The management disconnect
What executives need to know about the modern workplace

Oxford Economics recently surveyed more than 1,200 senior executives and non-executive employees around the world and across industries to better understand the challenges and opportunities of the modern workplace. The results show that workers and their managers see things very differently—a divide that threatens employee productivity and engagement along with overall happiness and health.

Q: What are the most notable gaps in perception among executives and employees?

The shift to open-plan layouts exposes workers to more noise and distractions than ever before, but most managers fail to understand the detrimental effects on employees. More than half of employees say ambient noise affects their productivity and satisfaction at work, and 40% are distracted enough to take steps to drown out the noise around them. The ability to focus is the top priority for employees when it comes to their work space, but executives say mitigating distractions was at the bottom of priority list when the office was designed.

Q: What is the impact of this perception gap?

Not only do executives underestimate the negative consequences of noise and distraction, they also fail to equip employees with the right technology to stay focused in this chaotic environment. Only 41% of employees have the tools they need to filter out distractions, but 63% of executives say workers have what they need. Employees and their managers also have different views on work/life balance—perhaps it's no surprise that bosses underestimate the amount of time they expect their workers to be available after hours.

Q: Why don't executives understand these issues?

It's probably because they live in another world. One example: nearly two-thirds of executives we surveyed say they work in a private office, compared with just 14% of employees. Executives also may have access to better technology—both in the office and at home—to help them get their jobs done with minimal stress; 59% have the tools they need to do their jobs from anywhere, compared with just 40% of employees.

Q: What should senior leadership do about this problem?

The first step in bridging the management-employee disconnect is recognizing that it exists. Starting a dialogue between employees and their managers about what is working and what needs to change is a good way to raise awareness and prioritize the necessary changes to office design or equipment.

For more survey data and interview insights, visit
www.oxfordeconomics.com/when-the-walls-come-down.