21 Steps to a Successful Office Refurbishment
21 STEPS TO A SUCCESSFUL OFFICE REFURBISHMENT

More and more businesses are wondering why they are not doing as well as they could given their strategy, products assets and people. And although there can be dozens of reasons for sub-optimal performance, the most glaring mismatch is often between an organisation’s objectives and its workplace.

Because physically moving offices can be traumatic and prohibitively expensive, refurbishing existing office space is becoming a popular performance-enhancing option.

If planned, budgeted and managed correctly, there is evidence that an office refurbishment can dramatically improve operational efficiency, enhance corporate image and competitive advantage, increase your client base, and improve your ability to attract and retain personnel.

Refurbishment doesn’t have to be daunting. In fact, it can be an exciting and creative experience that is a pivotal point in achieving your strategic goals.
DISCOVER

1) APPROACH YOUR LANDLORD.
The chances are that your refurbishment project will add value to the landlord’s investment. It’s therefore a wise move to approach him at this early stage to let him know your intentions and to review your lease terms.

You may well be able to negotiate a capital contribution, improved rental terms or even be able to renegotiate onerous rent review and dilapidations clauses in return for the improvements you are making.

You also want to make certain that your landlord is going to ultimately give you approvals to do the work and therefore his initial agreement is vital before the process of refurbishment is considered.

2) CONSIDER CAREFULLY HOW THE DESIGN WILL SUPPORT YOUR PEOPLE MOST EFFECTIVELY.
A refurbishment is the perfect opportunity to create a new environment that reflects and fits your company’s culture.

Design goes way beyond a floor plan, workstation layout, colours and finishes. A well-designed work environment becomes the bedrock of your company’s culture, brand experience and is a way of communicating your unique story.

Consider opting for design solutions that not only support employees with private and open plan areas but also empower them to work in a style suitable for both the individual and the workgroup they belong to.

Research has shown that 80% of the reasons why people do not perform reside in the workplace.

3) SPEND TIME DEVELOPING A PROPER PROJECT BRIEF.
The difference between an efficient refurbishment project and an outstanding one usually reflects the amount of time and energy that goes into planning and briefing the teams involved.

When the project brief is coming together it is important to consider to what extent the design solution could accommodate your company as it develops in the coming years.

Any cultural changes or plans to dispose of or acquire new departments will have an impact, and taking into account the various issues relating to the working environment such as productivity goals, strategic objectives and corporate culture is also very important at this stage. Also ask yourself whether you will need all the space you currently have. By re-planning, changing your desks or filing differently could you reduce your square footage requirement?

4) INTERVIEW AND SELECT A REPUTABLE DESIGNER AND REFURBHISHMENT FIT OUT PARTNER.
A good interior design partner should have all the key disciplines in-house; workplace consultancy, space planning, interior design, and furniture specification as well as post-contract support and
an understanding of cost control and best value procurement. Ensure your designer is completely independent and does not have any vested interest in specifying any product or supplier. They should look after your interests and ensure you get best value.

Your designer will have worked with several contractors during their career. It may be worth asking their advice on suitable construction companies who have a proven track record in delivering good value and high quality fit-out.

Also consider whether the relationships will work between the designer, refurbishment contractor and your in-house team, as they will be working closely together over many weeks or months. Consider whether your project is too big or too small for them, see if they specialise in high or low value contracts wherever they are based. Make sure they use language you understand and do not merely communicate in industry jargon.

Most importantly, do they seem as though they really want your project? Are they committed? Will they do whatever it takes to deliver your brief on time and within budget?

5) FORMULATE A PROJECT BUDGET FROM THE OUTSET.

Your office refurbishment could well be among the largest individual items of business expenditure for many years.

Although some aspects of it are obviously much easier to budget for accurately, many less apparent expenses lurk in the fog, and it’s the great unknowns of a typical commercial refurbishment that consistently cause companies to under budget, sometimes woefully so.

You could dramatically reduce the likelihood of budget surprises by partnering with professional teams from the outset. Interior designers, project managers and leading refurbishment companies owe their success to the accuracy with which they can produce budgets and then deliver against them.

When the project budgets have been established, be sure to also include professional fees, any new it infrastructure costs, furniture, telecoms, insurances, and even marketing and pr to announce the new-look working environment.

6) PROCURING YOUR FIT-OUT.

Consider whether you would like to appoint a contractor on a tender or negotiated basis.

If you decide to tender your fit-out, your designers can help you prepare drawing tender packs and specification documents to ensure that all contractors are quoting ‘like for like’. Alternatively you can appoint a contractor and negotiate the costs either on a fixed price or open book basis. Your designer will have been involved with many different procurement routes and will be able to advise you on the best solution for you.
7) COMMENCE SPACE PLANNING AND THE OUTLINE DESIGN SCHEME.
The way your office space plan is designed needs careful thought in order to maximise its potential to bring about large gains in productivity, motivation, efficiency and morale.

