

MEASURING THE SUCCESS

OF BETTER DESIGNED WORKPLACES

Ian Bryan / Ian Bryan Architects



IBA
inspire
create
deliver



SOME OF THE FIRST QUESTIONS WE GET ASKED BY CLIENTS
CONSIDERING IMPLEMENTING A BETTER WORK ENVIRONMENT ARE:

- A) WILL IT WORK
- B) HOW WILL WE KNOW IF IT WORKS

WE HAVE BEEN STRUGGLING TO FIND THE BEST
ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS.

UNTIL NOW ...

Too often the workplace is viewed through a real estate or facilities management prism when really it is a HR issue. Staff costs are far and away the highest costs to businesses. Even small increases in productivity, staff well being, staff retention and recruitment of the best staff can have a big influence in profitability. All these elements can be strongly influenced by the quality of the work environment.

To what extent the design of the workplace can have on profitability is extremely difficult to determine. There are so many other elements that come into play; remuneration, organisational / management style, company philosophy and staff relationships all will

have an impact. It is possible to make a subjective assessment, for example, Deloitte estimated that revenue per head increased by 5-10% as a result of the new work environment created in Nile House, Prague. Whilst this can provide a rough guide it cannot be verified. IBA therefore set out to design a survey tool for the purpose of assessing the performance of any workplace.

The survey is based on a confidential online questionnaire on which staff are asked to rate the performance of the workplace environment against specific criteria. Once completed this can give a clear picture of the success or otherwise of a workplace.

IBA FIRST USED
THE SURVEY TOOL
FOR THE CBRE'S
NEW PRAGUE OFFICE
COMPLETED
IN LATE 2013.

CBRE's former premises consisted of a front of house reception, a suite of meeting rooms, a closed room for the managing director and then open plan space for the staff with a dark and enclosed kitchenette. This typical arrangement is what we call the 'default setting' and is still the most common format in office environments in the Czech Republic.

Old premises



A number of business acquisitions meant that much larger premises were needed and for this purpose the vacant adjoining tenancy space was added.

Taking encouragement from the new office in Amsterdam CBRE wished to employ new workplace ideas based on a mobile, notebook led work solution without permanently assigned workstations. IBA then set about the task of designing a completely new activity based workplace to meet the specific needs of the expanded Prague office.

97%

of respondents agreed that the design of the workplace enhanced their productivity

New premises



The questionnaire was sent out 1 year after completion so that the staff will have been able to form clear opinions of their workspace. The questions were in 2 sections; part 1 related to the former workplace and part 2 for the new workplace. The individual questions were identical for both parts.

THE RESULTS

have been very encouraging. Firstly, and perhaps unsurprisingly there is very clear satisfaction at the generally improved level of facilities and variety of work settings available – meeting rooms, A/V conferencing, reception spaces, concentration rooms, phone booths, informal meeting areas, refreshment areas etc.

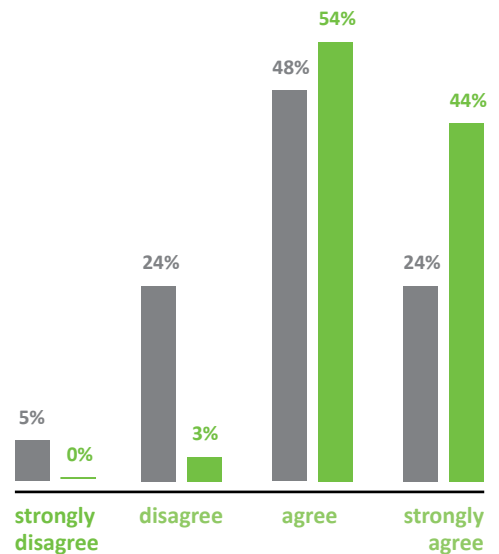
More interestingly and perhaps more importantly there were a number of key outcomes related to less tangible issues.

