

The 'wacky' office

Google has opened what is being called the 'wacky' office. What does our work environment tell us about company culture?

1 Match each word in Box A with its opposite in Box B. Which words best describe your own workplace or office?

(A) cosy	noisy	light	inspiring
Formal	warm	casual	conventional

(B) quiet	dark	uninspiring	informal
spacious	cool	smart	unconventional

2 Scan the transcript of a radio programme and find any words from exercise 1 in just one minute. Underline them.

So, just before we finish, let's have a look at some of your comments. On last weeks' programme, we asked you to tell us what kind of environment you wanted to work in. Well, we've been inundated with e-mails. Quite a few of you enjoyed the video tour of the Microsoft Campus in Seattle. Sean from Cardiff said: 'The spacious campus looks great - more like a park than the headquarters of a global computer giant. All that open space is so inspiring'. Debbie Lee wrote: 'It's hard to imagine any Microsoft employee getting through a typical day without a game of squash or tennis. The giant gym is great, but I go to work to work, not to play sports. I can do that in my free time.' Thanks for that, Debbie; it was a very common response.

OK. A lot of people said they loved the slide in Google's new so-called 'wacky' office in Zurich. Just to remind you - the quickest way to the canteen is by sliding down a fair-ground slide! It seems a lot of people are tired of conventional meetings and want to try those cosy little 'meeting pods'. Jaques from Paris wrote: 'Wow! There are whiteboards everywhere. Wherever inspiration strikes, you can just jot it down'.

Stress-busting was certainly high on many people's agenda. A lot of you said you'd love to try out the so-called 'Stress capsule' and you liked Google's idea of a quiet area, 'chilling out' near an aquarium, but most people were against the idea of having a professional masseur at work. Nor were you keen on the idea of being able to play pool or video games. Opinion was divided on canteens. Eat and drink as much as you want was popular with some, but others thought it was an extravagant waste of company money.

All this talk about Google reminds me of the dot.com days, when employees were encouraged to lie on the ubiquitous beanbag. So, next week we'll be talking to Mark Breschler who'll be here to tell us if there's a serious point behind the 'fun office'. Many of your e-mails suggest that all these wacky ideas are part of something rather more sinister - the company simply trying to get employees to stay at work longer! So that's it for tonight's programme. It seems the trend is towards a more casual work environment, although some of you still prefer a more formal workplace. Thanks for those mails and helping us answer the question: what does where we work tell us about the company culture?

3 Read the whole transcript. Which employee facilities are mentioned?

4 Decide if the following words are nouns (N), verbs (V) or both (B).

programme	environment	tour	inspiration	waste
encourage	e-mail	suggest	question	culture
agenda	video	remind	work	trend

5 Your company has a new CEO who wants to introduce a more informal working culture and so the company is to move to a purpose-built headquarters. A questionnaire has been sent to all employees to find out what they would like in the new building. Work in groups and rank the facilities based on what you would include.

Mail: to all staff	From: CEO	Re: move to new premises	Message: let me know your preferences	
canteen	gymnasium	tennis courts	squash courts	massage service
'quiet' area	video games area	whiteboards in corridors	parkland	other (specify)