THE EFFECT OF OFFICE SETTING ON EMPLOYEES PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

by

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DECLARATION

I, Nonkululeko Thabisile Mazubane declare that this dissertation is a representation of my own work both in conception and execution. This work has not been submitted in any form for another degree at any university or institution of higher learning. All information cited from published or unpublished works have been acknowledged.

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Abstract

Office setting is a widely acceptable means of providing an enabling environment that best facilitates employees' performance and general productivity. This study sought to investigate the impact of office setting on employee performance using, eThekwini (KwaZulu-Natal) municipal offices and employees at the Durban City Hall, as a case study. The objectives of the study were to analyse the office design, finishes and furnishings of the head office building of eThekwini municipality and identify features in the design, finishes and furnishings in terms of their suitability and comfort of the employees; assess the impact of office settings on the performance of eThekwini municipality employees at the City Hall; and propose specific settings based interventions that would address employee health, comfort and wellbeing and thereby enhance optimum performance. The study was based on a sample of 65 City Hall staff randomly drawn from various departments and units, as well as 10 senior managers. Data for the study obtained mainly from the administration of questionnaires was analysed quantitatively using SPSS and Microsoft Excel and presented with the aid of frequency distributions, pie charts, tables, pictures and graphs. The research identified considerable office settings deficiencies which included uninspiring and old-fashioned office design and decor (largely cellular offices), use of dark wooden partitions resulting in poorly illuminated offices, and continued use of old furniture at the City Hall. The study also confirmed that the settings deficiencies had varying adverse effects on the performance of City Hall employees by between (20% - 80%). The study recommends the relocation of the City Hall head office to a new modern facility designed and furnished to suit the particular needs of the organisation. The development and operation of a real estate policy that leverages on the workplace environment to attract, retain and boost employee performance has also been recommended.

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my supportive partner Nokuthula Mbanjwa and my loving sister Precious Mazubane.

Acknowledgements

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List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full term
DUT	Durban University of Technology
HR	Human Resources
IT	Information Technology
ITES	Information Technology Enabled Service
LRA	Labour Relations Act
MSDs	Masculoskeletal Disorders
SA	South Africa
SAPS	South African Police Service
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
US	United States
WMSDs	Work-related musculoskeletal disorders

CHAPTER 1 : OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

In the past few decades, there has been a strong trend for corporate organisations and businesses to reconfigure the spaces of their offices in new ways and models. In addition, the shift towards more exciting and flexible workplace environments and the need to meet the diverse and growing expectations and requirements of different employees has led to the rise of debates about how and where productive work is accomplished. In a 2003 survey done by *Management Today* (2003) magazine, indicated that (97%) of respondents regarded their place of work as a symbol of whether or not they were valued by their employer.

The effect of office setting has been noted by many studies as being one of the key elements related to equipping employees in the workplace to help produce best performance. The quality of the employee's workplace environment has a major impact on the level of employee's motivation and subsequent performance. How well they engage with the organisation, especially with their immediate environment, influences to a great extent their error rate, level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, absenteeism and, ultimately, how long they stay in the job (Al-Anzi, 2009: 19).

According to Clements-Croome and Kaluarachchi (2010: 15), many executives are under the mistaken impression that the level of employee performance on the job is proportional to the employee's compensation package. Although compensation package is one of the extrinsic motivation tool, along with office environment, it has a limited short term effect on employees performance. Office environment can be described in terms of physical and behavioral components. These components can further be divided in the form of independent variables. An organisation's physical environment and its design and layout can affect employee behavior in the workplace. Although convenient workplace conditions are requirements for improving productivity and quality of outcomes, working

conditions in many organisations may present with lack of safety, health and comfort issues such as improper lightening and ventilation, excessive noise and emergency excess.

