

Open-plan offices don't work and will be replaced by the 'coffice', says BT futurologist

They were supposed to generate a sense of camaraderie, enhance teamwork and encourage an open flow of ideas between colleagues after decades of segregation in booths.

5 But open-plan offices are actually bad for productivity, allowing workers to be interrupted every three minutes by a range of distractions, a futurologist at BT¹ has warned.

Dr Nicole Millard, an expert in data, analytics and emerging technology, said that large offices are inefficient, especially for introverts who work better when they are not disturbed, and predicted they will soon die out.

10 Instead, she has forecasts that employees in the future will become 'shoulder-bag workers' carrying their offices in backpacks and collaborating in small teams in coffee shops - or 'coffices.'

Although many firms believe large, open-plan workspaces help collaboration, in fact, unless staff are in close proximity 'you might as well be in Belgium', said Dr Millard. However, research has shown that put workers too close together and they clam up, as
15 if being stuck in a lift together.

"The trouble with open-plan offices is they are a one-size-fits-all model which actually fits nobody," Dr Millard said at New Scientist Live in London yesterday.

20 "We're interrupted every three minutes. It takes us between eight and 20 minutes to get back into that thought process. Email. We get too much. Meetings, colleagues. It's all distracting.

"Is being switched on making us more productive? The answer is no. The problem of the future is switching off. The big damage is task-switching. You can tell you have been task switching when you switch off your computer at night and find there several unclosed windows or unsent emails still there because you were interrupted."

BT¹: British Telecommunications