



## **How to achieve effective workplace design and ensure successful business results**

Making sure that your workplace is an inspirational place to work is vital. A well-designed work environment really pays dividends, not only does it reflect the company identity, but it also introduces an effective approach to space management, resulting in better work processes. Consequently the staff feel valued, which generates increased motivation and productivity.

Getting the design right will ensure successful business results....but you have to remember that design goes beyond the choice of desking and layout. The real results come from an intelligently planned and well thought through scheme, taking into consideration your company culture, brand and people. Your appointed design and fit-out partner should look carefully at the balance between open plan areas and cellular offices and examine how teams interact with each other before designing the floor plans.

Effective design is achieved by following rational stages. First, if you are relocating, finding an appropriate building in which to house your office is crucial. Your design consultant will establish how much space you need by carrying out a workplace study to help you find the right location.

A precise calculation of your space needs is essential. Many office buildings are leased on a 15 years term and to over-estimate your space requirements can prove very costly. For example, if the workplace study demonstrates you need 4,000 sq ft less than you believed, you could save yourself £2,500,000 over the term of the lease. Your design and fit-out consultant should also carry out detailed surveys on your short-listed buildings. This will help you in the selection process by highlighting issues likely to impact on your business (Mechanical and electrical infrastructure, IT and telecoms services, building services etc...).

The second stage of your project is preparing a project brief. The initial briefing document is a key element to the future success of your project: it communicates your business objectives or 'vision' to your appointed design team. It should highlight key goals, current working practices, company values, operational and technical workplace needs, cultural issues, headcount information and finally budget and timescales. This provides the target for your design consultants to aim at.

Brainstorming sessions with designers will help you create your brief. Designers should listen to your ideas and directions whilst offering advice and guidance. Once the key functional and operational needs are established, your fit-out consultant will start working on the design of your office. The interior can be as creative as your brief, views and values allow.

### **Get involved in the design process**

When appointing your design consultants, make sure that they are in tune with the direction you wish the creative and aesthetic aspects of the project to take.

In order to ensure that the project is well-received internally, you might want to involve your staff in the process of designing their new office. Whether it is its colour schemes, meeting room names or layout, it will most certainly result in them taking a sense of pride and ownership in the finished product. It will increase motivation as well as retention, in the case of the company relocating to new premises. Employees' involvement can be achieved by your workplace consultant conducting staff interviews or running workshops prior to embarking on the project.

Once you have agreed on a layout, it is essential to incorporate the technical aspect of the project such as lighting, air-conditioning, water supplies and data before moving onto more visual aspects of the design. CAD drawings and artist's impressions will give you an idea of what the final result will look like.

### **Build in flexibility**

Flexibility is a key factor in providing a long-term return on your investment. Your office needs to be adaptable to meet your future demands, so try to build in elements that allow changes right from the start. For example, training and meeting areas with fold-back partitioning can come in useful. Also, ensure that your furniture is easily reconfigurable.

In order to ensure longevity of your scheme, your design company has to take into account how long you will occupy the building for. The more fashionable or trendy a scheme is, the shorter-lived it will be. Spaces need to embrace some contemporary elements that won't become dated six months down the line. Build flexibility into the scheme so that as styles change, so can the design elements.

### **Choose your furniture, seating and storage facilities**

Furniture choices should be driven by the overall design solution and not the other way round. Firstly, you need to set a budget and decide on the style of furniture. Bespoke desking can sometimes help optimise your space as opposed to standard desks. It is important to choose high

quality seating as not only does it impact on productivity by avoiding Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI), but it also works out more expensive to keep replacing chairs.

Storage is also an important element to consider as it helps keep the workplace environment tidy. If you are refurbishing or relocating, take this opportunity to archive old documents and consider off-site storage as an option to maximise your space.

### **Use colour scheme and lighting wisely**

Colour is one of the most mood-altering devices; it is also one of the most cost-effective ways to bring a desired ambiance into a workplace. When introducing corporate colours into the scheme, take into consideration how it will affect the staff. Strong branding can be important, but the inappropriate translation of corporate colours can have a negative effect.

Levels and type of lighting particularly affect people's moods, and as such, is an important feature in any design scheme. Ensure, when possible, that staff are near a source of natural light. Working in a gloomy atmosphere is oppressive and can affect productivity. Make sure that your lighting complies with new regulations. Full spectrum fluorescent tubes are phosphor-balanced units, the technology used in the treatment of the Seasonal Affective Disorder. Used in a working environment, it keeps staff bright alert and motivated.

### **Provide break-out areas**

Providing appropriate break-out space to avoid daily stress is crucial. Some companies choose to provide pool tables, table football, internet access or a café/canteen. Designing a truly recuperative and relaxing area is an essential ingredient in the overall design solution. Break out areas can double up as informal meeting areas in order to maximise the space utilisation.

### **Make sure your office meets health and safety regulations**

Throughout the construction stage your refurbishment company must ensure that the Health and Safety requirements are met. At the end of the project, you should be provided with a safety file outlining any health and Safety aspects that you need to consider in the future when the building is being maintained, altered or repaired.

Design is a long term investment and the decisions you make now will impact on your company's future. Produced correctly, your workplace design will have a positive impact on your productivity and will also be memorable for staff and visitors for many years ahead.

*Clive Lucking is the Managing Director of Area Sq. Limited. Tel: 01784 274 000. Email: info@areasq.co.uk*

---

## **Notes to editors**

---

Launched in January 2000 by Clive Lucking, Nigel Hudson and James Cornwell, Area Sq specialises in the design, project management, space planning, fitting out, refurbishment and furnishing of commercial office interiors. Area Sq is based in Egham, Surrey and Central London and undertakes projects of 2000 sq ft up to 70,000 sq ft throughout the UK.

Area Sq clients include Reed Elsevier, Sungard, Cendant, Microsoft, Thomson Wealth Management, Epson, Budgens, TATA, Pharmion and Capita.

For more information, please visit our website [www.areasq.co.uk](http://www.areasq.co.uk)