

PA ENTERPRISE

DeskDemon's Magazine for Executive PAs, Office Managers and Secretaries

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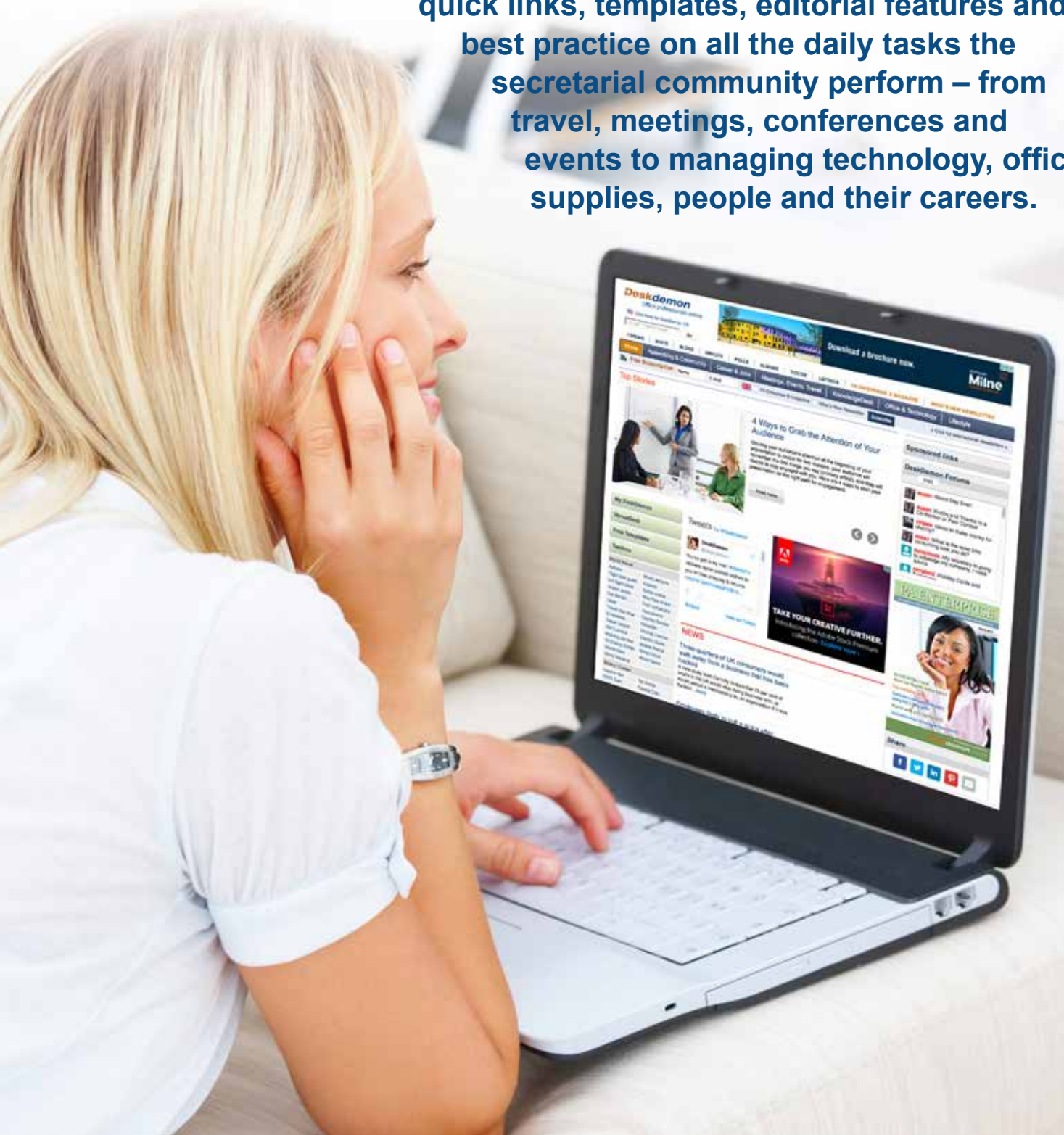
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Four-day working week trials



The UK has begun the world's biggest trial of the four-day work week. Is the four day work week a good idea, or is it unworkable for many industries – and even many people? The UK may soon find out, as it's just started what's being heralded as the biggest ever experiment based on this working model.

Four day working week: the results so far

More than 3,300 employees at 70 UK companies have begun working a four day working week with no reduction in pay. The pilot project will run for six months and is based on the 100-80-100 model: 100% pay for 80% of the time in exchange for a commitment to maintain 100% productivity.

“As we emerge from the pandemic, more

and more companies are recognizing that the new frontier for competition is quality of life,” nonprofit group 4 Day Week Global’s CEO Joe O’Connor told the Guardian newspaper. “Reduced-hour, output-focused working is the vehicle to give them a competitive edge.”

Even before the pandemic, a 2019 poll of 36,000 Americans carried out by YouGov America found that two-thirds would prefer a four day work

week – regardless of whether that meant longer working hours on those days.

In the UK trial, researchers will measure the impact of the four day work week on productivity in each business, as well as the well-being of workers. They will also record the impact on the environment and gender equality.

Pros and cons of a four day working week

More than 80% of people in the UK would prefer a four day working week, according to a survey in 2021 by recruitment company Reed. It lists the advantages of the four-day model as:

Improved morale and fewer absences:

A shorter working week leads to less burnout, making staff happier and more focused in their roles.

