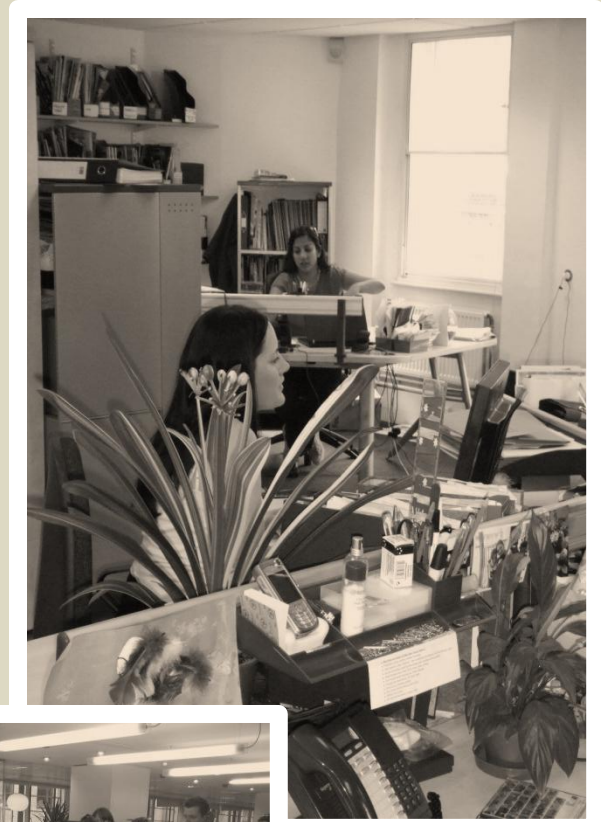


# The World's largest, independent Public Relations firm that, in London, looked

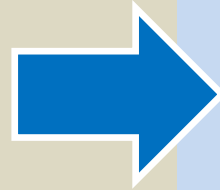
- fragmented
- tired
- second-rate



**Three** companies

**Three** cultures

**Three** 'designs'



**ONE**  
ambition

↙ **Edelman** ↘ *spook*media ↙ **JCPR**

# The Brief:

# “F\*@k Me”



# Create a space for the Conversation Age

## FINANCIAL TIMES

Friday November 7 2008 | £1.50

### No space wasted in the Velcro workplace of the future

Clever office design can give staff and clients a flexible and interactive environment – not to mention a cocktail bar, says Alison Maitland

The first thing that strikes the visitor to the new London office of Edelman, an international public relations firm, is the absence of a reception desk. A solid table with chairs occupies the space ahead, a flower arrangement in the middle and a large light overhead. Even more strangely, the light is decorated with small paper drawings of Japanese erotica.

Hardly visible behind large pillars are two receptionists described as concierges – who emerge to take coats, direct people to meetings or charge up their mobile communication devices. Next to the entrance area is a bar café and a library with magazines and a vast collection of Penguin books.

Is this a glimpse of the office of the future? If so, privacy-loving chief executives are in for a shock. From the entrance area, you can see Robert Phillips, Edelman's UK chief executive, in his office, which converts into a meeting room for all comers when he is not using it.

Visitors are positively encouraged to view the 280 employees at work, whether at their bench

desks – with their personal space demarcated by brightly coloured screens – or in meeting rooms at one end of the 37,000 sq ft space in Victoria Street.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is the cocktail bar, through which clients have to pass to reach the conference rooms where presentations are made. And here's something else new: an employer encouraging drinking at work. The bar opens for cocktails at 5pm.

Now out of his office, Mr Phillips sits himself sideways in an armchair, his legs over one of the arms. "People start in a much more relaxed way in the bar and then go into a presentation and you've broken down the barriers," he says.

Breaking down barriers between staff, too, was a primary aim when Edelman HQ combined with two subsidiary agencies in the new office in June.

Mr Phillips says the results are already showing through. "Our win rate on cross-practice pitches has gone up by 36.40 per cent in four months because people haven't sat in silos," he says. Edelman completed the move

to its new office before the global financial crisis took hold, but measuring the cost-effectiveness of new office design will be increasingly important as companies grapple with the economic downturn.