According to Hughes (2007: 36), studies have revealed that among some of the factors that affect employee performance are: employee's ability to learn and perform the task required, expectations to achieve and standards by which to achieve them, knowledge and skills necessary to perform the job, feedback from management regarding the status of the employee's performance, acceptable working conditions and equipment to perform the job effectively, incentives in place that positively reinforce good performance. People working under inconvenient conditions may end up with low performance and face occupational health diseases causing high absenteeism and turnover (Hughes 2007: 35-38). Every organisation has to ensure that employee work stations are designed and maintained to a satisfactory degree in order to reduce injuries typically associated with work performed in an office environment and to eliminate potential hazards. Employees should be able to adjust an office swivel chair to an appropriate setup when seated at a workstation.

Wang and Gianakis (1999) claim that about (86%) of productivity problems reside in the work environment of organisations. The work environment has an effect on the performance of employees. The type of work environment in which employees operate determines the way in which such enterprises prosper. Although other organisational elements such as praise and recognition, compensation and financial reward impact on employee performance, studies have also shown that an employee's workplace environment is a key determinant of their level of performance (Wang and Gianakis 1999). How well the workplace engages an employee impacts their level of motivation to perform. Indeed poor workplace environment influences employees: health and safety, error rate, level of innovation, collaboration with other employees, absenteeism and, ultimately, how long they stay in the job. In Haynes (2011: 78) as cited in Taiwo (2010: 23), it is observed that work systems do not only affect commitment, competence and cost effectiveness but also have long term effects on physical health, mental health and longevity of life of employees.

One major benefit derived from pursuing office ergonomics is that it reduces the risk of injury by adapting the work environment to fit the person instead of forcing the person to adapt to the work environment. In addition to injury prevention, ergonomics is also concerned with enhancing work performance, by removing the barriers that exist in many work places that prevent employees from performing to the best of their abilities. This ultimately helps people work more effectively, efficiently, and productively at their jobs (Washington State Department of Labour and Industries, 2002).

According to the Washington State Department of Labour and Industries (2002) improvements to the office working environment are implemented to create a safer and more healthy work environment, and that a company may experience other benefits including increased productivity, increased work quality, reduced turnover, reduced absenteeism, and increased morale. According to the Washington State Department of Labour and Industries (2002), if workers are required to adapt to a job that exceeds their body's physical limitations, they can become injured, especially with work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WMSDs), which account for over (40%) of all Washington State Fund workers' compensation claims among office workers. Numerous studies have shown that employee performance and satisfaction are substantially impacted by key elements in the office environment such as furniture, noise levels, lighting, temperature, air quality and general comfort.

1.2 CONTEXT OF RESEARCH

Al-Anzi (2010: 356), points out that the number of job opportunities available for employees has been increasing in a growing worldwide economy, which means that not just employees but also employers need to readjust themselves in order to cope up with the dynamics of business life. Therefore, human resource (HR) executives need to consider new strategies for recruiting and retaining best fit talents for their organisations. Higher salaries and compensation benefits may seem the most likely way to attract employees. However, quality of the physical workplace environment may also have a strong influence on a company's ability

to recruit and retain talented people. Some factors in the workplace environment may be considered key elements affecting employee's engagement, productivity, morale, comfort level etc. both positively and negatively (Stoessel, 2001: 57). Although convenient workplace conditions are requirements for improving productivity and quality of outcomes, working conditions in many organisations may present with a lack of safety, health and comfort issues such as improper lighting and ventilation, excessive noise and lack of emergency exits. People working under inconvenient conditions may end up with low performance and face occupational health diseases causing high absenteeism and turnover (Stoessel, 2001: 58).

Beautyman (2006: 150-160), argues that employee disengagement is increasing and it becomes more important to make workplaces that positively influence workforce. The focus is on symptoms of disengagement such as distraction, lack of interest, poor decisions and high absence, rather than the root causes. The working environment is perhaps a key root causing employee's engagement or disengagement. Research indicates that improving the working environment reduces complaints and absenteeism while increasing productivity.

