

Put people and performance ahead of property

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In the concluding part of his article, **Paul Carder** looks at how facilities managers can improve the effectiveness of their workplace.

The first half of this article examined the development of the idea that offices should enable users to be more productive and the need to nurture the contemporary knowledge worker (see *Facilities Management* 19.6, pp.14–15). This part looks in more detail at the facilities manager's role in improving office productivity.

Let us first consider what is at stake here. By far the greatest value that facilities managers can add to their organisation is to help workers to be more productive. I covered this subject a few years ago in my article "From facilities, to facilitator" (*Facilities Management* 14.1). My key message was that the best facilities manager is one who makes life easier and more productive for everyone working in the organisation. The FM discipline should be about becoming the facilitator of work, not just a manager of facilities.

This is what I said then: "A debilitating focus on facilities management cost reduction (a consistent theme in the industry), in the absence of measurement of business effectiveness, is a downward spiral."

Sadly, the situation is now far worse and cost reduction is at the top of most organisations' agenda. Of course, when the economy does pick up, clients will hardly be queuing up to thank service providers that cut prices during the downturn and to offer to spend more on FM again. Indeed, why should they unless providers can demonstrate how doing so will have a return on investment?

PEOPLE ARE THE PRIORITY

To get into the right frame of mind to make office productivity work in their organisation, facilities managers need to refocus. The key principle is: "Think people and performance – and only then think property and facilities."

To think about this issue in another way, try arranging these roles in priority order, in relation to your job as head of facilities:

- organisational psychologist;
- health and fitness coach;
- workplace strategist;
- manager of property and FM services.

This list is *already* in the correct order – although you could argue that (1) and (2) are both subsets of (3). But they all go before (4), being essential for informing the role of property and FM.

You, the psychologist

This is possibly the most interesting part of your role if you are going to improve office productivity. You may have a few thousand occupants in your property portfolio. What do they think about their working environment? More importantly, how does this ultimately affect their productivity?

Most of the factors affecting how people think about their workplace are *not* directly related to the physical working environment. The right leadership and respect for employees is more important in determining a great workplace. The Great Place to Work® Institute exists to demonstrate this and to help organisations create and sustain high-trust workplace cultures¹. It provides annual research data based on more than 10 million employees in 45 countries, representing more than 5,500 organisations of varying sizes, industries and structures.

Nevertheless, the physical workplace does have an effect on occupants' morale and wellbeing, and for an analysis of your workplace's effectiveness, I would recommend applying the survey tools delivered by Leesman². The company provides a range of unified measurement and audit techniques that aim to provide organisations with open-source information and collective learning. These tools include the Leesman Index (Lmi), which is becoming the primary published workplace satisfaction index in Europe.

The Lmi is populated through an online structured survey, which asks about the importance of, and satisfaction with, a range of issues. The average Lmi score currently stands at 56.3, compared with the highest score to date of 83.9, which is clearly a large gap. One of the perceived worst-performing facets of most current workplaces is the ability to hold confidential discussions (followed closely by the ability to think and concentrate on detailed individual work). With the help of tools such as this, "you, the psychologist" can work out how to address any gaps and improve workplace performance.

You, the health & fitness coach

We have considered the mind, so now for the human body. This area of science is far better understood, and the workplace environment is full of opportunities to apply this science to improve people's wellbeing.

Recent research has even suggested that employers can gain more by investing in the health of staff who are well rather than focusing on the minority who are sick³.

Ergonomics is a key area for any facilities manager, helping to ensure that people are working in a way which prevents longer-term musculoskeletal disorders and shorter-term human error. The Health and Safety Executive and the Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors⁴ provide detailed information on ergonomics, so I will not cover it in detail here.

The area that facilities managers fail to deal with enough, however, is sensory perception. Temperature, ventilation and indoor air quality, humidity, acoustics, daylight and general light levels all have direct and measurable impact on human performance. Even the olfactory sense has been cited by one business owner as “one of the most important aspects of creating a welcoming space that makes the spirits of creative endeavour feel welcome”⁵.

I will pick just one factor, temperature, as although it is covered by detailed guidance⁶ it always comes up in complaints and surveys of office users. In fact, temperature control has one of the lowest satisfaction ratings in the Lmi discussed above. Yet the *Improving office productivity guide*⁷ by Nigel Oseland and Paul Bartlett mentioned in my previous article gives detailed explanations on improving office occupants’ productivity, stating that: “Humidity, air quality, temperature and air movement are inextricably linked in most user minds, so the most effective way to achieve improvements is to deal with them together.”

So what stops the head of FM being able to deal with this productivity killer once and for all? The science is clear, and the engineering and FM guidance are in place. What more is needed for a clear business case for expenditure on HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning), controls, sensors and management systems to ensure that human performance is maximised?

You, the workplace strategist

Taking the above into account, and with a clear view of how employees’ minds and bodies are affected by the working environment, you can do a lot to improve office productivity. But if you move from individuals to groups – teams, business units and whole organisations – there is a third element, workplace strategy. There are many books and articles on this subject but there is one key factor in developing a successful workplace strategy – understanding the organisation’s needs and translating this into the design and management of the working environment.

The factors to consider include collaboration (ease of working together in various-sized groups), communication (does the workplace assist or restrict this?), access to meeting rooms and many others. Again, these factors can be assessed (if not scientifically measured) using tools such as the Lmi.

You, the facilities manager

I began by saying that the FM industry needs to refocus. If you follow through the argument above, you will think about people and performance and thereafter about how to apply your conclusions to property and FM. I don’t believe that many FM professionals are going to get the recognition they want by just doing the “day job”. But if you can make the organisation work more productively, perhaps you *will* get that recognition.

GETTING HELP

There is solid science behind office-productivity measurement. The efficiency of some activities such as talking, reading, writing, concentration and using equipment has been measured by laboratory-based studies. Other activities are more difficult to measure and more difficult to simulate in a laboratory, but according to Oseland and Bartlett “could be easily observed and therefore measured in the real world”. There are a lot of areas where further research is needed, but we should not ignore what we already know.

As a facilities manager, there are many people whom you can call on to support your analysis or business case for change. For starters, I would recommend the following people and sources:

- Paul Bartlett has been actively developing a knowledge base for many years through his Office Productivity Network, which holds several workshop discussions and building tours every year⁸.
- For a detailed review of building performance evaluation (BPE), I recommend the textbook and global case studies in *Assessing building performance*⁹. BPE is based on feedback and evaluation throughout the useful life of a building, from strategic briefing through to design and occupancy. It includes the use of post-occupancy evaluation techniques.
- A comprehensive and up-to-date resource on subjects relating to workplaces and human interaction can be found at the Centre for People & Buildings in the Netherlands¹⁰. Its website includes a useful list of publications and articles.
- In the UK, you can speak with Dr Craig Knight, who is researching what makes a productive workspace for most people¹¹. In Knight’s words: “If you think that a clean-desk policy, quality circles and lean offices are good ideas, then we really do need to talk. Our work strongly suggests that you are heading up a blind and damaging alley.”

INTO THE MAINSTREAM

All these people mentioned above will continue to promote the use of office-productivity analysis. Perhaps, as we slowly pull out of our current economic downturn, this subject will get nearer the top of the FM agenda. Unless it does, I fear that FM will never fulfil its potential.

FM

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