

Office plants boost well-being at work

Office plants can assist in boosting staff well-being by up to 47% according to workplace research carried out at this year's Chelsea Flower Show.

Visitors to the Chelsea Flower Show were challenged to take part in the study which measured their creativity, happiness and productivity as they experienced a range of different workspace designs.

The study, designed by the Identity Realisation research group at the University of Exeter, in association with IGD, compared people's effective output across different types of business space. Ninety experiments took place across the week and involved a total of 350 participants.



Visitors to the Chelsea Flower Show were challenged to take part in the office design study.

The results showed that allowing staff to make design decisions in a workspace enhanced with office plants can increase well-being by 47%, increase creativity by 45% and increase productivity by 38%.

The findings, which would be expected to translate to a significant increase in business profitability, confront the popular belief that plants and art are an unnecessary or even wasteful element of the business environment. Results from this and related scientific investigations stubbornly indicate that across all measures of psychological comfort and business performance, the managerially popular flexible, controlled, lean office, is consistently inferior to a space enriched by the design decisions of people who work there.

Psychologist Dr Craig Knight from the University of Exeter said: "We have previously shown that designing your own workspace improves health, happiness and productivity. It was time to go a step further and see whether the principle can also be applied to creativity and indeed whether the very act of designing the workspace can be used effectively. Results at the show demonstrated how creativity can be increased by 45% through improving the psychological well-being and design of a working environment.

"The results from the Chelsea Flower Show experiment indicate that plants, in a well designed and personalised office environment can boost business effectiveness through improved staff productivity and creativity. This gives company managers a real incentive to share control of office space with their staff and create meaningful, less didactic and more grown-up space."

The Chelsea experiment allowed the public to experience one of four typical office designs. Visitors were invited to undertake tasks to measure their productivity, wellbeing and creativity. The measures were collated for each office design and differences between the designs were assessed as part of the results data.

Ian Drummond, Creative Director of IGD said: "I was delighted to be a part of this very important experiment. So much of what we do is about putting living nature into offices – the health benefit of plants is so important in the workspace. I felt it was important to release the results during National Plants at Work Week to raise the awareness of our need for plants at work."

The experiment builds on Knight's research with colleagues from the University of Exeter's Psychology Department. Previous work has revealed the potential for remarkable improvements in job satisfaction and performance by allowing workers to personalise their office space. The research showed that employees who have control over the layout of their workspace are not only happier and healthier but are also more productive to the tune of 38% when compared to a lean space.

Through quantifying workspace creativity and by examining the psychological application of design, the Chelsea experiment has furthered Knight's leading edge work. This high profile study will precede a two part longitudinal workplace investigation with large office based organisations.

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