

THE EFFECTS OF OPEN-PLAN OFFICES ON SOCIAL, MENTAL AND PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The nature of work has changed over the century, and office designers have to create environments that support how people work. As a result, office designers came up with different office space layouts ranging from traditional, private offices to open-plan offices. The type of office layout can substantially influence variables such as communication, social interaction and performance. The purpose of this study is to explore ways in which open-plan offices affect employees' physical, social and mental well-being. The research was carried out within the geographical area of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality in South Africa. The research focused on five government departments: the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, Department of Infrastructure; Department of Social Development; South African Police Service Head Office as well as the Department of Human settlements. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify employees who work in open-plan offices and continue to work in open-plan offices amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The data collection period occurred between May and September 2021. A survey with open-ended questions was distributed to all the selected employees, and 54 responses were received. Thematic content analysis was used to analyse data received from the survey. The study's findings indicate that open-plan office design has contributed to the deterioration of employees' physical, social and mental well-being in the work environment. The move towards an open plan has contributed to employees' inability to work to their maximum. Employees have experienced reduced concentration span, constant distractions from conversations and movement around the office and decreased overall productivity in the work environment. The findings of this study is relevant to Human Resource Managers, Facilities Managers and office space designers. However, further studies are needed to examine the private and public sectors to understand if the dynamics are the same.