Wang and Gianakis (1999: 89), state that workplace satisfaction has been associated with job satisfaction. In recent years, employees comfort on the job, determined by workplace conditions and environment, has been recognized as an important factor for measuring productivity. While it is easy to envision that changes to the physical comfort of the worker may result in measurable changes in performance, it is also well known that humans are extremely adaptable, and will readily accommodate over time to a wide variety of conditions. As more and more computers are being installed in workplaces, an increasing number of businesses have been adopting ergonomic designs for offices and plant installations. Ergonomics, also called biomechanics, has become popular because of demand from workers for more human comfort.

The efficiency of office employees is directly or indirectly affected by the conditions under which they are required to do their work which affect the performances of workers and the achievement of organisational objectives for

this purpose. This study focuses its attention on the effects of the office environment on the motivation of workers in an organisation (Campbell, 2010: 24).

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The main health problems that may result from risks in the office environment are musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) affecting the muscles, tendons, ligaments, nerves and other soft tissues and joints of the neck, upper limbs (shoulders, arms, hands, wrists, fingers), back or lower limbs (knees, hips, feet). Symptoms include pain, swelling, tingling and numbness, and may result in difficulty moving or long-term disability if no action is taken. The term covers conditions with specific medical diagnoses for example frozen shoulder, carpal tunnel syndrome and others where there is pain without specific symptoms (Erez, Earley and Hulin, 1985: 54).

According to Fisk and Rosenfeld (1997: 105), the impact of the environment on office workers has been of interest to building science researchers for many decades. Work has been pursued primarily in university-based and government laboratories looking at specific dimensions of worker comfort thermal, ventilation, acoustic and lighting and whether changes in those environmental conditions can be related to measurable changes in worker performance. The development of open office plans spurred an interest in acoustic environments, while workers compensation claims for back injuries and carpal tunnel syndrome drove research into office furniture ergonomics. The identification of "sick building syndrome" motivated a host of efforts to untangle the causes and effects of poor environments (Fisk and Rosenfeld, 1997: 105). Looking at these problems, one will quickly notice that workers rate of production and organisational hazards that might cause injury or death of workers depends on environmental factors. It is the environment that will greatly motivate the workers to increase their productivity. Employers have obligations to analyse workstations, provide information and training to workers, plan daily work routines, and protect workers' eyes and eyesight. There are also requirements relating to equipment and the working environment. Organisations should have proactive strategies to manage the

health of their workforce, including having clear reporting systems for health problems, carrying out risk assessments, managing any problems identified, and then implementing and monitoring solutions (Sekaran and Bougie, 2012: 15-16).

According to Ryan et al. (2009: 25), a properly set-up office workstation helps workers maintain a comfortable, neutral body posture, with the joints naturally aligned, reducing stress and strain on the muscles, tendons, and skeletal system, and minimising the risk of developing MSDs.

Poor performance in low and middle income countries is particularly exacerbated by human resources (HR) staff shortages that reached critical levels in many resource-poor settings, especially in municipalities such as eThekwini Municipality and has been a major concern in this country.

Although there is no conclusive evidence concerning the relationship between health outcomes and the number of HR staff available for employees, it is clear that qualified and motivated HR staff are essential for adequate health service provision. Low performance can be determined by poor knowledge of how to perform particular work, poor working conditions and poor communication between employer and employee and employees themselves. Determinants of poor performance can be influenced in a variety of ways. The 2006 World Health report describes three levels which influence workforce performance including: job-related interventions that focus on individual occupations, support-system-related interventions and interventions that create an enabling environment and focus on managerial culture and organisational arrangements.