It’s important to incorporate the technical aspects of the project such as lighting, air-conditioning, data, power, plumbing and wastage supplies together with other important areas such as your comms room. Your interior designer will conduct a building analysis and advise you on the best locations to position any items needing services (kitchen, breakout, comms /data etc).

8) USE THE REFURBISHMENT TO INTRODUCE METHODS OF REDUCING WORKPLACE STRESS.
The planning and budgeting elements of the refurbishment process will play a crucial role in helping you to minimise your costs and overheads and maximise productivity.

It will however be wise to consider the equally significant long-term saving that may be made if stress-busting elements were integrated into the project plan.

Proven research indicates that stress-related illness is a major contributor to sickness absence and is estimated to affect 1 in 5 workers in the UK. Research has also proved that time spent taking stress levels into account when the space is designed and the furniture is selected, may improve employee productivity and morale and could avoid absenteeism, lack of creativity and poor internal communication. You may want to ask your design partner to conduct staff interviews or devise an anonymous questionnaire to identify any areas of concern. Often staff confide more readily in an ‘outsider’ especially when their views are treated in confidence. This vital information can dramatically influence the success of the finished scheme and often provides the directors with an insight into wider company morale.

9) ABSORB YOURSELF IN THE DESIGN PROCESS.
It is crucial that there are no surprises at this stage of the project and that you are made fully aware of the way in which your new offices are likely to look and feel.

Far from being confined to cad plans and artist’s impressions, the design process should be a captivating journey that includes options for every aspect of the new working environment.

It should dissect every aspect of each room and working area and incorporate options for finishes, colours textures, fabrics and veneers, as well as specialist issues, for example flooring, bespoke joinery and lighting, along with the showcase areas such as reception and executive meeting rooms.

10) EXAMINE NEW FURNITURE OPTIONS THOROUGHLY.
The design and feel of office seating and storage may make the difference between a good working environment and an outstanding one. It would be wise to select a designer and refurbishment partner with furniture expertise that could help you develop and meet your requirements.
First establish the type, quantity and quality of furniture that is required and whether you want to compliment or replace your existing styles. Then set a budget and a timetable for installation. Once all these variables are defined, the actual process of choosing from the wide array of products on offer should become a far less daunting prospect. Ask your designer to organise and partner you on furniture showroom visits to get a feel for the sort of environment you want to create. When purchasing chairs, be careful to avoid making the mistake of going for the cheapest or best looking option. It may not seem like much, but a chair could be one of the most important pieces of office equipment you buy. With the 8 to 10 hours your staff could spend in it every day, a chair may affect not just physical comfort, but also productivity and long-term health.

11) COMMUNICATE WELL WITH ALL YOUR STAFF BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE REFURBISHMENT.
Proper instruction and employee role designation may prove vital in assuring that work areas and departments are prepared for refurbishment. Ask your design partner to present the finished scheme to your staff and answer any queries or concerns they may have.

Ensuring that your move managers take an active role in this communication process usually provides that employees treat the process with greater vigilance. They will be made to realise they have a key role to play in the office refurbishment and that their cooperation is essential to meeting tight time schedules.

If a move into a temporary office is needed during the project, responsibility usually begins with each employee packing and marking items in his or her own work area and if handled efficiently and professionally, invariably encourages ‘buy-in’ and so ends with them taking the opportunity to create a neater, more efficient and motivating environment.

12) CARRY OUT A DETAILED STORAGE AUDIT.
You don’t need a refurbishment guide to tell you that the way you file, store, and archive and generally hoard information and data may present opportunities for greater operational administrative efficiency and a more streamlined way of providing staff access to material they need to meet their workplace objectives.

Your design partner will be able to work with you to audit your storage requirements, and produce the optimum solution, which will then be factored into the space planning process.

Another factor to take into account is whether any of the material you currently store in the office could be stored off-site for even greater and effective utilisation of your space.

13) PLAN TO MINIMISE DISRUPTION.
The refurbishment of your offices should demand a very high level of consistent focus across a number of key areas – each of which must be considered as both an individual micro-project as well as a piece within the overall jigsaw.

Among the issues you should address are whether to move out of the premises during the project or
create ‘swing space’, which should enable you to adopt a ‘business as usual’ policy while the work is carried out around you and your teams.

Many of the more experienced refurbishment companies pride themselves on minimising disruption by including logistics experts within their team of specialists to plan every stage with continuity, harmony and respect for your people and their working practices.

The disability discrimination act 2005 (dda) places new duties on landlords and property managers, as well as employers of disabled people. As an employer, you have a duty of care regarding the way in which you provide services to disabled people.

