

# Workplace

Careers | Management | Moves

## Less is more when it comes to choice in the workplace

Technology can help make choice in the workplace less overwhelming, writes **Leeson Medhurst**

There is an intrinsic belief that more choice is better for everyone, but the opposite can also be true. Too much choice can create confusion, leaving people paralysed by the choices available and unable to make any decision at all - or they make poor choices. This can be equally true in today's workplace.

For some companies and organisations, the ideal office is a non-confrontational, all-encompassing, open environment where people can benefit from increased communication. This includes giving people a choice of where they sit, and when and where they work.

However, some people who come into a new working environment where they no longer have any limitations may feel overwhelmed, rather than welcoming this level of choice. Instead of embracing the choices now open to them, they may begin to look for security, creating their own clusters by sitting in the same spaces with the same people.

One of the most common problems I come across when talking to clients is that their people are working in silos. This has a negative impact on communication and means that people continue to work in their own little hubs or units, not mixing with the rest of the organisation.

To remedy this, employers tend to veer further into encouraging an open-plan, agile workplace. They presume that as a result, people will feel more empowered to make their own decisions.

In theory, this may sound like a good solution for breaking down work silos, but I would argue that humans are creatures of habit. When faced with a surfeit of choice, people start to limit themselves. This results in the creation of those productivity-sapping silos. We need to offer people some choice, but set limits so that they do not become paralysed by it.

This is where technology can help to create the utopian employee experience. For years, the train of technology hasn't stopped at workplaces. Now, it's a case of getting on board or missing it at your peril.

JLL's paper on the



3/30/300 rule provides a breakdown of what an organisation can look to pay per square foot in terms of total occupancy costs: £3 is for utilities, £30 is for rent and £300 is for employee-related costs.

### Biggest asset

Traditionally, facilities management teams have focused on the £3 and £30 costs, which are normally restricted by long-term agreements and yield smaller results and savings. But focus is shifting to the £300 employee-related costs. As well as being the biggest cost, employees are also our biggest asset.

Through the deployment of sensors, technology can help business owners and occupiers to better understand how their space is being used. Evidence has proved that offices are much quieter towards the end of the week, so why

have the entire space ventilated and heated if the space is less than 50% occupied?

With an agile space, companies have the flexibility for staff to sit on one floor and shut the remaining space for a day or two. Equally, if your meeting suite has only been used for 40% of the day, why do the cleaners need to clean those unused spaces at the end of the working day?

These same sensors can then focus on the £300 portion to enhance the user experience. This might be as simple as finding a free desk or the right environment to complete a specific task. This removes the worry that employees will be overwhelmed by choice.

Why not use that same technology to have your groceries ordered for collection as you leave the building or your dry cleaning waiting for you?

There is a long way to go in developing agile space strategies and everyone has their own issues to cope with, but it is possible to create a workplace that works for everyone. To do that, we need to embrace the right technology and use it to rid employees of the abundance of choice. **Leeson Medhurst** is director at **360 Workplace**