Helps recruitment: Offering potential and existing employees a flexible working pattern will help attract and retain talented professionals. However, there are also some potential disadvantages of the four day work week, the recruitment agency says:

It doesn't suit all industries: Some sectors require a seven-day-a-week presence, which could make a short working week impractical. Examples include emergency services, public transport networks and logistics.

It doesn't suit all workers: Some employees prefer the structure of a five-day week, and some like working overtime.

It can increase costs: Some sectors, such as healthcare, require staff to work long shifts. Companies in these areas may have to pay more overtime or draft staff in to make any shortfalls.

The four day working week is nothing new

The idea of a shorter working week is not a new one. The five-day week is often credited to Henry Ford, who in 1914 proposed that his car production switch from a six-day to a five-day rota. The creation of unions in the 20th century helped to make a five-day week and two days' rest the norm.

Four day working weeks became three times more common in the United States between 1973 and 2018, with an additional 8 million employees working such a pattern, according to research by the IZA Institute of Labor Economics. The rise wasn't due to changes in demographics or industrial structures, but more a result of workers' and employers' preferences, the study notes.

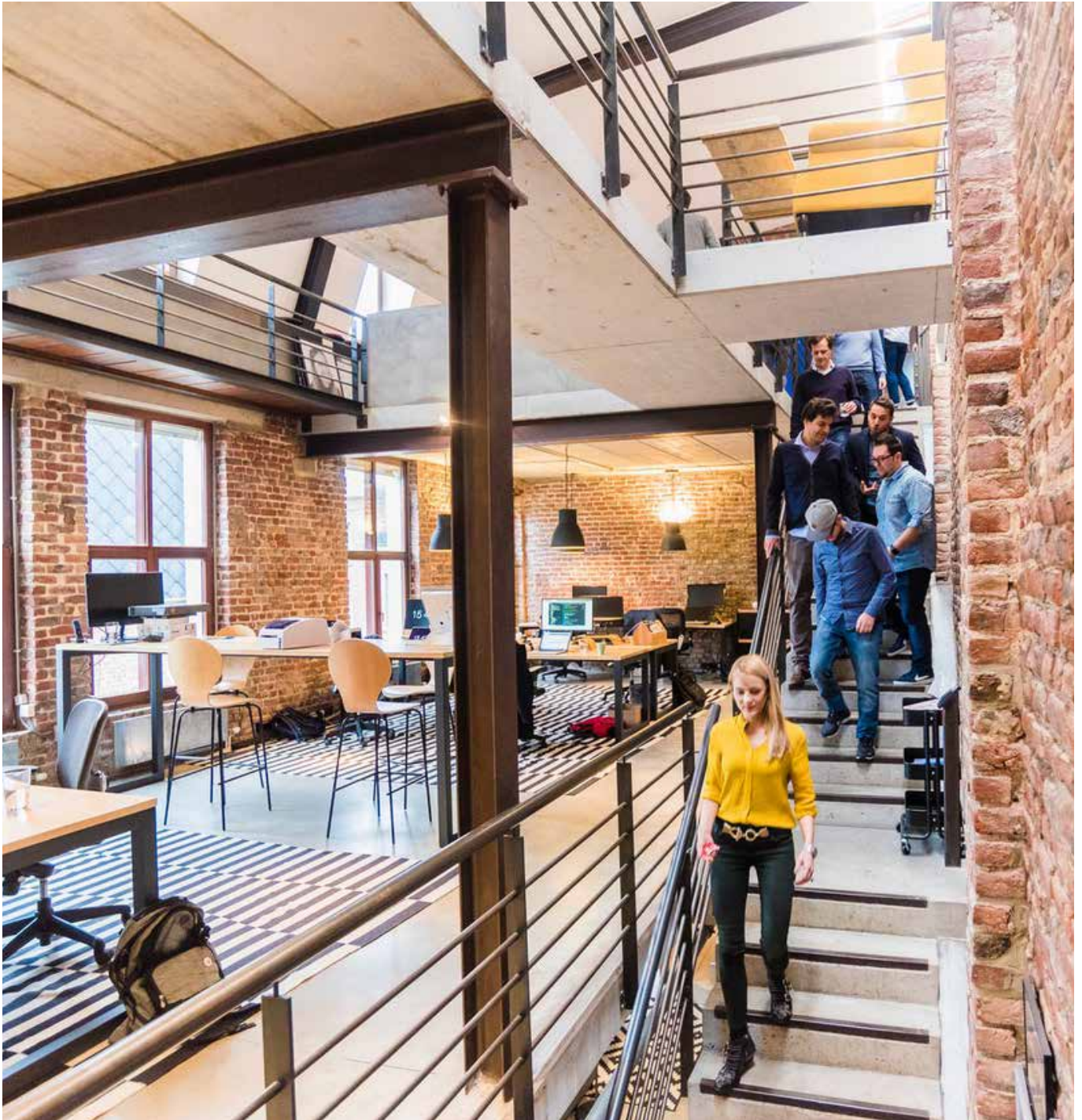
Four day working week experiments in other parts of the world

Belgium: Belgian employees recently won the right to work a full week in four days without loss of salary. People will be able to decide whether to work four or five days a week.

Iceland: The country ran a four day working week trial between 2015 and 2019 and found that the well-being of 2,500 workers who took part increased in terms of health and work-life balance.

New Zealand: All 81 employees at the New Zealand office of consumer goods giant Unilever are taking part in a year-long trial of a four day work week at full pay. If the experiment is a success, the company will consider extending it to other countries.

