

WHY DAYLIGHT AND VIEWS MATTER



As the movie title “A Room with a View” suggests, people seem inherently drawn to an interesting view—natural or otherwise. In fact, they’ll even pay significantly more for it.

In an office setting, the word “view” not only refers to what users see outside the office windows, but also to a user’s perception of an interior space. Everything from the dimensions and materials to options the user sees impacts this interior view; and therefore affects opinions of the space.

Why Views Matter:

- Access to views has been linked to the relief of boredom, anxiety, and stress, as well as to greater productivity.
- Dimensions, materials, and options affect viewers’ opinions of their workspaces.
- High-performance office layouts are designed to support the tasks to be performed there.
- Individuals prefer lighter, more airy workspaces that are visually interesting.

The Importance of Views

While a view might seem like a luxury more than a necessity, research suggests otherwise. Long ago, humans relied on having a view of their surroundings for survival, both for prospecting food sources and detecting approaching danger. Although surviving in today’s workplace is hardly the same proposition, people still react with the same primal instincts, experiencing less stress when their environment provides them with the right kind of view.

Environments that Mimic Nature Can Affect Productivity

Recent studies have linked having access to views of nature in the workplace to the relief of boredom, anxiety, and stress; and, as much as possible, windows framing natural views. However, because most offices are located in cities, not in idyllic mountainside settings, it is also critical to mimic a variety of natural settings within the workplace.

Certain furniture systems and space layouts accomplish this much better than do others. In a Haworth study on visual perception, for instance, participants were asked to rate four office layouts categorized as enclosed, heavy spine, light spine, and freestanding based on their levels of visual interest. Overall, the light spine environment was seen as more exciting, pleasant, relaxed, and collaborative than the other options displayed. Not only do individuals prefer lighter, more airy spaces like those defined by light spine systems, they also find a less-linear furniture setup more natural and visually interesting.

It makes sense, then, that the way offices are specified, the amount of visual interest created, and the materials used all affect a space’s appeal and its ability to relieve boredom and impact productivity.

Access to Daylight

Human beings are naturally drawn to windows and light. Even if the average person can't scientifically explain why daylight affects our moods and energy levels, we know that it does. We all are familiar with what's known as the "winter blahs," and a growing recognition of seasonal affective disorder (SAD) has been well covered in popular media.

It follows naturally that daylight—or a lack of daylight—affects people in the workplace. As research is beginning to show more clearly, a greater dose of daylight in the workplace may be critical in reducing levels of stress and increasing performance levels of employees.

Why Daylight Matters:

- Access to daylight reduces stress and may increase productivity.
- Workers overwhelmingly prefer working near windows if they're not close enough to experience excess heat.
- Natural light provides variety and stimulation during the day.
- Tapping natural light as a resource reduces energy use.

Workers and Researchers Alike Say Daylight is Preferred

One study on employee preferences reported that not only do the overwhelming majority of workers prefer an office with a window, but also that 73% of those surveyed considered windows "extremely important." People are drawn to windows for a variety of reasons, from the natural light and views to the instant access to information about time and weather.

Why is this draw to windows so intrinsic? Daylight has a powerful influence on people because it affects the chronobiological system, which is responsible for regulating our sleep/wake cycles. Scientists believe humankind's evolution in a natural, rather than built, environment is responsible for our sensitivity to

daylight. Our preference for views is also traced to early humans' dependence on being able to see without being seen, which was key to survival.

Daylight and Views Have Clear Benefits

Research suggests the main benefits of natural light are psychological; it raises comfort levels and reduces stress. However, these psychological improvements are broad; and they affect everything from productivity and physical health to mood and behavior, regardless of an individual's gender, position, or tasks.

There is also a sizeable and growing body of evidence that giving workers a view outdoors, especially a view with natural elements, is beneficial. Research shows employees with a natural view exhibit less job pressure, more job satisfaction, fewer ailments and headaches, and recover from stressful situations more quickly.

Bringing Daylight into the Workplace

Increased productivity has become a compelling economic reason to bring more daylight into the workplace. Daylight in a workspace is measured by the amount of natural sunlight penetrating an individual's work environment, as experienced from a seated position. Whether it is natural light coming directly through windows or filtering through translucent materials, both grant what is defined as access to daylight. However some recent evidence suggests that external views (out of buildings) may be more important than daylight, at the very least, both are important—perhaps for different reasons.

Because some workstations may not have windows, many manufacturers (Haworth included) provide glass panels, glazed moveable walls, lower panel heights, and translucent or mesh partitions/walls.

These elements improve access to daylight and views, and some may also address acoustic privacy.