Each part of Edelman's office, which was created by Gensler, the international architecture and interior design firm, is multifunctional. This accords with Gensler's model of four 21st-century work modes. Only one of these – head-down, focused work – is solitary. The others – collaborating on tasks, learning skills, and socialising for work purposes – involve interaction.

Gensler suggests that design-

ing offices for the four work modes can boost productivity by more than 20 per cent and says what is needed is a "Velcro environment" with built-in flexibility and adaptability. Raised flooring, for example, allows wiring underneath to be easily reconfigured, partitions can be moved to convert open-plan to cellular offices and back again, and bench desks can be constructed so that space for extra people is quickly added or removed.

For most offices there is evidently some way to go. Two-thirds of UK office workers are unhappy with their workspace, and companies are using just 55 per cent of their space on

average, a Gensler survey shows. People tend to think they spend 70 per cent of their time in the office, but time-use studies show it is closer to 30 per cent, says Gary Wheeler, Gensler's European director of workspace. "More and more, offices of the future will be about knowledge sharing and we'll do the rest of our jobs somewhere else – whenever we need to be to get the information."

As the survey underlines, however, many organisations struggle to adapt – or resist adapting altogether. Management teams say they want people to collaborate in the office, but then keep them in cubicles. Water coolers stand in unwelcoming cubby holes and coffee comes from push-button machines with no place to sit and chat, so people quickly head back to their desks and bury themselves behind their computer screens.

On the other hand, wholesale change can be alienating if it is introduced too hastily, as victims of over-enthusiastic hot-desking regimes know. Julia Pollitt, UK managing director of Ahrend, the Netherlands-based office

furnisher, says the new force of 100 employees at the same location every day, that's part of human nature. Successful companies abandoned blanket how-to focus on the needs of individual departments, he says. Finance and legal teams often need fixed workstations and privacy for handling confidential matters. Sales people and project teams are more flexible. Just needing comfortable spaces in which to work.

In Edelman's new office design, is a sign of the future, he says. "I think everything is one giant water cooler."

#### MORE ON FT.COM

This article is part of an online special report exploring The New World of Work. For more, visit [www.ft.com/network](http://www.ft.com/network)



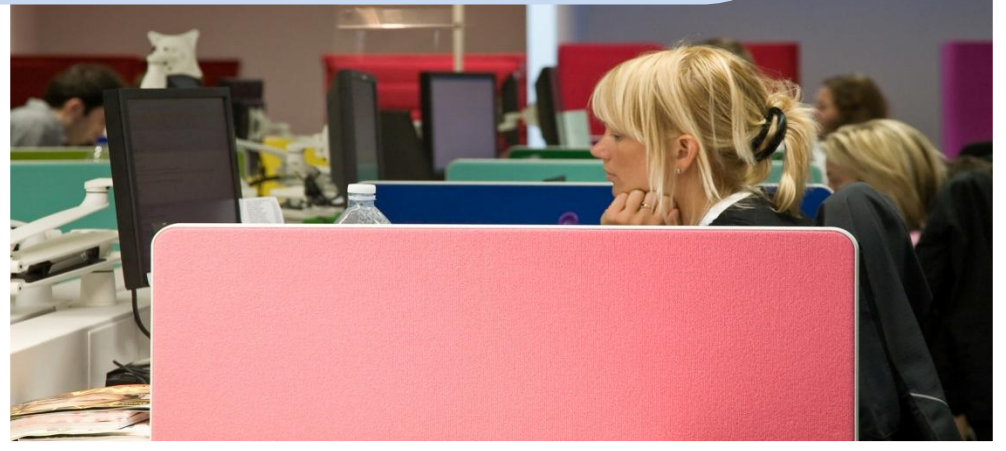
Ym in the office: Edelman's cocktail bar opens at 5pm

