

Why does office furniture vary so much in price?

One of the questions we get asked all the time is why is office furniture so expensive? And why does one desk or chair cost 5 times as much as another that looks basically the same?

These are good questions but with clear answers.

Let's take a task chair as an example, but the reasons could just as easily be applied to desks, storage units, screen arms, anything you may want for your office space.

You can buy a task chair from an internet provider for £70.00. A top ergonomic task chair such as a Steelcase Leap chair will cost close to £700.00. This isn't even a posturepedic chair which is designed to help with specific medical issues either, simply a chair designed to fit your body and the way it works.

The differences are many, wide and significant. A £70 chair will have cheap components and will usually come with a 1 year warranty if any warranty at all to reflect the manufacturers confidence in how long they will last until they break. The adjustments will be minimal, the foam will be thin and will compress very quickly, the castors will be small and on cheap bearings so the movement of the chair will be less smooth, the castors will be hard so unsuitable for wood or polished floors, materials will be unrecyclable, you will have a choice of a few colours all in the same budget fabric and the carbon footprint of the chair usually mass produced in the far East will be high. It will however be highly preferable to working for 8 hours sat on a dining chair so if your budget is £70.00 it's an excellent investment.

The Steelcase Leap chair is hugely ergonomically advanced – the result of 4 years and \$35million of research and development and the result of 11 academic case studies looking at the bio mechanics of sitting, focussing on things like the positioning and posture of the spine and pelvis. It is highly adjustable so it fully supports users over a wide range of weights and heights to the fullest degree, it's made of the best quality components and so carries a 10 year warranty, can be fully customised with different levels of arm adjustability, lumbar supports, sliding seat depths, headrests, etc and made to order in a huge variety of finishes and fabrics. It is also thoughtfully designed to allow the most comfortable access to control levers and is made of 100% recyclable materials using environmentally considerate manufacturing processes.

The difference is clear to see between these two ends of the spectrum but you don't have to spend £700 to get the majority of these benefits. The big name manufacturers such as Steelcase and Herman Miller as well as large R&D budgets to repay also have enormous overhead costs to cover in terms of real estate, multiple showrooms, layers of management and in the case of Steelcase a corporate jet to fly their staff and highest profile clients around in! A significant part of the cost of your chair goes towards these costs.

There is a happy medium though whereby a chair is produced by a manufacturer that is fully ergonomic, carries a 5-10 year warranty, with the same adjustments, choices and environmental credentials but at a more palatable price tag of around £200 - £250. This chair will give you many years of service, fully supporting your needs and wellbeing and not break the bank.

Items like this are at the sweet spot of cost whereby you are buying a quality product that can be made to your specification, that will last and that will be a pleasure to use but that isn't priced at a premium because of the manufacturer's name and the associated operational costs that come with that name. It's a lot like buying clothes – we all know something very cheap uses poor materials and won't last, but equally we know when we buy Armani jeans they are no better than Levis but we're paying for the label. The value lies in the middle. A good furniture dealer will know the current market and exactly where to guide you for best value for every item you're looking for.

Budgets are budgets. Not every business can afford a £250 task chair for their staff even if they fully appreciate the benefits it brings, but it's always worth considering the cost over time of a quality item that will last. A £250 chair that lasts 7 years costs a penny a day. A £70 chair that lasts a year costs twice that, and that's before you start to factor in the time it takes to replace the items yearly, not being able to find the same chair in the same finishes next year as last year, the reduced comfort and function it provides throughout its lifespan and the better image for your company quality items provide for your staff and clients.

Our advice is always the same, if at all possible don't think about cost, think about value, and find a good professional partner to guide you to the best value item you can afford.

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