

The Importance of User Control

Employee Engagement Ergonomics Summary

HAWORTH



In the automotive industry, much attention is paid to user control through features such as adjustable seats and a well-designed control panel. Having individual user control is just as important in the office setting, even though it's not always emphasized.





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Why User Control Matters:

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- Workers who have control over their environment are more content
- Individual control is important for physical comfort
- Adjustable spaces suit different workstyles and human factors
- Standards programs make individual control more critical

How Function and Comfort Relate to User Control

Most workers, unfortunately, are unhappy with the workspaces where they spend an average of 37.5 hours each week. More than 1,000 U.S. office workers surveyed in 2004 gave their spaces an equivalent of a 2.3 grade point average. This overall dissatisfaction is compounded by a general lack of physical comfort, according to 84 percent of those surveyed.

But how can personal control improve workspace satisfaction? People feel better about their jobs when they can claim some control and ownership in the work they do as well as in the place in which they do it. Granting individuals some control over the appearance and organization of their work area can improve a person's perception of their work and the actual experience doing it.

Multi-Faceted Benefits of Control

The good news from researchers is that a little more control goes a long way in making workers feel happier, more valued, and more comfortable. Even small adjustments can satisfy personal preferences related to aesthetics, workstyles, and comfort. Research argues that even a perception of personal control can serve to buffer the effects of environmental stress and generally increase worker satisfaction.

Chair and worksurface heights address obvious personal comfort issues, but there are many not-so-obvious preferences, such as orientation. While one person might prefer to sit facing a corner to minimize distractions, another may decide to sit facing outward for a better vantage point. Work tools, tables, and privacy screens that are easy to rearrange allow workers to tailor their space. Aside from preferences, tasks also vary from one person to the next. Because most workers acquire 60 percent of their task-relevant knowledge on the job rather than in formal training, researchers believe providing opportunities for workers to interact with their spaces contributes to their level of learning and ultimately to their knowledge base.

Control through Layout, Tools, and Lighting

As more companies develop standards programs, the need for individuals to control aspects of their space becomes even more critical. Facility managers and designers tend to prefer flexibility that can be achieved while still maintaining the simplicity and consistency of one standard office layout for everyone. In addition, lighting is another opportunity for individual customization. While one person might need a great deal of light for certain tasks, another person may need to reduce monitor glare.