Hot desking 101: a complete guide



What is hot desking?

Hot desking is a workplace system where employees use available desks at different times on a first-come, first-served basis. Companies generally turn to hot desking to maximize space utilization, improve desk efficiency, and reduce real estate costs.

Why do we call it hot desking?

You might still be wondering: Why do we call it hot desking? The term is said to have derived from the term “hot racking”—the practice of sailors with different shifts sharing the same bunk at different times.

What are the benefits of hot desking?

Hot desking provides benefits to both team members and employers. However, benefits change depending on how organizations offer hot desks:

- Improved space utilization. Hot desking maximizes office space by reducing assigned desks from the floor plan.
- Cost savings. Reducing real estate costs is a primary advantage. With hot desks in place, companies can maximize the use of existing office space, limit the number of assigned desks from the floor plan, and reduce their real estate portfolio—or avoid expanding before they need to.
- Better employee relationships. Hot desking gives team members the chance to work alongside colleagues they may not see otherwise. This can help strengthen existing relationships, forge new connections, promote teamwork, and improve cross-departmental rapport.
- Improved collaboration. Hot desks can

improve efficiency and collaboration in the workplace. If there are five departments working on a project, having a flexible work environment with a hot desking model can allow projects to be ramped up and down quickly as needs change, without the need to add more real estate.

- Efficiency. Employees don't need to book hot desks in advance, which makes it easier for employees to simply sit down, plug in, and get to work.
- Hybrid work flexibility. Hot desking makes hybrid and flexible working easier. By providing unassigned flexible seating on a first-come, first-served basis, employees can show up and get to work without the hassle of booking desks in advance or adhering to set usage schedules.
- Employee satisfaction. Empowerment in the workplace can have a huge impact on employee satisfaction. Hot desking allows employees to choose where they sit, providing more employee choice and autonomy.
- Workplace cleanliness. Hot desking helps employees focus on work, without the distraction of a cluttered office desk. It also demands employees leave desks clean, as they may not return to the same desk.

How can employers improve hot desking?

- Although hot desking has many perks, it also has a few downsides. For example, without the right tools in place, it can be a hassle to find a hot desk for the day. And as a result, employees aren't always enamored with the thought of changing desks each time they come to work. And teams don't always get

the chance to connect like they would in a traditional office with permanent desks and private offices on the floor plan.

- Here's how to resolve the most common hot desking issues that arise in the workplace.
- Give employees hot desking tools that make sharing desks easier. Leveraging workplace software that makes hot desking quicker and more efficient for employees. A workplace mobile app and real-time office maps can go a long way to removing friction from the hot-desking experience.
- Manage hot desks with desk booking software. Desk booking software that provides additional insight into how, when, and by whom desks and spaces are being used can help your workplace team track the success of your hot desking strategy in real time and improve the desk booking experience for everyone.
- Make sure teams stick together. Post pandemic, it's common for teams to split their time between remote work and in-office collaboration. To promote better team cohesion and prevent a feeling of isolation from creeping into the workplace experience, hold regular video conference meetings so that teams can interact with one another—even if they're not physically in the same place. For socialization and teamwork, regular team outings or get-togethers can also be effective in bringing new employees, long-time office workers, and remote work team members together.

Is hot desking effective?

Hot desking can be an effective workplace strategy when it is deployed in the right

office environment, especially when it is used to support a flexible working strategy, collaborative workspace, or hybrid workplace model.

Here are the working environments that typically benefit most:

- Office neighborhoods. Office neighborhoods are groups of desks on a company floor plan that are dedicated to specific functions or departments. Hot desks can be used within each office neighborhood to support individual employee seating needs. Check out some office neighborhood examples if you're new to this work setup.
- Activity-based workspaces. An activity-based workspace (ABW) is a dedicated group of seats or zone that is set up to support any type of collaboration in the workplace. Typically focused on a specific activity or type of work—quiet work, group work, desks to support team-specific tasks, and more—most activity-based workspace designs can benefit from the flexibility that hot desks provide.
- Agile workspaces. An agile workplace gives near-unlimited autonomy to employees. For example, workers are given a task, but they get to choose when, where, and even how to complete it. Agile working often relies directly on hot desks to deliver an extreme level of seating flexibility to employees.

How to measure the success of hot desking

Integrating hot desking isn't a one-and-done experience. Tracking desk usage and ensuring that available hot desks reflect the needs of your team takes time.



Teams should keep a close eye on the following metrics to measure the success of hot desking in their organization.

Workplace analytics

Workplace analytics can help companies analyze office desk utilization, facility planning, and other areas that impact the success of an organization. This provides a high-level view of exactly what a company needs to gain insights leading to intelligent decisions that affect the workplace. For example, monitoring hot desk usage will help workplace teams spot usage trends, understand the seating needs of employees, and provide a better seating setup on the floor plan.

Space utilization

This metric shows how space is divided up and used by employees over time. For example, tracking space utilization can help companies understand where people gather, identify wasted space, improve office design, and optimize which types of desks are made available on the floor plan.

Occupancy rate

Tracking and improving occupancy rate is one of the simplest ways companies can create a more efficient office space. And it's also the best way to ensure that they have the right ratio of hot desks to support the needs of in-office employees.

Are workers resisting the shift to hot desking?



Workers place personal items, like photographs, on their desks in order to resist a change to a flexiwork style of working, according to new research from emlyon business school.

The research found that employees believed this is the most effective approach to show their dissatisfaction and halt the change to a new way of working, utilising their personal items as an overt way to resist the shift to flexiwork.