To improve the performance of employees, a supportive working environment is needed. This encompasses more than just having sufficient equipment and supplies. It also includes systems issues, such as decision-making and information-exchange processes, and capacity issues such as workload, support services and infrastructure. Although it is logical to link poor performance to poor working conditions, there is limited documentation showing how poor working conditions influence employees' productivity, competence and responsiveness. While some of the reviewed studies conducted in this country have looked at

workers performance and working environment factors, most of these studies focus on how motivation, supervision, skills to perform the given work, and availability of working tools affect performance and rarely research the role of the working environment and performance of health workers especially focusing on how working environment affects the availability, competence, productivity and responsiveness of such employees.. This study examined whether there is a relationship between working environment and performance level of employees in eThekwini Municipality.

Therefore, specifically, this study investigated the effect of working environment on performance levels of employees in eThekwini Municipality, evaluating the extent to which working environment encourages or discourages office workers to perform well.

1.4 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to identify the effect of office setting on employee performance in order to make recommendations which will improve employees' performance.

1.5 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:
- Determine the disorders that result from awkward posture.
- Assess the current type of equipment used in offices.
- Determine the knowledge, attitude and practices of safety in deployed employees.
- Identify how working conditions affect employees.
- Recommend interventions to improve efficiency.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the study:
- What are the disorders that result from awkward posture?
- What are types of equipment are used in offices?

☐ What is the effect of office setting on employees' performance?

☐ What interventions can be recommended to improve efficiency?

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The impact and significance of office design on employees' productivity is addressed in this study. Human resource professionals in the organisations are well aware of the importance of office work setting. Very few researchers have addressed this in the context of human resource management. Very few researches can be found in the field of human resource management, this huge gap needs to be filled by new research scholars. Workplace environment and its related issues are neglected. It is evident that there is less importance attached to office design, incentives and assisting facilities and also information about office setting is not available to employees. The situation is that employees cannot even complain about them. These circumstances are affecting the performance of the employees greatly, in the form of delay in work completion, frustration, effect on personal growth etc. This study will try to find out the effects of office design in terms of furniture, noise, lighting, temperature and spatial arrangement on employees' productivity. Productivity is typically defined as the ratio of inputs to outputs. In an industrial setting the definition of inputs and outputs is fairly clear: so much raw material purchased relative to so many widgets produced and sold. In an office setting, it is difficult to be precise about the definition of inputs and outputs, and perhaps even more difficult to measure them. Should input be considered number of person-hours worked? Many professional offices with salaried employees don't strictly track number of hours worked. Should output be considered profit? But profit (assuming the organization is profit-based) may often be more of a function of accounting procedures and economic climate. Given these challenges, many researchers trying to study the organizational productivity of offices have resorted to secondary measures of individual performance that are plausibly related to overall organizational productivity, such as absenteeism, or task or cognitive performance of individual workers

1.8   BACKGROUD OF CITY HALL CENTENARY

The Durban City Hall may no longer be the most imposing building in town, as it was when it opened some 100 years ago, but it's still the pulsating heart of Durban's civic life. Many of the Municipality's departments have relocated to buildings across the length and breadth of eThekwini, but the Mayor and City Manager's offices remain firmly ensconced in the City Hall, which remains the venue for meetings of Council committees and of the full Council.

The City Hall is also an important hub of the arts and education, home to the Durban Art Gallery, City Library and Natural Science Museum, which draw crowds of tourists and locals. Anyone who grew up in Durban will have fond memories of at least one school outing to the building. And it is outside the City Hall's Church Walk steps that crowds invariably gather to make their point, whether in protest or celebration. The structure was designed in 1903 by Stanley G Hudson, based on the City Hall in Belfast, Northern Ireland.

Although it looks like one building, behind the ornate facade it is actually three: the municipal chambers; art gallery, museum and library; and the main auditorium. Joseph David, Head of City Hall Administration and Secretariat, said it was important to celebrate the building's centenary because it represented a milestone in the city's rich history. "My fondest memory of the City Hall has to be when I was a young high school pupil and I came to the City Hall to watch a famous guitarist. The visit by Mother Teresa and Nelson Mandela are fond memories too." He believes that the building deserves to be preserved because "it is a monumental structure with great sentimental value to the city of Durban". David's view was shared by a number of visitors to the City Hall canvassed by the Metro recently.

