

Union Investment survey of 3,145 office workers

The sustainable office is emerging as a competitive factor for businesses

- **Well-being is key criterion for office workers**
- **Comfort aspects more important than technical facilities or accessibility**
- **Workers more satisfied with offices in central locations**
- **High employee awareness of sustainability issues**

The sociocultural qualities of office buildings are set to play a growing role in the coming years as companies compete to attract the best staff. A clear trend is emerging, with office workers placing technical facilities and office size behind other criteria when it comes to their ideal working environment. The satisfaction and thus performance of such employees is increasingly dependent on factors that influence the individual's sense of well-being in the workplace. That is the key finding of Union Investment's recent study of office users, for which market research institute Ipsos interviewed 3,145 employees from the German private sector in February. When asked what constitutes the perfect office environment, more than 50% immediately cited well-being and comfort aspects such as "a pleasant indoor environment", "bright rooms with natural light", "windows that open" and "offices with good sound insulation". Accordingly, 80% of those surveyed considered the "overall sense of well-being in an office" to be important or very important for an office environment, followed by

78% for "brightness and natural daylight". In contrast, criteria such as "technical facilities in the workplace" (65%), "accessibility by public transport" (50%), "safe environment" (44%), "office size" (41%), "central location" (21%) and "local leisure facilities" (9%) were less important across all ten sectors polled.

"Demand for buildings that generate a strong sense of well-being is set to receive an additional boost as the job market recovers and competition for highly-qualified staff intensifies," says Dr. Reinhard Kutscher, Chairman of the Management Board of Union Investment Real Estate GmbH. "User expectations are rising, particularly with regard to the quality of the immediate working environment."

Insufficient attention paid to identifying employee requirements

Of the employees surveyed who are very or extremely satisfied with their working environment, 47% are located in the city centre, 38% in less central districts or edge-of-town locations and 31% in industrial or business parks – with significantly higher values for office workers in cellular offices (56%) than for employees in two-person offices (43%), three- to-four-person offices (36%) or open-plan offices (28%). Having said that, 40% would like their employer to invest more in the quality of their office space, and some 46% want their views and wishes to play a greater role in decision-making processes. Another surprising statistic to emerge is that just 28% of the companies covered by the survey systematically record the wishes of their staff with regard to their working environment, with the standard methods used being employee surveys, staff appraisals and company suggestion schemes.

Employees willing to change their behaviour

Many managers and decision makers will be surprised at the level of awareness of office workers with regard to sustainability issues. “There is vast environmental and economic potential for sustainable building use – office workers are far more willing to change their behaviour than many managers think,” says Kutscher. Nearly 50% of those surveyed believe that their behaviour in the office can make an active contribution towards protecting the environment. At the same time, only a quarter of respondents feel they are getting sufficient support in this area from their employer. It therefore comes as no surprise that one in three office employees want more active support from their company on green matters, for a variety of reasons. Around 40% regard sustainability as a key competitive factor for their company. Some 30% think that a greater commitment to environmental issues would boost their employer’s green credentials in the eyes of both customers and staff.

Green codes of conduct still a rarity

Union Investment’s study shows that awareness of sustainability issues is also on the increase in German offices from a purely environmental perspective. For office employees, their employer’s ecological commitment is mainly demonstrated in the form of green IT, recycled paper, and waste separation systems, with the latter already being deployed by one in two companies. In contrast, guidelines for energy saving measures or active environmental protection are only in place at 18% of the companies surveyed,

mainly in large enterprises with over 1,000 employees. A similarly low proportion of firms (18%) have implemented special initiatives to raise awareness of environmental protection among employees.

About the study of office users

For the study, Union Investment commissioned market research institute Ipsos to interview a representative sample of office employees in Germany in February 2011 who work in the private sector and are primarily office-based. A total of 3,145 online interviews were conducted with office users from the following sectors: consulting (289), healthcare (262), IT/telecommunications (208), sales and distribution (469), information/communication (313), finance/insurance (322), utilities (55), transport/logistics (178), manufacturing/production (559), scientific and technical services (302) and other sectors (188).

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