



STATUS SYMBOLS & EMPLOYEE ATTITUDES

Kim, S.E. & Jung, C.S. (2015): The effects of status symbols in the office on employee attitudes in a human service agency. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance*, 00, 1–17

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This study hypothesizes that the **physical setting of a workplace is a motivating force because it reflects status within an agency, which can affect employees' work-related attitudes**, including employee job satisfaction and perceived performance. Survey data were collected from 508 employees in a state-based human service agency in the United States. Results indicated that satisfaction with status symbols in the workplace influenced job satisfaction and perceived performance, even after controlling for traditional motivational variables such as satisfaction with pay and supervisory support.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

- The relationship between the physical setting and human response has been an under-investigated area in the provision of human services. While physical settings for the delivery of social services have received continued attention in human services administration and evaluation, the focus has been primarily on the impact of the physical spaces on the client experience.
- This study focused on four status symbols in an office setting to better understand how they impacted employee attitudes:

Office Privacy	Indoor Environment	Office Furnishings	Control of Surroundings
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Enclosed spacesSpaces that allow for quiet concentration or confidential work	<ul style="list-style-type: none">WindowsOutside viewAir qualityCarpetingQuiet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Quantity of furnitureQuality of furnitureErgonomic design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ability to personalize surroundingsAbility to control office temperature

- This study found empirical evidence of the relationship between status symbols in the office and employees' work-related attitudes beyond traditional motivational variables such as satisfaction with pay and supervisory support.
- Results suggest that the **office setting should be treated seriously as an important motivational variable** along with other traditional motivators. Human service employees experience physical symbols of status as a form of extrinsic reward for performance, allowing them to communicate their organizational status to outsiders as well as to members of their organization.
- The office setting is a type of extrinsic motivator that complements intrinsic motivation, as employees perceive positive office settings as linked to their own feelings of prestige, pride, and recognition of past performance.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

Agency leaders and managers need to be aware of the key elements of symbols of status within an office setting and their symbolic functions that support or interfere with individual experiences and work effectiveness. While larger office spaces may not be necessary and more luxurious office furnishings are unlikely to be championed by taxpayers, steps can be taken to **ensure the workplace is more intelligently designed to facilitate personalization and positive workforce support**.