About R45-million has been spent on refurbishing the City Hall, including cleaning statues in Francis Farewell Square, opposite the Church Walk entrance. The renovation work is expected to continue 2015, and other celebration are planned to mark the centenary. Mikhail Peppas, a member of the South African National Society, which works to preserve objects of history interest and natural beauty,

said the building stood as a testament to transition. "The City Hall and its surroundings are steeped in history. The hall has seen the British Empire, the apartheid government and, now, a multiracial Council. It has seen the city grow and change around it to the point that the two roads flanking it have changed names," Peppas said.

1.9   OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1: Introduction and background.
Chapter 2: Literature review.
Chapter 3: Research methodology.
Chapter 4: Presentation of the results.
Chapter 5: Summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations

1.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the reader to the background of the study and the problem statement, the aim of the study, research questions and the significance of the study. The next chapter will focus on relevant literature that was reviewed in order to gain more insight and understanding and to support the relevance of the study.

CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 presented the background to the study and the problem statement that set the basis for the study of the effect of office setting on employee performance. This chapter presents a literature review.

Many business executives are under the mistaken impression that the level of employee performance on the job is proportional to the size of the employee's compensation package. Although compensation package is one of the extrinsic motivation tools, it has a limited short term effect on employees' performance. A widely accepted assumption is that a better workplace environment motivates employees and produces better results (Leblebici, 2012: 25).

Essentially, an elegant and functional workplace environment often results in improved employee efficiency and productivity. In recognition of this fact, most offices are now designed and furnished with the employee in mind to ensure that his/her workplace environment including furniture and equipment adequately supports and induces high performance. The quest to equip employees and workers with most suitable workplace environment, furniture, equipment, tools and techniques to discharge their duties efficiently and effectively is the fundamental philosophy behind the development and growth of ergonomics. The performance of an employee is measured by the output of the individual, which is the productivity of the individual. At corporate level, productivity is affected by many factors such as employees, technology and objectives of the organisation. It is also dependent on the physical environment and its effect on health and so on employees' performance (Al-Anzi, 2009: 54).

According to Gyekye (2006: 234), an office is a place where professional duties and administrative work are carried out in the organisation's building. The work depends on the type of business, but it will usually include using computers, communicating with others by e-mail, telephone or fax, keeping records and files etc., in hard and soft format. Features of an office such as people, building space,

equipment, furniture and the environment, must fit together well for workers to feel healthy and comfortable and to be able to work efficiently. More than (50%) of the world's population currently works in some form of office. Developing countries such as India and China have growing populations. They are working with machines and many are in the computer related sector. In the Information Technology (IT) and Information Technology Enabled Services (ITES), workers are dependent on computers. Work in the IT and ITES sectors is increasing in India.

2.2   WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

BusinessDictionary.com (2012), defines workplace environment as a location where a task is completed. When pertaining to a place of employment, the work environment involves the physical geographical location as well as the immediate surroundings of the workplace, such as a construction site or office building. Typically the environment workplace involves other factors relating to the place of employment, such as the quality of the air, noise level, and additional perks and benefits of employment such as free child care or unlimited coffee, or adequate parking. Besides manufacturing plants and other specialized production units, nearly all employee productive activities take place in the office environment. In other words, most workplace environments are fundamentally office environments.

An office environment as defined by BNET Business Dictionary (2012) and cited in Hameed (2009) is: "the arrangement of workspace so that work can be performed in the most efficient way". Office design incorporates both ergonomics and work flow, which examines the way in which work is performed in order to optimize layout. Office design is an important factor in job satisfaction. It affects the way in which employees work, and many organisations have implemented open-plan offices to encourage teamwork. Office design is very vital in employee satisfaction, and the broad concept of office design also includes the workflow.