# “One giant water-cooler”

The FT  
November 7 2008

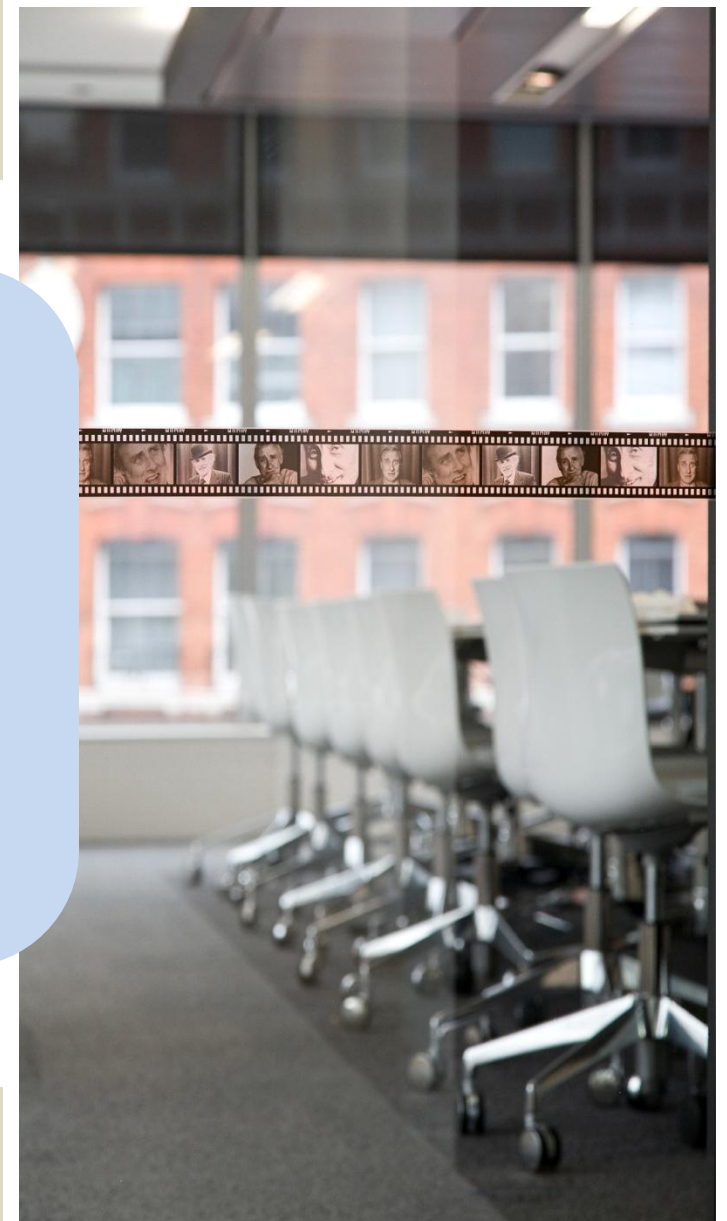
# Early Findings

- Staff Churn tracking at approx. 20% down YoY
- Sickness/ Absence down by approx. 25%
- Cross Practice Pitch wins up by approx 30%
- A constant stream of praise
  - Clients, media, colleagues, prospective hires



# Early Learnings

- Personal Involvement/ Staff Involvement
- Refuse to accept Convention (we could have pushed further)
- Invest in Design
- Not just an Office

