



Love Your Workspace

How psychology can inspire office planning to help create happy, healthy, high performing work environments.

A better understanding of the complex relationship between personality types and the working environment can enhance wellbeing and productivity through better office planning. The impact our workplaces have on wellbeing and productivity is a vital consideration influencing today's office planning strategies. Organisations are moving away from pure open plan offices, increasingly investing in a more 'humanised' work environment featuring breakout spaces, informal meeting areas, quiet zones, private meeting rooms and hot desking facilities.

Workplace furniture manufacturers KI Europe collaborated with business psychologists OPP to find out more about the relationship between personality types and the environments in which we work, and whether this had an impact on our productivity and sense of wellbeing. Using the MBTI® – the world's most popular and well-known personality assessment, OPP looked into the links between

personality type and office conditions, exploring type differences for issues such as:

- Preferred or ideal working environment
- Satisfaction and happiness at work and how this is affected by the work environment
- Personalisation of the work area
- Likes and dislikes within the work environment

Types in the workplace

One of the exercises often used to help extraverts and introverts understand each other better, goes like this: Separate a group into extraverts and introverts and ask each to draw their ideal office environment. Comparing the results will typically show a quite clear difference between the priorities and preferences of the two groups. In the past, a number of links have been made between personality type and the working environment. For example, 'The Negotiable Environment' (Williams, Armstrong, & Malcolm, 1985) discussed office layout and allied factors in MBTI terms, and the 'Environmental Personality Type Assessment' attempted to 'type' the workplace (Salter, 1995). More recently, concerns have been raised about the impact of the modern office environment on introverts in particular (Cain, 2012). Open plan offices have become the norm, and desk sharing, hot desking and similar arrangements are becoming commonplace. As our research shows, such environments may inhibit wellbeing for some personality types.

"HR often focuses on raising employee engagement through means they have a direct influence over – training, management structures, salaries, benefit packages. However, the physical environment itself can have a dramatic impact on the average employee's day. Proximity of breakout and dining facilities, rooms to have confidential meetings or make sensitive phone calls, appropriate storage for personal or job-related materials, adjacency to amenities – these are just a few examples of elements of the physical environment that can help improve the worker experience.



But these are seen as the domain of the Facilities Manager – whether in terms of workplace design, furniture procurement, or expenditure. HR invariably hold a wealth of knowledge that could help Facilities Management make better decisions regarding the working environment, and could do even more to gather and interpret data from employees. In addition to direct feedback through regular surveys, HR could also use psychology and psychometric tests such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (which they may already use for other purposes), to better understand the diverse needs of their teams in terms of their workspace. It goes without saying that one size doesn't fit all, that one person's ideal work environment might be another's worst nightmare. A better understanding of who needs what, from a psychometric and practical perspective, can help HR and Facilities Management to work together to get the mix right. This type of internal communication is essential to enrich the organisation as a whole, rather than data being held in silos. In addition to gathering data through surveys, simple motion sensors can be fitted to monitor the actual, rather than perceived usefulness of space and furniture – helping to measure the overall effectiveness of an evolving workplace strategy."

There is a near equal frequency of introverts to extraverts in a typical population. The statistics from the survey are based on OPP's own data of the UK population. This split remains closely balanced when comparing exclusively male or female samples. Accommodating the needs of introverts within an office landscape does therefore have the potential to benefit a vast proportion of the workforce.

Editorial kindly provided by Jonathan Hindle, Group Managing Director, KI EMEA

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