

# What flexible working brings to the table

**Business Info explores the impact of flexible working on office desking**

More and more workers are asking for flexible working arrangements. In a survey by XpertHR, 56% of UK employers said they had seen an increase in flexible working requests over the past two years.

Three out of four believe this is due to changes in workplace culture, attributable in part to the extension, in 2014, of the right to request flexible working to all employees with at least 26 weeks' service.

The introduction of remote working and flexible start/finish times has freed employers from having to provide each office worker with their own desk and enabled them to use space more creatively, as Chris Batt, product sector manager at Herman Miller, explains.

"Over the last few years we have seen a shift away from high density uniform clusters of dedicated workstations to a much less formal office environment where individuals can choose where and how they work, with much more postural change supported throughout the office,"



he said.

"When an individual wants to concentrate they can do this, but now they can choose if they want to sit or stand. If people want to work in a socially connected environment, rather than at a desk, they can choose a café or break-out area."

Steve Bays, managing director at Century Office, says that compared to the boxed-in cubicles of the '80s today's informal, open plan offices give workers much more freedom to move around and interact with colleagues.

"We're now creating offices that boost collaboration and encourage employees to move around during the day and at regular intervals. Informal spaces, such as sofas, the office café,

breakout pods and booths, allow for a change of scenery and a welcome excuse to step away from the desk. These areas also help to break down communication barriers, while increasing the opportunity for spontaneity," he said.

Bays added: "Conversations made in these areas can lead to great ideas that may positively affect the future of the business."

## Health and wellbeing

For Steelcase UK brand manager Alexander Gifford, standard desks no longer offer the functionality workers need. Nor do they do enough to support the wellbeing of their users. Instead, modern solutions like the Steelcase Bivi desking system support a variety

## DESKING SOLUTIONS

### Collaborative system

Atlas Office Landscape by Herman Miller combines height-adjustability and collaborative working in one solution. Thanks to its no-beam design, the versatile system can be configured to fit different spaces and needs, supporting focused activity or impromptu meetings. Screens, shared cable management, personal storage and meeting tables can all be integrated into the workspace.

[www.hermanmiller.co.uk](http://www.hermanmiller.co.uk)



### Move more

Also from Herman Miller, the Ratio height-adjustable desk is designed to encourage users to vary their posture throughout the day. With its clean lines and lightweight design, Ratio blends into the modern office environment. It is available with two kinds of electric height adjustment, including programmable presets for use at assigned desks, so the user can adjust their desk to the right height at the touch of a button, or manual height adjustment.

[www.hermanmiller.co.uk](http://www.hermanmiller.co.uk)

### Adaptable design

Steelcase's Bivi is a modular desking system that supports a variety of postures, allowing users to alternate between sitting, standing and lounging. It promotes movement in the workplace through a reconfigurable design and variety of accessories. These include built-in sofas, storage, privacy screens and arches that support canopies, mountain bikes and skateboards.

[www.steelcase.com](http://www.steelcase.com)



of postures and heights, as well as individual and collaborative work.

As Gifford put it: "With a more agile workforce, it is crucial that desking allows you to do more with less."

While not a new idea, sit/stand desks that improve circulation and posture have become a workplace phenomenon over the last few years, as employers have begun to recognise the importance of ergonomics to the health, wellbeing and productivity of workers.

Chris Batt says that in this respect the modern office is getting closer to the vision of a healthy office expounded by Herman Miller researcher Robert Propst 50 years ago.

"In 1968, Robert Propst, designer, inventor and researcher at Herman Miller, wrote: 'Man's physical machine has evolved to do many things well but no single thing continuously. The office can be a kinetic, active, alert, vigorous environment'. His Action Office system featured a stand-up desk that he argued 'would do more than anything else to overcome sedentary decline'. Herman Miller has offered standing surfaces ever since."

Batt added: "Research has shown that a choice between sitting and standing combined with training on the benefits of standing is most effective at reducing sitting time, which has benefits for the individual and the organisation."

More than 15 years ago, office furniture manufacturer DAS started designing height-adjustable desks that made it easier for IT and facilities team

to access tech underneath desktops on bank trading floors. Lars Brown, account manager at DAS Business Furniture, says that since then their use has become much more widespread.

