

Making the best of hot desks – the pros and cons

The hot desk phenomena evolved from a need to conserve space and provide a landing spot for employees who mainly work outside of the office. Simultaneously the concept of activity based work spaces evolved with the intention of providing a range of different spaces to facilitate different activities such as meetings, collaboration, private work, creativity and concentration. Thus, suddenly our workplaces have changed to reflect both required design solutions operating alongside the more traditional personally allocated work spaces (where desks or offices are allocated to an individual).

The drive to provide more flexibility for employees in where and how they work has been enabled by Teleworking systems. This has resulted in the current blending of work performed from multiple sites. The adage you can work anywhere at any time is true.

The pros and cons of such flexibility and mobility are complex and each person can be impacted differently. A person's work style, work complexity, available resources and work environment act together to influence characteristics that are valued and desired by the employer such as collaboration, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity.

Hot desking works best when there are clearly defined inputs, outputs and set goals. In many cases these are unlikely to be sufficiently defined for every employee and team in every organisation.

There's also evidence to suggest that employees have different preferences, for example, goal orientated environments align most closely with the preferences of conscientious individuals. For organisations and managers this means fitting the person to the job and to the workspace.

The autonomy to sit wherever you want isn't exactly what current employees are looking for according to recent research. In fact there has been a significant push away from hot desking by employees many finding it counterproductive and limiting their work and its quality.

So how do we make the best of this design phenomena called hot-desking?

Managers and supervisors can assist by doing the following:

Employee arrive at work each day looking for a quick start and an effective work environment so they can perform at their best.

Desk and equipment

- Making certain there are desks available for staff when they come to work. This makes the staff member feel valued, demonstrates consideration by the supervisor and reduces time wasted on trying to locate an available/suitable hot desk.
- Ensuring that the specific equipment required for a specific staff member to work effectively is provided at the chosen hot desk. For example two screens, a height adjustable desk to cater for all potential users, a head set and an adjustable chair. These facilitate an atmosphere of efficiency and minimise the frustration caused by "unnecessary delay."
- Avoid sub-optimal technology which causes time-consuming delays when logging on. Ensure your staff have the required equipment to facilitate effective, efficient work, (including any specific software required by that employee).

Team work and collaboration

- Avoid people owning a hot desk by ensuring desk allocations are based on work teams, work type and required collaboration. The flexibility required by senior employees often requires them to have greater mobility and special equipment to work independent of location.
- Ensure that staff always know how to get in touch with their supervisor and where their team members are located. This promotes a positive team culture.
- Promote trust and co-worker collaboration by providing support as required and linking team members together.
- If the staff member is using a desk within a team setting that is not their own, make sure general protocols about confidentiality and noise are understood along with an expectation that the team will make the employee welcome.

Watch for

- People that start work early can have an unfair advantage so make sure this is addressed in a planned way so as to avoid conflict.
- Lack of personalised space can be a source of resentment so make the spaces part of wider team environment.
- Staff must learn to quickly set up their hot desk to be ergonomically safe and suited to their specific requirements. Guide staff to the [Ergonomics](#) webpage so they can read about how to set up their workstation appropriately.

For additional information please call a member of the [HWS team](#).

Additional references:

[The Rise and Fall of the Hot Desk.](#)

[A Guide to Successful Desk Sharing.](#)

[Putting Employees in Their Place: The Impact of Hot Desking on Organizational and Team Identification](#)