try incorporating breakout areas that promote a culture of informal meetings and teamwork. However, we've already seen the impact distractions such as noise can have on performance, so be careful to balance these with areas for quiet concentration.

Improved networking can spark innovations that will set you ahead of your competitors

### 3. Struggling to Attract & Retain Talent

Does your workspace inspire pride and loyalty in your staff? Does it present your company in a good light to potential candidates? Does your office equip staff to do their best work? All of these will impact your employee attrition.

Naturally, many factors influence whether your company can attract and retain the best staff. However, the workspace has a definite impact – as evidenced by these recent statistics:

- » **89%** confirm the property is a major factor in whether or not they **accept a new job**
- » **80%** said their workplace influences whether they'll **stay in their current job**
- » **67%** admit to having **left their last role** because of the workplace

So, if your business is suffering what Best Companies calls 'revolving door syndrome', your workspace could be to blame.

Create a physical working environment that inspires potential and current employees to want to work for you. To win top talent, consider the impression the office makes on job applicants. To retain your best staff, make them feel valued with comfortable and attractive surroundings. Furthermore, make the workspace rewarding by equipping them to do their best work. These simple steps could influence the talent your company wins and keeps. As summarised by InteriorsTeam's Andrew Shears:

! Create a physical working environment that inspires potential and current employees

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Modern workspaces that will accommodate changing ways of working [are] a key ingredient if you want to attract new talent.

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### 4. A Dip in the Mood

How upbeat are your staff? Are they enthusiastic and motivated? Or are stress levels always riding high? If you notice a dip in the mood, ask yourself whether your workspace could make staff more satisfied.

**79%** of professionals rank the quality of their working environment as a 'very important' factor in maintaining a sense of job satisfaction.

In Best Companies' report 'Healthy People, Healthy Business: Why Well-being Matters', the employee engagement specialists give a good yardstick for gauging satisfaction in your office:

! 79% say the working environment is very important to job satisfaction

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Be sure to regularly take stock of the atmosphere in your office – is it a happy place to be? Are people stressed? ... There's nothing like walking into a company where employees feel truly cared for and valued – the difference in atmosphere is palpable.

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If you sense morale is low, check whether your workspace is serving your staff's personal and professional needs. Research into workplace well-being is unearthing increasing evidence that sedentary work is bad for health. Meanwhile, we've already explored how issues such as airflow, noise and temperature impact productivity. All of these have an impact on employee satisfaction.

In response to this growing link between the physical working environment and employee well-being, workspaces are increasingly being designed to focus on employees' needs. For instance, Jenny Ruegamer, Design Director of global architecture firm Interior Architects, commented:

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As designers it's our job – whether through lighting, hydration stations, or effective colour psychology – to design offices that keep workers free from stress and exhaustion.

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Relaxing spaces for staff to take time-out of their roles are vital to well-being. Indeed, **74%** of UK employees want a space where they can recharge during the working day. Meanwhile, the benefits of adding a touch of nature to the workplace go far beyond appearance. Blending nature with indoor spaces – known as biophilic design – has been observed to stave off symptoms of ill health whilst improving employees' overall well-being by **15%**.

Minimising stress and promoting relaxation may boost employee well-being. However, if you really want to boost motivation, consider what drives your employees – and create a space which reflects these values.

! Touches of nature can boost well-being by 15%

By **2020**, the UK's workforce will comprise four generations ranging from members of Generation Z to Baby Boomers. Undoubtedly, this diverse workforce will have a mix of values and working styles, split broadly along generation-lines. If you want to inspire your employees, create an environment that respects and supports their ideals and motivations. For instance, despite the age difference, Baby Boomers and Millennials are both driven by a sense of purpose – broadly speaking. So, companies seeking to engage staff within these age groups should foster an environment where these groups will feel involved in the company's wider aims.

Facebook has created such an environment within its **430,000** sq. ft. HQ. CEO, Mark Zuckerberg, commissioned famed architect Frank Gehry to transform the office into the world's largest open plan office space. Yet what is truly unique about the office is where Zuckerberg and his management team sit. Unlike other open plan offices, where the management have separate cubicles, Zuckerberg and his management team sit within the same space. Why is this important? Because the layout reflects the company's values – namely a non-hierarchical culture that celebrates collaboration above all.

If you want a satisfied workforce who find their work engaging, try creating a space that takes care of their personal needs and feeds their motivations.

## In Summary

Dysfunctional workspaces create dysfunctional workforces. After all, the UK Green Buildings Council states 'buildings are fundamentally for people.' Your business performance rests upon your staff's productivity, communication, retention and satisfaction. If you see signs that your workspace is impeding any of these, it's time to update your office.

Buildings are  
fundamentally  
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