

Journal of Managerial Psychology

The Physical Environment of Organizational Behavior (OB)

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Background and Rationale

Employers today are increasingly opting to accommodate their office staff in open-plan offices (OPSs). For example, employees of Australia largest communications company, Telstra, recently moved into an Activity Based Workplace (ABW, see Hoendervanger, de Been, van Yperen, Mobach, & Albers, 2016) featuring extensive use of OPO architecture. Advocates for OPOs argue that such accommodation is cost-efficient and encourages employees to engage in flexible work practices leading to collaboration. Nonetheless, astute scholars may also see the trend for widespread adoption OPOs as a challenge for organizational leadership and managers.

The physical environment of work (PEW, i.e., comprising buildings, furnishings, equipment, lighting, air quality, and the arrangements of these objects) is critical for employees' effective interactions, productivity and well-being. In this regard, organizational scholars have long argued for a direct link between the physical environment of work and employees productivity, beginning with the Hawthorne Studies of 90 years ago (Roethlisberger, Dickson, & Wright, 1939). In subsequent work, scholars such as Becker (1988) and Lee and Brand (2005) extended the debates the PEW to include connections with workspaces, work patterns, and organizational culture. Johns (2006) further broadened the field to encompass consideration of work contexts in general. Nevertheless, research on the PEW has tended to be fragmented; isolated in specific disciplines such as architecture,

environmental psychology, environmental behavior, facilities management, or education (Brown, Lawrence, & Robinson, 2005) – and has been largely ignored in the field of organizational behavior (Ayoko, Ashkanasy & Jehn, 2014).

The issue of the PEW and OPOs came into prominence in organizational scholarship following publication of a review by Elsbach and Pratt (2007), who argued that the contemporary move to OPOs presents a raft of paradoxical and contradictory issues. Thus, while the benefits of OPOs are many, including cost effectiveness (Oommen, Knowles & Zhao, 2008), promotion of communication, interaction, and creativity; knowledge sharing; and idea generation (Marmot & Eley, 2000); OPOs are also associated with uncontrollable noise and distractions; loss of identity and privacy (Bodin Danielsson & Bodin, 2009; Kim & de Dear, 2013), interpersonal conflict (Ayoko & Härtel, 2003), and decreased motivation (Evans & Johnson, 2000). In other words, OPO's can just as easily cause lowered satisfaction, productivity and well-being (Bodin Danielsson & Bodin, 2009). Altogether, while these studies have extended our understanding about the impact of the PEW on employee interactions and possible benefits and challenges for organizations, they demonstrate that OPOs continue to present organizational scholars with an enigma. Moreover, contemporary research in this area has yet to disentangle the paradox and contradictions that are inherent in the PEW and especially those associated with the OPOs.

Our overarching aim in this special issue is therefore to foster theory-driven, evidence-based constructive debate on the physical environment of office work, and how it shapes employees' interactions and behaviors at work. We especially seek contributions that articulate the theoretical background to the physical environment of work and open-plan offices, while providing fresh understanding that can assist in clarifying their paradoxical

nature. Authors may wish to probe the connection between the physical environments of work and how it links to employees' territorialities, identity, work design, task interdependence, physical activities, emotions, work processes, and well-being. Altogether, we ask: How does the physical environment of work affect behavior in organizations?

By asking how the physical environment impact organizational behavior, we invite contributions that explicate methodological, theoretical and practical challenges of the physical environment of work with a view to understanding the crucial connection between the physical environments of work and organizational behaviors and how the conundrum surrounding the PEW might be resolved in the context of management research and practice. Following is an indicative rather than exhaustive set of example questions authors may wish to explore:

1. What are the methodological and theoretical challenges involved in the study of the PEW and its connection with employee behaviors, interactions, and well-being?
2. How might organizational researchers and leaders resolve the paradoxical nature, tensions and mixed findings in the research into the PEW (and especially OPOs)?
3. What organizational processes and policies make territoriality a double-edged sword; and how is it connected to identity and place attachment?
4. What is the connection between the PEW and team interactivity and collaborations?
5. What leadership behaviors might be more suitable in effectively leading employees in OPO where well-being and productivity are major concerns?
6. What is the connection between the PEW, organizational climate, organizational culture, gender, ethnicity, diversity, and employee emotional well-being and productivity?

7. How does the PEW shape employees' sustainable behaviors while promoting creativity and innovation?

We particularly welcome articles that shed new light on existing problems or offer solutions to these. We are receptive to (i) contributions from a variety of ontological perspectives; (ii) studies conveying innovative and challenging theorizing; (iii) interdisciplinary contributions; and (iv) studies from a multiplicity of methodological backgrounds (i.e. mixed methods, triangulation, sense making, practice and phenomenological approaches). Importantly, we expect authors to make clear how their research and ideas improve our understanding of the ways in which employees enact behavior at work.

Please note that all submissions must have firm theoretical grounding in the relevant literature. For theoretical pieces, there is an expectation that authors will clearly articulate underlying theoretical frameworks, either identifying overlooked issues or showing ways of overcoming acknowledged theoretical problems. In the same vein, we expect authors of empirical contributions to base their work in strong methodological designs, including competently executed data analysis, and findings that offer significant new insights. These should be explicitly related to organizational policy and practice, with implications clearly elaborated for the domain of management and OB (See Ashkanasy et al., 2014) while constructively advancing new approaches.

We encourage prospective authors to refer to the *Journal of Managerial Psychology* website (<https://www.emeraldinsight.com/journal/jmp>) and in particular the instructions on submitting papers as well as for more details about the types of manuscripts that we will consider for publication). Prospective authors should direct any questions about expectations,

requirements, and appropriateness of topics to us in our capacity as the guest editors. We are also open to discussing initial ideas for papers, and may be contacted by email:

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