

A Design Uplift in the Workplace to Raise More Than the Furniture

I harbour fond memories of my first job as a reporter in Fie but the dingy, windowless office isn't one of them. Flimsy room partitions did little to mask the noise and a visit to the loo in winter meant you had to put your coat on for protection against the elements, thanks to the half-inch gap down one side of the window frame.

In those days, however, bringing in professional designers to give your workplace a makeover was unheard of, but as Hugh Anderson, managing director of Glasgow based **haa design** explains, an office carefully designed and laid out to suit the specific needs of its employees and the type of business it represents can completely change people's attitudes to work.

"It's not just about the touchy-feely stuff," he says. "You can have an open-plan office, plants and a nice sofa where people can sit and relax, but it goes much further than that. You have to understand that there are different modes of working so you might need to provide quiet, private areas as well as more formal and informal meeting facilities. Modern offices need to have different types of space."

Making a few quite simple changes to an office can really boost morale without it costing too much, says Anderson. "If you have a meeting room with a rectangular table chances are the senior person sits at the top. Replace it with a round table and everyone feels more equal and is likely to contribute more. If two people need to have a short, informal discussion, then they don't need to go into a private room and close the door – it's easy to create a small area in a corridor or beside a coffee machine for this type of communication."

Clever use of light and materials can also enhance the workplace. "Areas where more informal meetings take place might benefit from softer, more mellow lighting," he continues. "Using glass as a partition can also be extremely effective in providing a private area that does not feel totally isolated."

One of **haa's** clients, Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), came up against resistance from staff when it decided to move from an old Victorian building in Glasgow's west end to a modern office in the city centre. The organisation's head of performance Maureen Gore explains: "Their reaction was really interesting. We had been in this old building for years, with lots of character, space and nooks and crannies, which wasn't always conducive to good communication.

Quite frankly people didn't want to move so we brought in **haa design**, who very quickly understood what we wanted to create. We wanted something a bit different and starting off with a big, empty space gave us the opportunity to do just that. Hugh came and spoke to us and people were able to make suggestions. People grow very

comfortable with their own space and we realised that some staff would find change very difficult.”

LTS, the lead organisation for curriculum development in Scotland, moved into the Optima Building in Robertson Street two years ago. “We’re much more efficient,” says Gore. “People had accumulated so much stuff, some of which hadn’t been touched for years, so we were able to have a clear out. This led us to insist that we should have more efficient storage facilities in our new office, so **haa** built this into the design. “We have informal meeting spaces, in some cases with no walls. We were keen to make people feel more empowered and part of the decision-making process but also increase productivity and encourage teamwork and improved communication. There is lots of light now and by incorporating colour and curves we have created an office that gives us private areas, informal meeting space and a platform that encourages people to speak to each other.”

According to Anderson, LTS is a prime example of a forward thinking organisation that has embraced modern design techniques to create an office environment that encourages efficiency, creativity and communication. “The dynamics of any office dictate that it is a place where people come together,” he says. “With LTS, our brief was to create a space that sends out the message that that it is a professional organisation, yet allow people to be more efficient and creative through a flexible office environment. Their initial fear was that a modern office would be noisy with no privacy. What they have is an easy-going environment that provides a number of spaces designed for different types of work, meetings and communication.”

Hugh Anderson
haa design