These are the findings of research by David Courpasson, Professor of Sociology at emlyon business school, alongside colleagues from Universite catholique de Louvain.

The researchers wanted to understand how employees react to changes in their work environment, especially in the context of flexiwork and the space used for working.

To do so, the researchers conducted a study of a large Belgian organisation, which was shifting from a standard office environment to a flexiwork system, where employees worked both from home and in a shared office.

The researchers collected data from interviews with employees and photographs of their workspaces which they submitted.

The researchers found that employees used various tactics to resist a change to the shared office system, such as leaving personal objects like pictures on desks, leaving material and work equipment lying on desks or even leaving their desks dirty or untidy in order to keep the same desk as their own.

Professor Courpasson says, “These workplaces, alongside working from home, offer employees flexibility, freedom and autonomy, whilst also supposedly reducing existing hierarchical gaps between

management and workers.

However, employees believe it rather dispossesses them of a personal space, which many believe makes the workplace identity-less and “de-humanized”. Therefore, our research clearly shows employees utilise tactics to change this, with the main effective way being place personal items on supposedly shared workplaces. This permits to identify the key role objects play in the resistance to workspace changes in organizations”

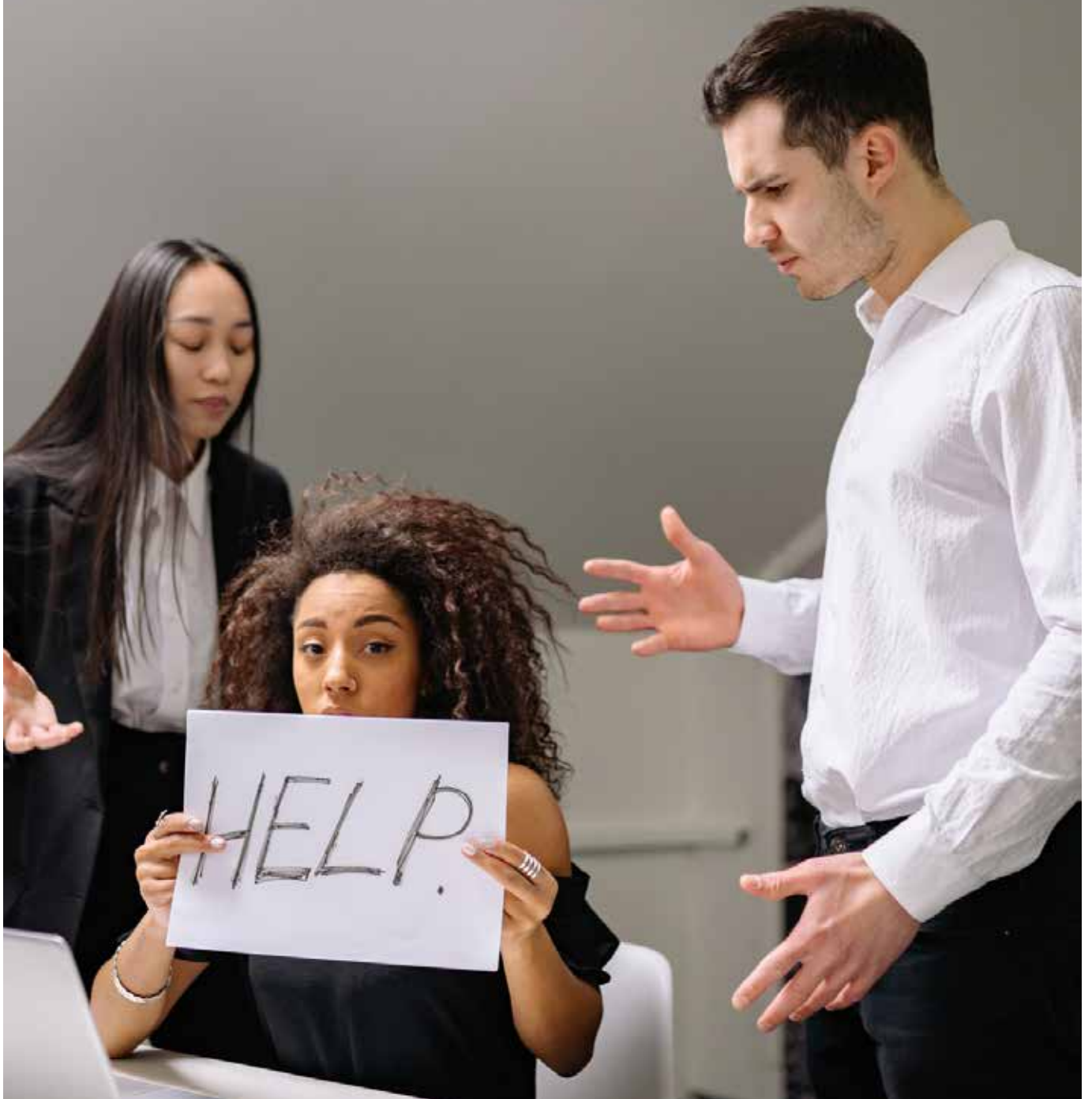
This study provides into the impact of a shift to a shared office, where desks must be left empty, clean and tidy at the end of the day, in order for anyone to sit anywhere each day that they work in the office, and whether or not employees adhere and accepted this.

The research shows though there is a shift to this work method, workers simply used their own methods to resist the change, and used personal objects to ensure they effectively still had their own specific workplaces despite it being a shared office.

