

Scientifically exploding the myth of office productivity

- Psychologists at the University of Exeter warn that current methods of office space management could be costing UK businesses £93bn a year in lost productivity.
- Researchers at the University of Exeter found that people were happier, healthier and 17% more productive in a room enriched with Ambius plants and artwork than they were in a lean space

The management of office space in this country is ineffective. It is very likely that productivity and well-being in your business are far lower than they should be. Thanks to impartial, scientific collaboration, Ambius is in the ideal position to help rectify these shortfalls.

The results of recent academic research by Prism (psychological research into identity and space management), part of the University of Exeter's internationally renowned School of Psychology, strongly refutes the common assumption that office design and workspace management is continually evolving. Instead the reverse would seem to be true. Methods of workplace management are stagnating. Consider the two offices shown below. One is from 1906, the other an award-winning design from 100 years later.



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Note how precisely the description of the early 20th century office also applies to its 21st century successor:

“(The) desks facilitated visual supervision and the hierarchical use and control of work space. On the periphery of the building and around the central area of the ‘pool’ were the managers’ and supervisors’ offices. Only managers retained the prerogative of controlling a window for ventilation and light and a door for privacy, while the pool workers were reliant on increasingly mechanical delivery of the ambient environment.” (Crompton & Jones, 1984)

It is clear to see how Prism reached its conclusions. However, the psychologists go further: in a series of investigations over the past five years they have yet to find a scenario where the modern space – featuring the ‘lean’ office with its attendant policies of clean desks and standardized working conditions – offers anything other than the worst working environment in terms of wellbeing, job satisfaction and productivity[†].

So what is the alternative? In studies where people worked through the same office tasks under the same lighting, at a constant temperature and using the same furniture, the University of Exeter found that people were happier, healthier and 17% more productive in a room enriched with Ambius plants and artwork than they were in a lean space[†]. In the UK alone, Prism estimates that current methods of office space management could be costing £93bn in lost productivity. How much is it costing your business?

For a relatively tiny outlay, Ambius can help companies realize genuine and demonstrable improvements. Through our partnership with Prism at the University of Exeter, Ambius offers impartial scientific solutions for the modern business. This research is designed to increase the well-being of your people and your organization. We would be happy to share the results of this unique collaboration with you for the benefit of your bottom line.

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[†] Knight, C.P., & Haslam, S.A. (2010). Lean, mean and ineffective. The impact of office space management on organizational identification, well-being and productivity (in press)