According to Clements-Croome and Kaluarachchi (2010: 15), many executives are under the mistaken impression that the level of employee performance on the

job is proportional to the size of the employee's compensation package. Although compensation package is one of the extrinsic motivation tools it has a limited short term effect on employees' performance. A widely accepted assumption is that a better workplace environment motivates employees and produces better results. The office environment can be described in terms of physical and behavioral components. These components can further be divided in the form of independent variables. An organisation's physical environment and its design and layout can affect employee behavior in the workplace.

Black and Lynch (2011: 363-364), argue that increasingly an organisation's physical layout is designed around employee needs in order to maximize productivity and satisfaction. They argue that innovative workplaces can be developed to encourage the sharing of information and networking regardless of job boundaries by allowing communication freely across departmental groups. The modern work physical environment is characterized by technology; computers and machines as well as general furniture and furnishings. To achieve high levels of employee productivity, organisations must ensure that the physical environment is conducive to organisational needs facilitating interaction and privacy, formality and informality, functionality and cross-disciplinarily. Ensuring that adequate facilities are provided to employees is critical to generating greater employee commitment and productivity. The provision of inadequate equipment and adverse working conditions has been shown to affect employee commitment and intention to stay with the organisation as well as levels of job satisfaction and the perception of fairness of pay. From a safety perspective, indications are that environmental conditions affect employee safety, perceptions which impact upon employee commitment (Black and Lynch, 2011: 365).

According to Gutnick (2012: 59-61), improving the working environment results in a reduction in the number of complaints and absenteeism and an increase in productivity. The indoor environment has the biggest effect on productivity in relation to job stress and job dissatisfaction. In the 21st century, businesses are taking a more strategic approach to environmental management to enhance their productivity through improving the performance level of the employees.

Geoffrey (2010: 58-61), argues that in the relationship between work, the workplace and the tools of work, the workplace itself becomes an integral part of the work. Maximization of employee productivity centers around two major areas of focus: personal motivation and the infrastructure of the work environment. The literature defines various factors that influence the performance of employees. The components of the office environment have a great impact on office productivity. In all of the work patterns, it was found that interaction was perceived to be the component to have the most positive effect on productivity, and distraction was perceived to have the most negative. As people are the most valuable resource of an organisation, the management of people makes a difference to company performance (Patterson, 2008).

2.3 KEY ELEMENTS IN THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

A productive office environment consists of a number of elements. Al-Anzi (2009: 12-13) identifies; furniture, noise, flexibility, comfort, communication, lighting, temperature and air quality as the constituents of an office design and productivity. These elements are shown on Figure 2.1.
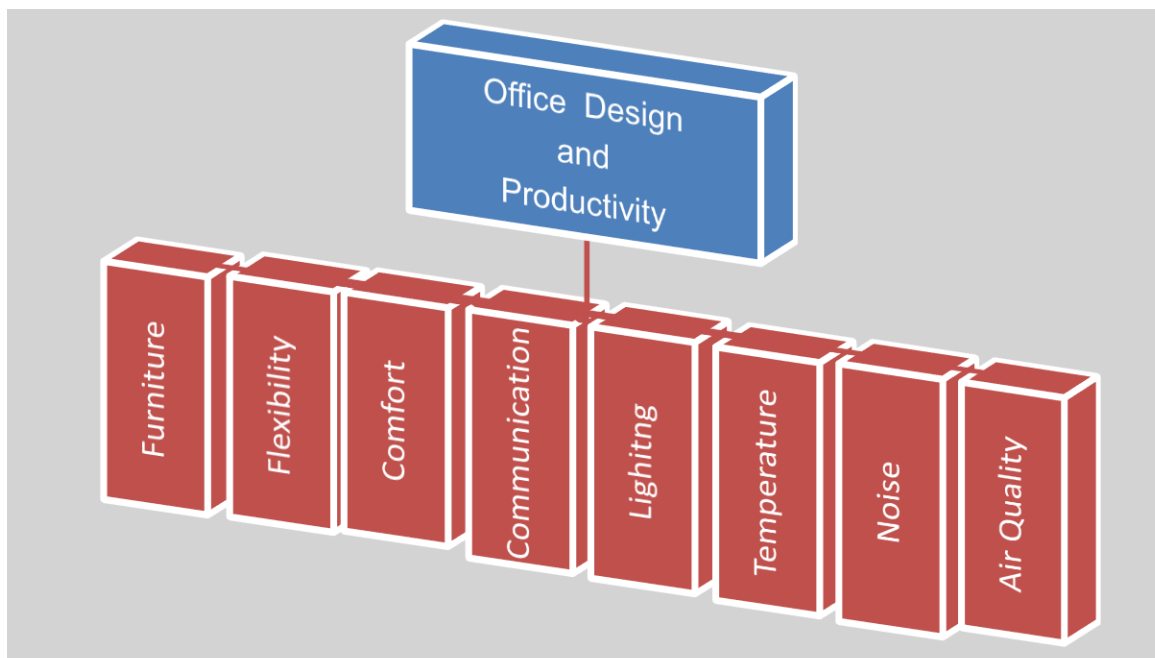
Figure 2.1: Office Design and Productivity
Source: Al-Anzi 2009: 14