As many companies have looked to employ flexiwork and shared office strategies since the beginning of the covid pandemic, this research showcases how employees are likely to react to the shift to a hotdesk workplace. This suggests that organisational management should see spatial changes as more complicated than mere geographical transitions. For instance, accepting that specific occupations may require a specific use of space, instead of considering flexiwork as “good in itself”.

Bullying:

why most people do nothing when they witness it – and how to take action



Imagine that you are at work, and you witness a colleague repeatedly bullying another colleague. What would you do? While many of us like to think that we would interfere to stop it, surveys show that most employees who witness bullying situations, known as bystanders, do not respond in ways that would help the victim.

Imagine that you are at work, and you witness a colleague repeatedly bullying another colleague. What would you do? While many of us like to think that we would interfere to stop it, surveys show that most employees who witness bullying situations, known as bystanders, do not respond in ways that would help the victim.

Instead, up to 60% of employees in some places report doing nothing when witnessing bullying. But why is this the case and what consequences does it have? Our recent research gives important clues.

Workplace bullying occurs when an employee is subjected to repeated behaviours that harass, exclude, or negatively affect someone's work. This may range from obvious acts of physical violence to more ambiguous behaviour, such as mocking, insulting or socially excluding someone.

Bullying can seriously affect victims' mental and physical health, with extreme cases leading to self-harm or suicide. On average, workplace bullying affects around 15% of people, though some sectors, such as healthcare and higher education, report higher rates.

The impact of doing nothing

Workplace bullying has traditionally been seen as an issue just between the victim and bully – and dealt with accordingly. But bullying often occurs in front of others. Surveys show up to 83% of employees in some organisations report witnessing bullying at work.

This is troubling. Witnessing bullying may harm bystanders' own wellbeing, stimulating fear of how they might be treated in the future.

But how bystanders respond can either help or worsen the situation for victims. In our recent study, we asked employees at a large university to answer questions about their experiences of bullying, as a victim or a bystander.

We showed bullying victims suffered less damage when they had helpful bystanders who actively intervened. Conversely, victims in groups with bystanders who did nothing experienced greater detriments.

We suggest that this is because victims in these situations must not only deal with bullying, but also understanding why others did not respond, which is more added stress. It seems to us bystanders are key in helping create an anti-bullying workplace culture.

Researchers have proposed that bystander responses to workplace bullying can be categorised in two ways: active versus passive, and constructive versus destructive. The former describes how proactive the response is in addressing the bullying situation, while the latter shows whether the response is intended to improve or worsen the situation for targets.

This gives four types of bystanders. There are active-constructive bystanders, who proactively and directly seek to improve the bullying situation by, for example, reporting the bully or confronting them. There are also passive-constructive bystanders who don't directly "solve" the bullying, but listen to or sympathise with the target.

Passive-destructive bystanders, on the other hand, typically avoid the bullying and "do nothing". While this may sound benign to some, targets may view passivity as condoning the bully's actions. Finally, active destructive-bystanders actively worsen the bullying situation, for example, by openly siding with the bully or setting up situations where the bully can pick on people. They effectively become secondary bullies.

The psychology behind bystanding

Why do so many people fail to intervene when witnessing something they know is wrong or harmful? The most famous theory to explain the phenomenon, known as the bystander effect, was inspired by the murder of Kitty Genovese. Kitty was a young woman in 1960s New York who was stabbed to death outside her apartment building while 38 residents watched from their windows. Initially, it was reported that not a single person intervened or

called the police, showing passive-destructive responses – though this story and the theory itself have been challenged.

That said, the effect seems to hold in more ambiguous situations, such as bullying, that don't amount to a medical emergency. The bystander effect explains their actions by proposing that individuals are less likely to help when there are other people present. This makes us feel less personally responsible to act, especially in ambiguous situations.

In another recent paper, we tried to delve deeper into the psychological processes underlying bystander behaviour. Bullying is often subjective, with people interpreting the same situation differently. So, we were interested in understanding what interpretations lead to active-constructive responses, which are the most helpful.

For active-constructive responses to occur, employees must perceive that the incident is severe enough to warrant intervention. This can be ambiguous – is that offhand remark just a joke or something more?

Next, employees must perceive that the victim does not deserve what is happening to them. Work relationships are complex and in certain cases, such as when group performance is key, employees may not approve of others making mistakes or inconveniencing them and may perceive mistreatment as justified.

Finally, employees must perceive that they are able to intervene effectively. There are many cases where employees wish to act but don't feel able to, such as if the bully is a supervisor, or if previous attempts to intervene have failed.





Taking action

While there is no one-size-fits-all solution to encourage bystander intervention, there are things you can try to help you better understand a target’s situation and, hopefully, become an active constructive bystander. Research suggests that perspective taking, or trying to see things through another point of view, can be beneficial.

Experiments have shown that participants who are asked to take a perpetrator’s perspective are less likely to agree that misconduct has taken place than participants who are asked to take the victim’s perspective.

Organisations have a key part to play in stopping bullying and, ideally, should have anti-bullying policies that are easily accessible by employees. These policies should clearly define what bullying is and have transparent,

confidential processes for reporting incidents that are either directly experienced or witnessed.

Policies and anti-bullying initiatives should have buy-in from senior management. This would ultimately help employees feel safe in speaking out.

Importantly, organisations should try to find the root causes of bullying and if there is anything they can change to reduce it. For example, high workload and poor communication may contribute to a bullying culture.