"Now, sit-stand desks are unquestionably the most sought-after solution as our clients are looking for furniture that is going to complement activity-based working. The little things count, too, such as electric controllers with programmable pre-sets, which make adjusting the height of the desk easier in a hot-desking environment," he said.

### Where to invest

Tony Antoniou, managing director of Rainbow, an independent supplier of office furniture, says that businesses of all sizes are now looking to integrate design elements that support flexible and agile working and that to do so some will seek to save money on desking.

"Those with limited budgets are purchasing the most cost-effective, but still visually pleasing and functional, desking ranges," he said. "The company then allocates the money that they save to collaborative furniture, so even on a budget they are trying to fit in some soft areas and informal spaces into their office; what they save on the cost of desks allows them to do that."

He adds that organisations with more generous budgets tend to upgrade their space by using wooden benches and soft-seating, with a focus on

breakout areas and informal meeting spaces so that employees can find a space they'd like to work in.

"Other companies are focusing on more ergonomic desking products such as sit stand desks, which have excellent health benefits," he said.

### A better balance

Flexible working policies give employees more autonomy in when and where they work, but Steelcase's Gifford points out that it's still important to make the office a space they want to visit and where they like to work.

"While flexible working has its benefits, coming together in the workplace is what keeps employees engaged and helps them to build trust and collaborate. The key is in designing workplaces to be destinations that people want to be in, while still providing tools and technology to support employees when they choose to be remote or flexible."

Lars Brown of DAS recommends solutions that can be expanded to meet changing requirements. "We often find that a client may not initially want the entire office to be height-adjustable, so it is important that DAS offers solutions that are upgradable with minimal disruption," he said.

In an era of flexible working, it is important to offer not only a greater variety of places where staff can work, but also furniture solutions that support their productivity and wellbeing.

The modern office is getting closer to the vision of a healthy office expounded by Herman Miller researcher Robert Propst 50 years ago



### Memory settings

The Autonomy Pro sit/stand workstation from Century Office allows users to adjust the height of their desk between 640 and 1300mm at the touch of a button. For added convenience, the workstation can be set to remember two user preferences (a sitting and standing height). Autonomy Pro comes with various safety features including an anti-crush sensor that detects obstructions.

[www.century-office.co.uk](http://www.century-office.co.uk)

### Cable management

DATUM Flux+ is a robust sit/stand desk from DAS designed with both agile working and increased technology provision in mind. The desk features an easy-to-use electric controller; a management rail for monitor arms and desktop power modules; high-capacity cable management, with a full-width cable tray under the worktop; and optional leg covers that double as a cable riser and CPU mounting shelf.

[www.dasbf.com](http://www.dasbf.com)



### Retrofit motor

KI's Work2 Sit-Stand range of desks and meeting tables offers flexibility for businesses exploring this new way of working. The collection can initially be configured as fixed height and upgraded in the future with full sit-stand capability from Linak-powered actuators. The desk can be set to remember a user's ideal sitting and standing height and features an integrated anti-collision sensor.

[www.kieurope.com](http://www.kieurope.com)

DESKING SOLUTIONS

## Versatile bench desking system

Century Office's Javelin bench desking system is a stylish and flexible boardroom solution designed to adapt to your changing needs. The desk is available in a range of work top sizes and finishes, and features height settable legs. An in-built, under desk cable tray keeps wires hidden, reducing the risk of tangling or accidentally pulling one. Additional extras such as hammered laminate tops, coloured powder-coated feet and power modules are also available.

[www.century-office.co.uk](http://www.century-office.co.uk)

**CENTURY**  
OFFICE



## KI launches Take5

The Take5 lounge seating collection from KI is inspired by mid-century styling and designed for today's workspaces. The collection's single, two- and three-seater sofas with low or high backs are complemented by ottomans, coffee tables and side tables. The seating is both comfortable and practical, with flat top armrests doubling as both a secondary seating surface and a worktop for notebooks or laptops. Each sofa can be fitted with power and USB modules, while upholstered high backs can be added to reduce noise and increase a sense of privacy.

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