

People Management

December 2015

£7.20



I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING

JONATHAN HINDLE

HR can find an alternative to 'cookie cutter' workplace design

We spend too much time at our workplace for it to be a dull, uninspiring and unsuitable space to be. But during the recession, conversations about workspaces and their design have been dominated by talk of budgets and a readiness to take the easiest route by replicating other organisations' workplaces. Those in control of costs have been convinced that the 'cookie cutter' approach is the optimum way of squeezing the most workstations possible into a single building – without thinking about the culture and values that accompany such a change.

Where is the human touch in these conversations? Where is HR's input, as the voice of the employee? HR professionals invariably hold a wealth of knowledge that can help facilities managers and finance departments make better decisions about our working environments – ones that in the medium to longer term can have a demonstrably positive impact on health and wellbeing, employee retention and even productivity.

Take, for instance, psychometric testing. Many organisations already offer staff the chance to discover their Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) profile, but these findings are rarely applied to preferences for different working styles and environments.

New research we've carried out with OPP has uncovered fascinating correlations between MBTI profiles and workspace preferences. Introverts are more likely to prefer to work in a private or home office than extraverts and, while neither group was found to have a strong preference for open-plan environments, introverts were more likely to suffer the negative effects of open-plan spaces. The research also



Jonathan Hindle

is group managing director EMEA at workplace furniture manufacturer KI.

found that people who worked in a private or home office were more likely to be satisfied at work, and those in workspaces with fewer people tended to feel more positive about being at work.

A 2006 study by Allread and Marras showed that, when an employee's personality is matched with the nature of their work environment, they are likely to report less anxiety and physical discomfort, and more job satisfaction and social support, than those individuals who are mismatched.

While research into the workspace preferences of different MBTI types is still in its early stages, so far it's indicating that the designs many organisations are

opting for by default are totally wrong for their staff.

As the employees at the heart of companies' people agendas, HR professionals should be well-placed to make the business case for spending more time, money and effort on ensuring workspaces meet workers' needs.

This can only happen with cross-departmental collaboration. And the traditional disconnect between HR, finance and facilities management will persist until one group makes the first move. But with wellbeing and talent retention rising up management agendas, it's the ideal time for HR to speak up and contribute to the workplace discussion.