Organisations whose members can reflect on problem areas can then take appropriate actions to tackle them. Not only could this reduce bullying, but it can also improve overall workplace wellbeing.

theconversation.com

Ten foods to add to your diet this summer



New research from Benenden Health has found that almost half of adults in the UK believe that they have an unhealthy relationship with food, with the youngest generations telling us that they are most unhappy with their eating habits.

Whether you are trying to improve your

physical health or just change your eating habits, the best way to approach your diet is to ensure you are getting a good balance of food groups, vitamins and minerals and to aim for a rainbow of colours on your plate.

The challenge and burden of constantly assessing our eating habits can have a



significant impact on our mental wellbeing, with the pressure of following diets and calorie counting often making us feel worse. By removing these targets and looking at making some simple lifestyle changes we can all live a healthy life and promote positive wellbeing.

To help us do this, here are ten foods that are great for our physical and mental health and well worth adding to our diets in 2022!

1. Yoghurt

Live yoghurt has an excellent source of so-called friendly bacteria, also known as probiotics. Probiotics can help to strengthen the digestive tract, which is perfect for the gut and help to support our immune system. Along with this, new research has found that there may be an emerging link between lactobacillus and reduced levels of depression.

Yoghurt can be enjoyed in many ways, including as a yoghurt drink or mixed in with fruit, nuts or grains; however, when buying yoghurt, consider the sugar content as some yoghurts can contain significantly more than others.

2. Aubergines

Aubergines are a tasty vegetable which

can easily be added to a lot of our favourite dishes. The vegetable has an antioxidant that may help to lower “bad” cholesterol. Along with this, it is a great source of fibre and has various important nutrients which can support the immune system and brain function.

3. Almonds

Almonds have a multitude of health benefits and are a protein rich, tasty snack that is great for curbing the appetite! Research has shown that almonds can help to improve our sleep and regulate blood sugar as they contain high amounts of muscle-relaxing magnesium. Magnesium helps the body to switch from its adrenaline cycle to what is known as the ‘rest and digest cycle’.

4. Ginger

Fresh ginger can help produce stomach acid as it stimulates the digestive system to keep food moving through the gut, helping to support digestion. Along with this, studies have recently been looking into how ginger may affect serotonin levels and may help to reduce anxiety.

The best way to incorporate ginger into your diet is by adding it into soups, stews,



smoothies or stir-fries. You can even add grated ginger to boiling water to make a refreshing ginger tea!

5. Cherries

Cherries are not only one of the most delicious fruits for snacking on or drinking, but are also known to improve sleep as they naturally contain melatonin, helping to promote a longer and deeper sleep.

6. Turkey

Turkey is an excellent source of protein and is also great at encouraging sleepiness. This is because turkey is high in tryptophan, an essential amino acid acting as a natural mood regulator. Tryptophan is excellent at calming the body, balancing hormones and fighting anxiety, all of which induce sleep.

7. Yeast extract

Yeast extract can be found in foods like Marmite and Vegemite or from leftover brewer's yeast and is one of the world's richest sources of B vitamins.

A study has shown that yeast extract has the potential to boost brain function as it can increase levels of a neurotransmitter

associated with healthy brain function. The University of York also found that adults who ate a teaspoon of Marmite every day had an increased production of a chemical messenger associated with healthy brain function.

8. Citrus fruits

Citrus fruits and drinks have significant benefits, with one study finding that a higher intake of citrus juice was linked to improvements in cognitive functions in older adults. Another study found that the flavanone-rich citrus juice in quantities commonly consumed can enhance blood flow to the brain in healthy young adults.

9. Oily Fish

Oily fish is full of Omega-3 fatty acids, which show that they may reduce depression. This is down to two such acids, eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA), which are thought to have the biggest potential benefit for people with mood disorders. Oily fish is also fabulous for our cardiovascular system so we get two benefits for the price of one.

10. Porridge

The oats that make porridge contain a unique type of fibre that nourishes and restores healthy gut bacteria as well as reducing your low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol, the "bad" cholesterol.

Oats are a super easy food to add to your morning routine by having a bowl of porridge, which is excellent for your health and keeps you feeling fuller for longer!

Office Lighting ideas to increase productivity



A happy workforce is also a highly productive one. But businesses can only truly get there when leaders tap into all possible avenues to give employee job satisfaction a boost. Aside from offering competitive salaries - and a decent amount of annual leave - there are a few low-hanging opportunities that can help with this too.

One of these is having the correct lighting in the office. This sets the tone for higher productivity levels, while also suggesting that the wellbeing of the team is a priority. If you're looking to upgrade your work environment this year — potentially with one of our flexible office spaces — we've got five transformative office lighting ideas right here to make the final decision a simple one.

CHOOSE THE BEST BULBS FOR THE TEAM

Moving to a new office creates a fresh opportunity to explore different types of lighting for the space. Deciding what to go with should factor in cost, energy consumption and total output to start.

You should also choose a type that benefits the efficiency of the team. The three most commonly found modern office lighting options are incandescent, (compact) fluorescent and light-emitting diode:

Incandescent bulbs

Incandescent bulbs are slightly more old-school and typically a fixture of older buildings. From an output perspective, unlike their counterparts, they reach their maximum output levels very quickly.

They also burn at higher temperatures, have relatively short lifespans and tend to consume more energy. In a sustainability-driven world, this should be factored into your planning. You may want to use these bulbs as decorative or accent lighting, to be used rarely, rather than in the primary fixtures around the office.