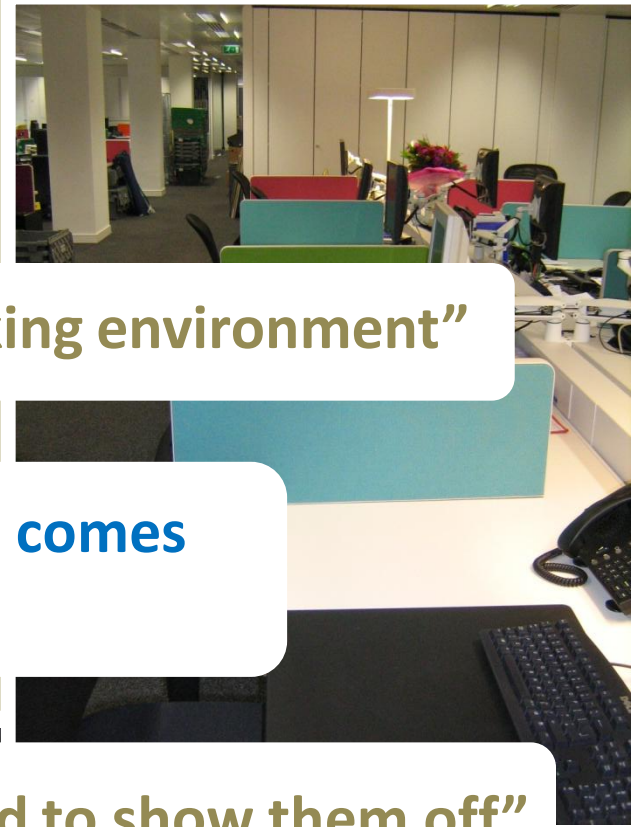


# Biggest Learning of All

**Get Budgets signed off  
before the Credit  
Crunch!**



# Verbatim Feedback



**“a beautiful working environment”**

**“a drink in the bar really helps when it comes to cross departmental co-operation”**

**“proud to show them off”**

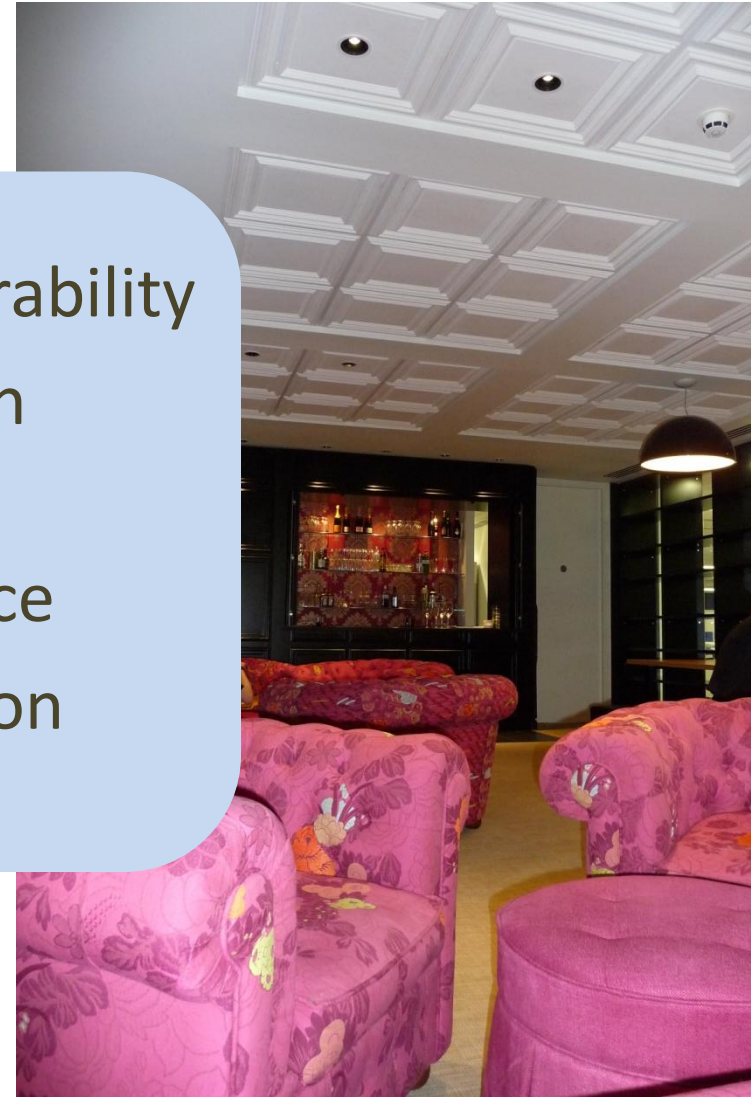
