

Research and Design Recommendations on Crowding in Open-Plan Offices



Background

We conducted a research project with about 600 employees of a large Midwestern insurance company to understand what causes perceptions of crowding in open-office workspaces, and what the effects of crowding are on satisfaction and performance.

Observations

The study uncovered the following insights about crowding:

- ▶ **Crowding is influenced by objective characteristics – density of workspaces and distance to windows.**
- ▶ **Crowding is not influenced by the amount of workspace enclosure.**
- ▶ **Crowding strongly influences satisfaction with the workspace.**
- ▶ **Crowding does not influence employee performance.**

Risks of Crowding

Crowding will not negatively impact employee performance; however crowding reduces satisfaction with workspace – which could affect attraction and retention efforts.

Design Recommendations

- ▶ **Distance between workspaces predicts perception of crowding.** Reduce the impact of highly “densified” space by orienting workspace openings to minimize views into others’ workstations while seated.
- ▶ **High enclosure (height and number of panels) of workstations is not a solution to problems with crowding.**
- ▶ **Perceptions of crowding are related to the distance to the nearest window.** Thus the closer each employee is seated to a window, the better. Not everyone can be seated right next to a window, so views to windows are the next best thing.

Knoll research initiatives focus on links between workspace design and human behavior, health and performance, and the quality of the users’ experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments.

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