2.4 WORKPLACE FACTORS AFFECTING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Office environment can be described in terms of physical and behavioral components. These components can further be divided in the form of independent variables. An organisation's physical environment and its design and layout can affect employee behavior in the workplace. Brill (1992: 23), estimates that improvements in the physical design of the workplace may result in a (5% - 10%) increase in employee productivity. Stallworth and Kleiner (1996: 32-33), argue that increasingly an organisation's physical layout is designed around employee needs in order to maximize productivity and satisfaction. They argue that innovative workplaces can be developed to encourage the sharing of information and networking regardless of job boundaries by allowing communication freely across departmental groups.

Statt (1994: 52), argues that the modern work physical environment is characterized by technology; computers and machines as well as general furniture and furnishings. To achieve high levels of employee productivity, organisations must ensure that the physical environment is conducive to organisational needs facilitating interaction and privacy, formality and informality, functionality and cross-disciplinarily. Consequently, the physical environment is a tool that can be leveraged both to improve business results (Mohr 2013: 25) and employee well-being (Huang, Robertson and Chang, 2004: 58).

Ensuring adequate facilities are provided to employees is critical to generating greater employee commitment and productivity. The provision of inadequate equipment and adverse working conditions has been shown to affect employee commitment and intention to stay with the organisation (Weiss, 1999: 67; Latham and Yukl, 1975: 42) as well as levels of job satisfaction and the perception of fairness of pay (Bockerman and Ilmakunnas, 2006: 45). From a safety perspective, Gyekye (2006: 231) indicates that environmental conditions affect employee safety perceptions which impact upon employee commitment.

Extensive scientific research conducted by Roelofsen (2002: 52), has yielded indications that improving working environment results in a reduction in a number

of complaints and absenteeism and an increase in productivity. The indoor environment has the biggest effect on productivity in relation to job stress and job dissatisfaction. As suggested by Govindarajulu and Daily (2004: 69), in the twenty-first century, businesses are taking a more strategic approach to environmental management to enhance their productivity and improve the performance level of the employees.

It is evident in the research findings of Patterson et al. (2003: 10) that the more satisfied workers are with their jobs the better the company is likely to perform in terms of subsequent profitability and particularly productivity. Geoffery (2010: 58-61), argues that in the relationship between work, the workplace and the tools of work, the workplace itself becomes an integral part of the work. Maximization of employee productivity centers around two major areas of focus: personal motivation and the infrastructure of the work environment (Geoffery, 2010: 101).