Anyone who employs somebody with a disability has a legal duty under the dda. In essence, it is unlawful to place somebody with a disability at a substantial disadvantage compared with other employees. You must not discriminate either through the way your offices are designed or in terms of the processes that operate within. If reasonable adjustments have not been made to ensure the working environment is suitable for any employees with disabilities, you could face a prosecution.

DELIVER

15) ONCE WORK BEGINS, ALWAYS ATTEND REGULAR PROJECT MEETINGS.
It is not enough to be interested in the progress of the project – you should be seen to be interested and this means treating meetings and site visits as a fundamental part of your daily life.

As well as the support you should give to the project team, there will be key decisions to make in relation to finishes, changes to the programme and many other mission-critical issues.

16) UNDERSTAND FULLY YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES.
Although your refurbishment partner should be experienced in ensuring that all legally binding health and safety requirements are met, it is worth bearing in mind that during the refurbishment project you are also governed by a number of responsibilities.

It’s wise to make sure you know who shoulders the ultimate responsibility for the health and safety of the refurbishment partner’s team of contractors, sub-contractors and site personnel.

Always work with a reputable fit-out partner that is safecontractor, chas and constructionline approved. This gives a clear indication that you can trust the organisation.

17) THOROUGHLY ORGANISE THE PHYSICAL MOVE INTO THE REFURBISHED SPACE.
You can expect the re-occupation of refurbished premises to be demanding, and to make light of what can be a logistics nightmare, you would be well advised to rely on the support of one of the new breed of dedicated move management consultancies.
You should also be advised to take into account the fact that major changes to office layout could exert a strain on your staff and without careful consideration may easily give rise to wasteful de-motivating and even destructive environments and atmospheres.

Even the smallest of gestures here may reap huge benefits. A post-project pack, for example, could significantly improve morale by addressing many of the issues that your staff may face, including new systems in the office, security and storage. It may also help to define new office protocols connected with open-plan offices, diary systems and the booking of space and rooms.

18) **TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO REDUCE THE AMOUNT OF FILES, UNWANTED EQUIPMENT AND CLUTTER.**

Managing your archive documents could be a headache and an ill-affordable burden. As you are in the process of seeking ways to optimise the way you occupy your new-look premises, it may make great financial sense to off-load your documents to storage experts.

19) **INSIST ON HAVING IT RIGHT FIRST TIME.**

Many of the best designers and refurbishment companies owe their success to their focus on getting every element of every project right first time. You may want to consider retaining the services of your interior design partner to help you monitor the design during the fit-out stage, thus ensuring that the design is followed accurately and that any issues can be addressed as they arise.

Snagging and other such convenient escape routes no longer need to be tolerated, and you can now expect to have your project handed over only when every element of it has been scrutinised. Although last minute adjustments are inevitable, they should not result in less than perfection, and you should resist the urge to take delivery of your smart new working environment until it has been agreed that every deadline and agreed objective has been met.

That means setting aside time to talk through the project plan, review the budget, inspect every nook and cranny, be certain that the compliance manuals are in order, ensure that regulations have been met, and generally satisfy yourself that the project meets – or better still, exceeds your expectations.

20) **ENSURE THE OCCUPATION IS A SMOOTH TRANSITION.**

The weekend of the re-occupation is probably the most stressful part of the entire refurbishment process.

Whilst your move management consultant will bear the burden of the physical move, there are also a myriad of tasks and contingencies for you to plan for. Lining up key people well in advance is the secret to success.

Check with your landlord that you can gain early and late access to the building over the move weekend.

Ask your fit-out partner to be on site and have the electrical contractor on stand-by for emergencies. Insist that not only the common parts of your building are protected, but also the walkways, as this is the time when damage is most likely to occur. Schedule time for training staff on new telephone
systems, evacuation and emergency procedures. Your health and safety plan and staff handbook will need updating and distributed to staff together with their security passes.

21) CARRY OUT A POST-REFURBISHMENT REVIEW.
Now that the dust has settled and all thoughts of contractors, noise and dust are long gone, it’s inevitable that someone will want to make changes!

There may be a number of items that were considered in the refurbishment that for whatever reason were put off until a later date. You may find that certain aspects of the design need tweaking, or that departments need to be juggled about to accommodate new staff.

Consider setting up a meeting with your in-house project team and your designer and fit-out partner to carry out a post-completion assessment. This is best carried out a month or two after occupation. Feedback from staff is also fundamental to ensure that the return on the investment in your office in maximised. Make sure that you not only assess the finished product but also the journey that got you there. It is important to give feedback to your refurbishment partners, as it is likely that your relationship will continue long afterward with further changes and alterations.