

32% Increase in Productivity

Modern Work Methods could be costing UK Plc in lost productivity

32% improvement identified where employees engaged in workspace design and organisation

Newly published research from the University of Exeter in conjunction with Ambius suggests that organisations that fail to engage employees in the design and organisation of their workspace could be losing out on vital productivity benefits. The findings show that by simply giving employees input into the development of their workspace, they can improve productivity by as much as 32%.

The research has identified that if a value was put on the cost to business for this level of lost productivity it would equate to a staggering £93bn*.

The independent research has resulted in the launch of a new consultancy service supported by Ambius. The research-backed service will help improve employee productivity, reduce absenteeism and boost well-being in the workplace. Ambius offers products and services - such as plant displays designed to reduce background noise, remove pollutants from the air and add interest and colour - that boost well-being in the workplace and improve the indoor environment.

Dr. Craig Knight, Managing Director of psychological research consultancy Prism** at the University of Exeter, says: "This study reveals how important it is to involve staff in developing their own working environment. A lack of involvement and control are both seen to be associated with high levels of psychological discomfort, which in turn is strongly linked with absenteeism, sick office syndrome and intentions to leave the organisation. However, if businesses allow workers to realise something of their own identity in their own workspace, whether that's through a piece of art or plants, then this will play its part in creating greater psychological comfort and increasing organisational identity (and engagement), well-being and job satisfaction."

University of Exeter's research, led by Dr. Knight, included extensive surveys and experimental data. Two of the studies — one at the University and another in commercial offices — saw participants take on a series of tasks in a workspace that was either lean (containing only the tools necessary for the job), enriched (decorated with plants and pictures), empowered (allowing the individual to design the area) or disempowered (where the individual's original design was deliberately overridden).

Results consistently showed that the more people (a) identified with and (b) reflected their own identities within their office spaces, the happier and more motivated they were in their

jobs. They felt physically more comfortable at work, identified more with their employers, and felt more positive about their jobs in general.

Kenneth Freeman, International Technical Director for Ambius said: "For many organisations there has been a focus on keeping costs to a minimum through cutting or reducing what are seen as discretionary items such as planting and pictures. However, the research conducted by the University of Exeter has shown that people were happier, healthier and 17% more productive in an enriched work environment than they were in a 'lean' space. Those that were given some say over their environment were 32% more productive. It's nothing new to say that happy people mean better business but this research proves conclusively that this is the case and really demonstrates the value of the services Ambius can provide to enrich workplaces."

Craig Knight concludes: "Much contemporary office space is functional and/or offers very little user control, but our studies suggest this practice needs to be challenged. When people feel uncomfortable in their surroundings they are less engaged - not only with the space but also with what they do in it. All too often people have to work in a space dominated by management's idea of what the working identity should be. If employees can realize something of their own identity in their own space that all changes and people report being happier at work, more engaged with their employer, and are visibly more effective in doing their jobs."

Ends

*Based on figures from the CIPD, 2008 and Gensler 2005.

** Prism (Psychological Research into Identity and Space Management) is a research-based consultancy based at the University of Exeter in the southwest of England, co funded by Ambius. With over 25 years commercial experience, most of it in the field of office design, Craig Knight has now applied his knowledge to academic research. Under the supervision of world-renowned psychologist, Professor Alex Haslam, Craig's published PhD thesis (The Psychology of Office Space: Determinants of Social Identity, Well-being and Productivity) has already been acclaimed. Ongoing research within Prism is aimed at continually refining the workplace model and offering a research-backed consultancy service to companies around the world.