

What kind of workspace suits you best? It may depend on your personality

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Where we work has a big influence on how we work—our productivity and our fundamental well-being. But a new study emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to creating an ideal office space, and an

employee's personality may matter for what kind of space works best.

The study, published in the *Journal of Research in Personality*, found that people who are more extroverted are often happier and more focused in offices with open seating arrangements, at desks that aren't separated by partitions. On the other hand, people who are more introverted and tend to worry more are happier and more focused in private offices.

"This suggests that the workspace should be designed to fit the [worker](#), and not the other way around," said study co-author Dr. Esther Sternberg, research director for the University of Arizona's Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine and director of the university's Institute on Place, Well-being & Performance.

"Our work illuminates the importance of considering both the individual's personality and their environment in predicting important behavioral and mood outcomes, such as how happy a person is and how well a person is able to work," said study senior author Matthias Mehl, a professor in the UArizona Department of Psychology. "In this vein, we demonstrate that when employers design and allocate workspaces, it may be beneficial to take an employee-centered approach."

The study is based on data collected through the Wellbuilt for Well-being research project, led by Sternberg. More than 270 [office workers](#) in four federal buildings wore health tracking sensors and were sent questions to their smartphones asking how they felt in the moment. The researchers linked various aspects of employee health and well-being—including activity, stress, sleep, behavior, focus and mood—to different aspects of the environment in which the employees worked, including workstation type.

Typically, how employees are assigned to different types of workspaces

has little to do with who they are and in what environment they thrive.

"As personality psychologists, we know that people are very different, and that they need different things to be well and do well," said lead study author Erica Baranski, assistant professor of psychology at California State University, East Bay. "At the same time, as it is estimated that we spend up to 90% of our time indoors, much of it in the workplace, it is imperative that those spaces fit individual needs. Yet, historically, organizations have treated all people as being and needing the same space—a one-size-fits-all model."

Although the [study data](#) was collected pre-pandemic, the topic of workspace design has only become more relevant as the U.S. grapples with the "great resignation"—the economic trend that saw many workers voluntarily leave their jobs in the wake of COVID-19, Sternberg said. Experts have said that the increased desire for variance and flexibility in workspaces is here to stay, and it is here for scientists to figure out.

"In order to recruit and retain workers—their most valuable asset—organizations need to focus on the well-being of their workforce, front and center," said Sternberg, who is also a UArizona professor of medicine and BIO5 Institute member. "This study provides [quantitative data](#) for the importance of taking individual personality into account to optimize individual well-being in the workplace."

More information: Erica Baranski et al, Personality, workstation type, task focus, and happiness in the workplace, *Journal of Research in Personality* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104337](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2022.104337)

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