

Home from home?

Personalising your work desk seems to improve job satisfaction. **MARGARET SCOTT**

THE advent of teleworking and the championing of 'hot desking' have brought with them a new concept in office life. Instead of people having a place in the office where they can be found, and where all their accoutrements can be kept together, employees may have no 'home' in their place of work. They may find that they are working from their domestic home, are always travelling, or that each day at work they are sitting in a different place. By not having a permanent area in which to work, the opportunity to personalise the space is diminished.

Personalisation of space has been linked with enhanced well-being so Meredith Wells from Eastern Kentucky University explored the role of personal displays on employee well-being. She carried out her work in 20 companies in California using

a written survey and short interviews. In addition to exploring personalisation and satisfaction at work, she was also interested in whether there were sex differences in personalisation and organisational well-being.

She found that in general women tended to personalise their space with symbols of pets, friends and family to improve the feel of the workspace. Men used symbols of achievement and sport to personalise space. Also, women used the space to express their identities, whilst men expressed their status within the company. However, both men and women did want the opportunity to personalise their work areas. Restricting such personalisation resulted in reduced satisfaction at work.

Wells argues that the restriction of personal displays in the office could be linked with a high turnover in staff because

of the role that it plays in employees' perception of their organisations. Where greater personalisation is allowed, a greater level of organisational well-being is reported, together with a more positive organisational climate, more positive social climate and reduced staff turnover. In decisions about the design of the workplace, the degree of personalisation that is expected and permitted may be an unforeseen – but crucial – factor in retaining staff and encouraging commitment to the organisation.

Wells, M. M. (2000). Office clutter or meaningful personal display: The role of office personalization in employee and organizational well-being. *Journal of Environmental Psychology, 20*, 239–255

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How to be a happy Valentine

Express little negative emotion and turn a blind eye to minor faults. **NEIL MARTIN**

WHAT helps couples to live happily ever after? Do both partners feel that the same things keep their relationship healthy? New research has highlighted the importance of different personality styles and their interactions.

Richard Robins and his colleagues at the Universities of California, London and Madison-Wisconsin asked 360 couples (either married, cohabiting, or dating for six months or more) to complete a series of personality measures and to take part in an interview designed to assess the quality of their relationship.

Whereas women were happier when their men were generally positive, not impulsive and not overly negative, men were happier when their partners expressed generally low levels of negative emotions. The negative emotions that caused general unhappiness were behaviours such as criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling. Individuals who expressed negative emotions were more likely to escalate arguments during conflict.

According to Robins and his colleagues, 'women are more likely to raise problems and criticisms in relationships; therefore, the ability of the man to soothe his partner and "embrace her anger" is crucial'. Men who are generally positive may be able to defuse negative affect more quickly; hence women's greater happiness with men who show this trait.

How we view our partner clearly affects the quality of our relationship, but we may often see our partner through rose-tinted glasses. Who is the more astute observer – the person in the relationship or the impartial friend?

Sandra Murray and her team at the Universities of New York, Waterloo and British Columbia asked 105 married or cohabiting couples to complete measures of relationship satisfaction and to rate each other on a series of faults and virtues. The researchers also asked nominated friends to list the couples' faults and virtues.

Those in satisfying relationships were significantly more likely to perceive their partners as being more virtuous and fault-

free than were friends or the partners themselves. These satisfied people also had partners who returned the favour, viewing them in the same light. Those in unsatisfying relationships, on the other hand, perceived less virtue in their significant others than did friends or their partners.

The authors argue that 'individuals are happier in their relationships when they perceive virtues in their partners that are not necessarily apparent to others (even to the partners themselves)'. Minor indiscretions and personality faults are overlooked and the good points accentuated.

Murray, S. L., Holmes, J. G., Dolderman, D., & Griffin, D. W. (2000). What the motivated mind sees: Comparing friends' perspectives to married partners' views of each other. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 36*, 600–620.

Robins, R. W., Caspi, A., & Moffitt, T. E. (2000). Two personalities, one relationship: Both partners' personality traits shape the quality of their relationship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*, 251–259.

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Great motivators at work

Two classic and optimistic views of human behaviour in our centenary 'Research in brief'. **CARY L. COOPER**

WHEN delving into the occupational psychology subconscious and identifying the most significant scientific contribution in the field, two items stick out above all others. They are Abraham Maslow's 'A theory of human motivation' and Douglas McGregor's 'The human side of enterprise'. In some respects these two theories are inextricably linked in their philosophical roots, and ultimately in their applications. Both theories are relatively simple, and deal with the positive side of human behaviour and motivation.

Maslow's theory explores the hierarchy of needs of individuals from basic physiological needs at the base of the pyramid, up to safety needs, to social needs, to esteem needs, and ultimately to the pinnacle of human experience – self-actualised needs. While Taylor's 'scientific management' promoted a negative view of human motivation, Maslow's optimistic view of human behaviour – that all human beings aspire to become self-actualised – is inspiring, and puts a different slant on how people should be conceived and treated in the workplace. As Maslow himself expressed, 'this is the simplest way of saying that proper management of the work lives of human beings, of the way in which they earn their living, can improve them and improve the world and in this

sense be a utopian or revolutionary technique'.

Maslow's theory was reinforced by the Douglas McGregor's more corporate view that organisations were either Theory X or Theory Y in their underlying management styles and assumptions about human behaviour. Theory X organisations feel that individuals could not be fully trusted, were basically intrinsically unmotivated (in a positive sense) and needed to be managed, with a capital M, by a more autocratic management style or by a carrot-and-stick approach. Theory Y organisations, however, have more of a culture of trust and an underlying belief that individuals would develop if given some sense of ownership in decision making and more autonomy. In this context managers are facilitators and not 'containers' or, in modern parlance, 'control freaks' of human behaviour. What Theory Y organisations aim for is meeting the higher order needs

of people, rather than manipulating the lower order needs to motivate them.