In spite of their high energy consumption, incandescent bulbs do get at least one thumbs-up in terms of eco-friendliness. They

are made using a non-hazardous metal, which makes them easy to dispose of when they need to be replaced.

Fluorescent and compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs

Fluorescent bulbs pack a punch and last longer than their incandescent counterparts. Typically sold in tube form, they are easy to install, making them a versatile option to consider. They also burn at cooler temperatures, while still offering a decent lumen output.

That said, because they use mercury, they can be a health hazard in the event of breakage. It also makes them more difficult to dispose of in an environmentally-friendly way.

Compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, therefore, are an energy-efficient “upgrade”. These are sold in more types than just tubes, conveniently slotting into the same traditional fittings as incandescent bulbs.

In a setting with white walls, fluorescent lighting tends to create a slightly clinical atmosphere. Softening the space with greenery, colourful furniture and decorative furnishings to fill the space is essential to reduce glare and subsequent eye strain. Doing so will boost employee productivity and may well lead to fewer complaints to HR, too.

Light-emitting diodes (LED)

The last of the “big three” options to consider in your new office space is light-emitting diodes (LED) bulbs. These dependable, long lifespan, energy-efficient bulbs offer consistent output quality. They also operate at cool temperatures, so are less likely to overheat and shatter.



In spite of their ability for high lumen outputs, thanks to the power of technology, LED bulbs run at low wattage levels. The downside is that they are more expensive than their counterparts, meaning you'll have to invest a little bit upfront in order to place them across the entire office space.

The good news is that you won't have to replace these too often, and they'll reduce the amount of strain on your eyes in the office. As well as this, they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, giving you the freedom to design a practical lighting setup, while sticking to the decor theme.

PICK PLACEMENTS THAT MAXIMISE NATURAL LIGHT

Once you've decided on the best bulb type(s) for the team, it's time to decide where these should be positioned, based on the office layout. Always start with the areas that feature

the most natural sunlight first.

From there, think about the placements that will enhance this natural light. Correct placement primarily involves taking the actual light fixtures into account but also extends to the desks and other furniture in the space too.

Well-positioned light fixtures

An easy tell that lighting has been correctly positioned is that it goes unnoticed by anyone entering the space. The team should feel calm and relaxed when they start their workday, preferably without having to squint or cover their eyes when they move from one room to the next.

Try to localise your light source as much as possible across the entire office. Consider the function of the lighting before you decide on the final position. Talk to us about this when you're first exploring a new office space, as

we can offer a bit of tried-and-tested advice. It can't hurt to get input from the team as well, to understand their needs, too.

Clever furniture placement

If finding a new office space also means bringing in new furniture, you should think about clever furniture placement in order to maximise the natural light in any room. In terms of the actual pieces, choose lighter colours and shiny surfaces to amplify this even more.

Where you put the furniture matters a whole lot, too. Play around with a few options in the various spaces to find what works best for you and your business needs. Where possible, you should angle all workspaces towards sunlight. Set out with the intention to create ambient desk lighting wherever possible, in order to avoid day-to-day disruptions as the sun moves.

CONSIDER THE CORRECT LIGHTING FOR WORK FROM HOME DAYS

Having a maintenance plan in place for checking, dusting and replacing office lights — ideally coordinated by an office manager — encourages a fruitful work environment. Well-kept lighting fixtures are generally less likely to cause work disruptions brought on by problematic bulbs.

If a hybrid work model is a feature of your business, the same level of maintenance consideration should be given to employees working from home every now and then. Making sure that they also have correct, working lighting in place takes the entire team into consideration, rather than just those in the actual office.

Start a conversation with your employees about their lighting needs for the odd day spent working remotely. Find out whether they need an extra desk lamp, replacement bulbs to match the types used in the physical office, or even just advice on maximising their exposure to natural light. The extra consideration will boost job satisfaction levels, which go hand-in-hand with increased productivity.

EXPLORE SMART LIGHTING FOR PERSONALISED SOLUTIONS

Smart technology has already begun transforming homes and office spaces around the world. Investing in smart lighting is a great way to boost productivity levels by catering to the individual needs of members from different teams of departments.

Ever evolving, smart lighting currently introduces the following to the work environment:

- The use of motion sensors to map out employee work patterns, tailoring the lighting based on actual data and real-time schedules
- Automatic dimming of office lights based on the amount of natural sunlight in the room. This helps with reducing eye strain during the course of the workday
- Colour changing bulbs that reduce the likelihood of debilitating headaches and migraines in the team
- Creating a well-lit workplace which encourages high levels of satisfaction, day-to-day comfort and maximum efficiency.

Guide to Smart Casual Dress Code



Selecting an outfit for your first day of work, a networking event or an interview can be a challenge, especially if you're unsure about what is considered acceptable to wear. While it is certainly necessary to follow any existing dress codes for professional events, you should also feel comfortable and confident in your clothes so you can feel the same way during the event.

If you like to combine form and function in your workwear, smart casual dress can be an excellent choice as it combines comfort with a professional, trendy appearance. In the UK, many offices now have a smart casual dress code throughout the week.

What is smart casual?

Smart casual is a professional dress option that incorporates trendy pieces into an outfit to achieve a clean yet comfortable, stylish appearance. Smart casual dress codes allow people to portray a professional image while feeling comfortable in what they wear.