**“seamless integration”**

**“being in an office that is modern open and edgy really helps me approach my work in the same way”**



# Recession Proof?

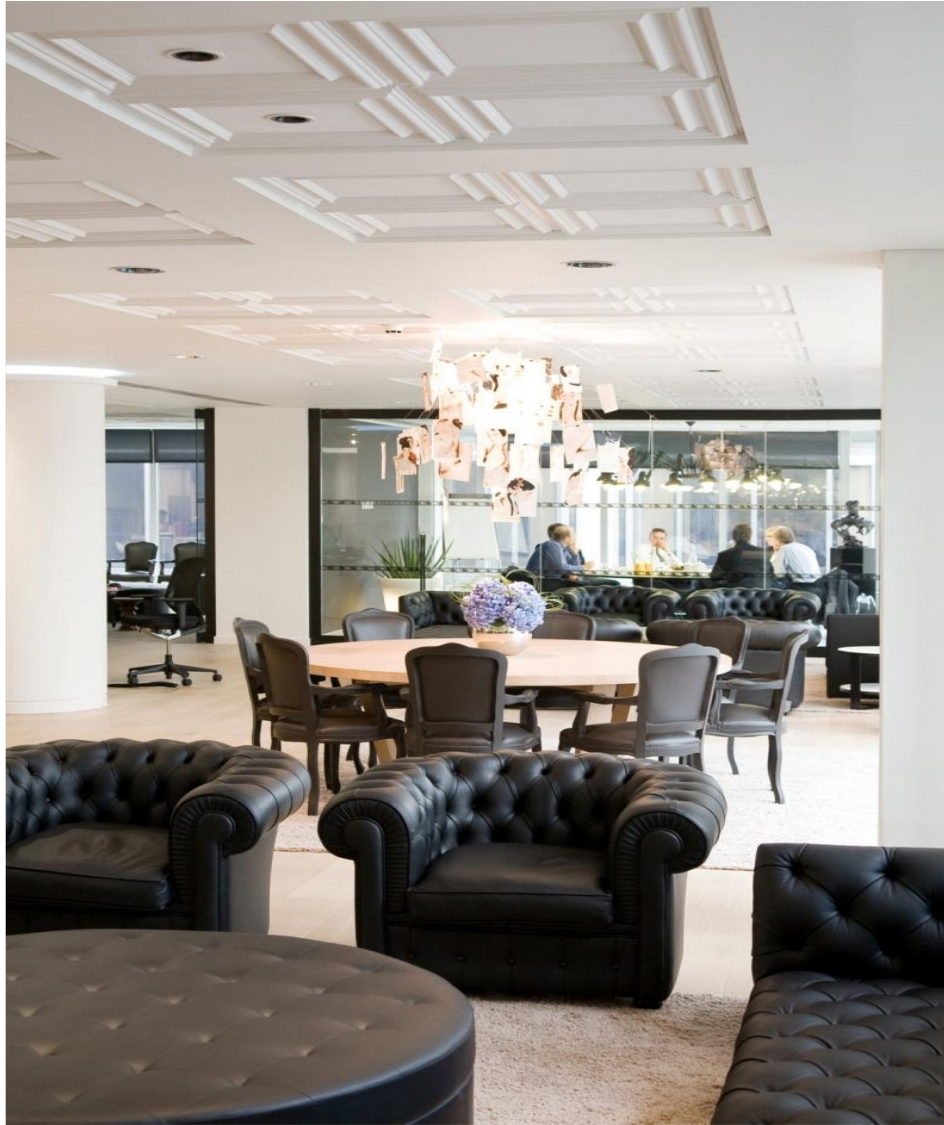
- Greater protection/ less vulnerability
- Reduction in Cost Base through environment
- Improved Business Performance
- Client Retention/ Staff Retention





# “Everyone needs a bit more sex”

Senior Partner  
Major Global Law Firm



**Brains as  
well as  
Beauty**