These theories are extremely important because of the changing nature of work, where jobs are now in effect short-term contracts and insecure. As we move toward an Americanised workplace with intrinsic job insecurity, long hours, and a more bottom-line management style, the irony is that the American theories of Maslow and McGregor become even more important than they were in the last century, particularly for a British workforce.

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50, 370–396.

McGregor, D. M. (1964). The human side of enterprise. In H. Leavitt & L. Pondy (Eds.), *Reading in managerial psychology* (pp. 267–279). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

■ Professor Cary L. Cooper is BUPA Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at UMIST.

In last month's centenary 'Research in brief' piece 'Introspection – A new look?' it should have been made clear that this was a review of a paper by Ericsson and Simon (1980). Paragraph three should have begun 'In their article in *Psychological Review* Ericsson and Simon try to make some sense out of the empirical and theoretical findings.' The missing reference was Ericsson, K. A., & Simon, H. A. (1980). Verbal reports as data. *Psychological Review*, 87, 215–251.

If you're happy and you know it

Politicians seem poor at matching their speeches to spontaneous applause. **FIONA LYDDY**

AT predictable points during a well-received political speech, enthusiastic, well-timed applause should erupt. At party conferences, where political leaders preach to the converted, the synchrony between speaker and audience should be high. The speaker uses rhetorical devices which, if effective, invite applause that is highly synchronised with the speech. While speech content alone may evoke spontaneous applause, the likelihood of applause is greatly increased by rhetorical formatting.

Failures of synchronisation between speech and applause, termed 'mismatches', are the focus of a recent paper by Peter Bull (University of York) and Merel Noordhuizen (University of Amsterdam).

Incidences of applause were analysed across six speeches delivered by British political party leaders (Paddy Ashdown, Tony Blair, William Hague and John Major) at annual party conferences.

Four main types of mismatch were identified: isolated applause; delayed applause; interruption of the speaker by the audience (audience mismatch); and interruption of applause by the speaker (speaker mismatch). The results suggest that mismatches are relatively common, with only 61 per cent of applause fully synchronised with speech.

Audience interruption accounted for 29.2 per cent of mismatched applause events and speaker mismatches for 12.9

per cent. The most frequently occurring mismatch was interruption of the speaker. Isolated applause occurred least frequently.

Mismatches were found to result from misleading cues; absent, poorly constructed or ineffective rhetorical devices; or the overshooting of completion points. Considerable variability in the frequency and type of mismatch was noted between speakers, suggesting that some styles are more conducive to synchronisation.

Bull, P., & Noordhuizen, M. (2000). The mistiming of applause in political speeches. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 3, 275–294.

■ Dr Fiona Lyddy is at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff.

Testimony in camera

Quality of child witness evidence improves when given via a video-link. **KAREN LANDER**

MANY UK courts now allow children to give evidence via a live video-link. This avoids the need for the child to confront the accused directly and to enter the sometimes intimidating atmosphere of the courtroom. While the use of video-links reduces stress in child witnesses, its impact on evidence quality is unclear. A recent study by Gwyneth Doherty-Sneddon and Sandra McAuley (University of Stirling) suggests that the positive benefits of using

such video-links may outweigh the drawbacks.

The study tested children's ability to give evidence about a neutral event via a video-link and face to face. Two groups (6-year-olds and 10-year-olds) of 32 participants took part. Upon arrival at the university the children witnessed a series of staged events. The experimenter 'found' a ball in the car, which was then taken to the lost-property room where a note was left for 'Fred'. When interviewed later, each child was asked about these events and the details surrounding them (for example they were asked to indicate the colour of the notepaper). Children were interviewed by trained interviewers, following Home Office guidelines of good practice.

The researchers found that both types of interview resulted in similar amounts of information being recalled and both required the same style of questioning.

Although the video-link resulted in the loss of some gestural information (due to camera angle), it also led to a number of positive effects. Children gave significantly less incorrect information during specific questioning in the video condition and there was greater resistance to misleading information by the younger children. A second study suggested that the younger children were more confident and less nervous in the video condition. It seems likely that distancing the child from the questioner may ease communication, leading to benefits in evidence quality and children's well-being.

Doherty-Sneddon, G., & McAuley, S. (2000). Influence of video-mediation on adult-child interviews: Implications for the use of the live link with child witnesses. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 14*, 379-392.

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The left hand of fate

General left-handedness seems a risk factor for mortality. **NEIL MARTIN**

ONE of the most controversial claims in the field of functional asymmetry is that left-handers die sooner than right-handers. A small number of studies have shown the proportion of left-handers declines significantly and more steeply

than the proportion of right-handers in the population. This pattern, however, could mask subtle individual differences.

This is a caveat Lee Ellis and Tim Engh from Minot State University, North Dakota, issue in their review of the deaths of 5743

Americans and Canadians. In the most extensive study of its kind, the authors examined the life expectancy of left- and right-handers mothers. Unlike most studies, however, they had asked participants to describe their handedness not in terms of two categories (left and right) but five (extremely right-handed, generally right-handed, ambidextrous, generally left-handed, extremely left-handed).

The authors found that there was a significant tendency for those classed as generally left-handed to die at a significantly younger age than were those in other groups. Those who lived longest were ambidextrous. The results suggest that left-handedness *per se* may not be a risk factor for mortality, but general left-handedness is.

Ellis, L., & Engh, T. (2000). Handedness and age of death: New evidence on a puzzling relationship. *Journal of Health Psychology, 5*, 561-565.



DAVE ROBERTS