For example, 97% of respondents agreed that the design of the workplace enhanced their productivity (up from 72% from the previous office), 100% agreed that the workplace expressed the company philosophy / identity (up from 80), 100% said they were proud of their workplace (up from 71) and 98% confirmed that the workplace was an enjoyable place to work (up from 71).

IT IS AN ENJOYABLE PLACE TO WORK IN

OLD OFFICE

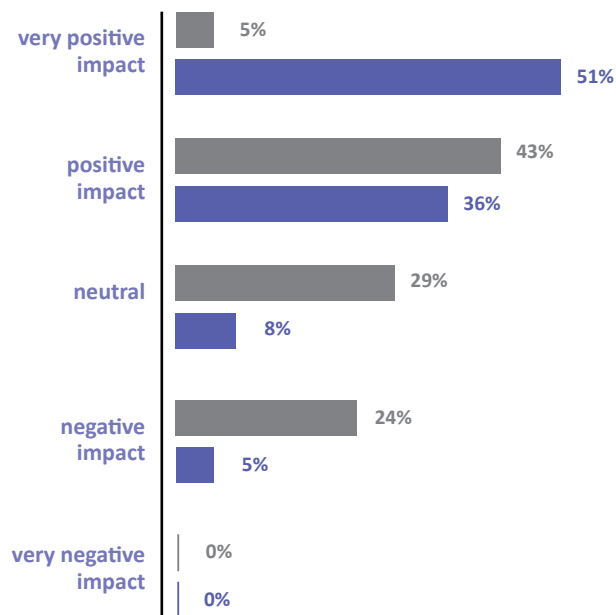
NEW OFFICE



OLD OFFICE

COLLABORATION WORK

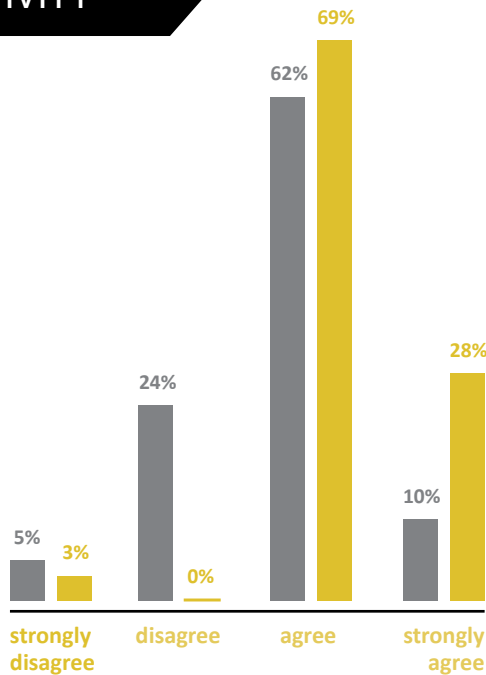
NEW OFFICE



These are all very positive figures and give a clear indication of the value a better designed workplace can bring.

As the workspace is designed around activity based settings we were very keen to discover how the spaces supported the different types of work being undertaken. One of the key initial requirements was to encourage greater collaboration and staff interaction. On these counts 87% of respondents noted positive influence on collaboration work (up from 47) and 82% on social interaction (up from 38%). Regarding other activities, 61% noted positive impact on creative work (up from 9%), 56% on individual routine work (up from 28%) and 53% on individual concentration work (up from 14%).

THE WORKPLACE ENHANCES MY PRODUCTIVITY



This feedback has allowed us to gain a very clear picture of the relative success of the project. Just as valuable has been some of the negative feedback, for example regarding the extensive bench seating which connects the front and back parts of the office and which remains underused - staff clearly prefer to sit at a standard desk when available. This may change in time as more people feel comfortable to work in a more informal setting.

We are now recommending other clients to use our employee survey method at the briefing stage, to help with the analysis of their current space and at post completion stage to review the success of the workplace.

As a case study, the survey results of the CBRE workplace demonstrate ample evidence that a better designed workplace can result in tangible benefits in terms of staff productivity gains, overall well being and other important business related aspects.

We believe this case study can be used as a strong justification for investment in better design and a more enlightened approach to the workplace.