A smart casual wardrobe should include versatile clothes that are comfortable. Ideally, most pieces of clothing can work with one another to form a variety of outfits for your professional life. There is a wide variety of clothing options to choose from for smart casual wear including skirts, dresses, trousers, jumpers, collared shirts, blouses, blazers and jackets, depending on the occasion. In building your looks, pair complementary colours or choose one pop of colour to brighten up a neutral base.

Smart casual wear vs business casual wear

You may hear both 'smart casual' and 'business casual' when talking about proper workplace attire. Both styles give you a professional appearance without having to wear suits or other stereotypically 'professional' clothing. The main difference is that smart casual clothing incorporates more trendy, fashionable pieces including chukkas, patterned sweaters, polos or trainers (in some cases). Dress shoes, high heels, blazers and loafers are better as business casual options.

Types of smart casual outfits

Smart casual dress code spans a spectrum of formality and a variety of events. Below are two broad categories of smart casual outfits to serve as a guideline for specific situations:

Dressed up

In general, you should opt for the most dressed up smart casual wear in more formal situations. These formal situations include office award ceremonies and important presentations. It's better to be overdressed than underdressed, so consider a crisp button-up shirt and blazer paired with chinos and dark boots for more formal situations.

Informal interviews, which often take place at a cafe or over lunch, typically call for a smart casual outfit. When choosing smart casual clothing for an informal interview, err on the side of caution and go for a dressier look. Dressier choices include fine-gauge cardigans, wool overcoats, blouses and button-up shirts. Choose structured handbags and satchels as better smart-casual options over backpacks at an informal interview.

More casual

Many companies have a smart casual dress code in place for their daily work, particularly for jobs that aren't customer-facing, like academia and corporate work. Networking events and company training days often ask attendants to use smart casual clothing. These scenarios are less formal than interviews or meetings with company executives, and you can opt for a more relaxed look to your outfit, incorporating patterned sweaters or polos. Jeans and trainers can also work when you need a less formal look.

Smart casual clothing for men

A few essential pieces serve as the foundation for a men's smart casual wardrobe. These can be mixed and matched to create a number of distinct outfits. The ideal smart casual look includes a balanced combination of complementary formal and informal pieces.

Trousers

When building your smart casual collection, shopping for trousers is a good place to start. If possible, every smart casual professional should invest in a quality pair of non-ripped denim jeans with straight legs and a tailored fit. Dark wash jeans are best for smart casual clothing. Jeans provide a classic look that fits into numerous environments and can be dressed up as needed.

You can also invest in chinos or casual cotton trousers in several different colours, such as navy and tan. Chinos serve as a base for any smart casual outfit and look great in many different settings. If you're going for an interview and the employer requests smart casual clothing, wear chinos over jeans to present a more professional appearance.

Shirts

Examples of smart casual shirts include short- and long-sleeve button-downs, Henleys and classic T-shirts. Because T-shirts can border on merely casual, opt for classic polo T-shirts without graphics or large, complex designs. You can also incorporate jumpers by dressing them up with the right pair of pants and shoes. If you feel comfortable with colours and patterns, you might also invest in statement pieces that can be paired with solid basics.

Jackets and blazers

Jackets are a great option to help mix up your outfits, and they look great in both formal and informal settings. An unstructured, dark blazer can create a smart, professional look without being too dressy. Shop for blazers that you feel comfortable wearing both at the office and out on the town. If possible, get a tailored blazer to keep it trendy and put-together.

Shoes and accessories

Make sure you have a couple of pairs of professional shoes such as Oxfords or loafers for more formal occasions and a pair of clean leather, canvas or suede trainers for casual situations. To complete the look, opt for classic accessories such as a leather belt and a wristwatch. As a general rule, you can keep your look cohesive by matching your belt to your shoes.

Smart casual attire for women

Women have many different options when putting together a smart casual outfit. From skirts to jeans and blouses to button-downs, choose versatile pieces you can pair with several others in your wardrobe. If you're unsure about more trendy styles, opt for basics that make you feel comfortable and confident.

Trousers and skirts

To begin, give yourself a foundation of trousers, chinos or jeans. These pair nicely with a structured jacket or a nice blouse. You can also incorporate skirts into your wardrobe. Opt for longer skirts or those that hit just below the knee, such as pencil skirts. Such skirts come in a variety of different fabrics. Try



experimenting with denim or corduroy to pair with basic tops and jackets. Dark pants and skirts that are solid in colour or have a subtle pattern pair well with a variety of tops.

Tops

Nearly any top works well in a smart casual outfit as long as it is clean, conservative and free of holes or wrinkles. Examples of smart casual tops include sweaters, Henleys, button-downs, blouses and nice T-shirts. Be careful when mixing patterns and make sure that any graphics are appropriate for the office.

Dresses

Dresses are a good option for an easy outfit on days when you don't have much time or simply want to feel professional and comfortable. For a more formal outfit, combine a dress with a pair of low heels and simple jewellery. For less formal environments, you can pair your dress with more stylish jewellery,

a denim jacket and casual footwear, such as flats or open-toe shoes.

Gender-neutral smart casual wear

There are also many gender-neutral options available to any person who wants to look professional and stylish. The most important thing is that your clothes fit well and you feel comfortable wearing them.

Some of the most basic and attractive smart casual outfits can be considered gender-neutral. For example, a pair of grey trousers, a white button-up shirt and a simple black jacket with loafers look great on anyone and can be worn in nearly any professional setting.

With the right mix of casual and formal clothing, you can create the perfect smart casual wardrobe. Prepared with these guidelines, you're sure to look great at the office, in your next interview or at your upcoming networking event.