Literature defines the factors that influence the performance of the employees. Haynes (2008: 325), explains that the office environment has a great impact on office productivity. In all of the work patterns, it was found that interaction was perceived to be the component to have the most positive effect on productivity, and distraction was perceived to have the most negative. As people are the most valuable resource of an organisation, management of people makes a difference to company performance (Patterson et al. 2003: 50). The workplace environment factors which lead to engagement or disengagement are illustrated in Figure 2.2. These factors encourage employees to communicate with each other in the workplace.
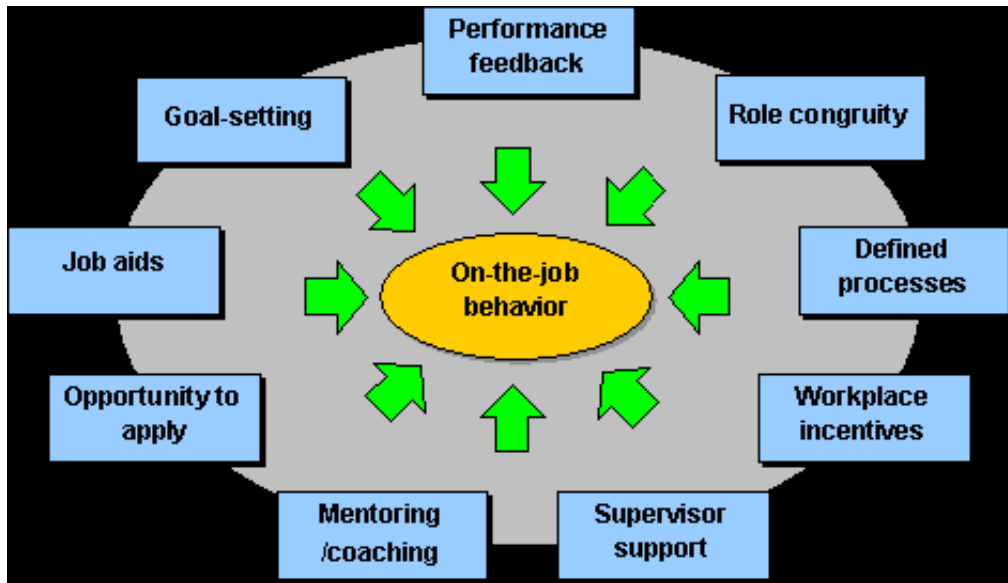
Figure 2.2: Workplace factors affecting employee performance
Source: http://www.businessperform.com/workplace-training/workplace_environment.html)

Statt (1994: 13), as cited by Leblebici (2012: 52), argues that the modern work physical environment is characterized by technology (computers and machines) as well as general furniture and furnishings. To enhance employee performance therefore, it is imperative that the organisation's physical environment is fashioned to support employees in their quest to attain organisational objectives.

2.5 WORKING ENVIRONMENT FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EMPLOYEES' PERFORMANCE

Research has shown that working environment factors have a direct impact on employee performance. These factors are as explained below.

2.5.1 Goal setting

Goal setting is an important tool to stimulate the motivation of the employee. There are two important purposes of goals in organisations – to guide the behaviour of individuals and to motivate them to perform at higher levels of effectiveness. Specific goals are more effective than generalized goals, and difficult goals lead to greater performance than do easy goals, as long as the goals are accepted, and frequent, relevant feedback is important for goal setting effectiveness. Effective goals, those with the above characteristics, are likely to

promote a greater frequency of desirable workstyle behaviours. They help generate commitment, both to the goals and to the organisation, which results in people doing more than they are required to do. Open communication is encouraged by the existence of effective goals. Members in groups with clear goals are more likely to communicate openly than those with unclear goals (Chandrasekar 2011:90).

2.5.2 Physical factors (office building)

Physical factors in the workplace such as poor layout or overcrowding can lead to common types of accident such as tripping or striking against objects (Chandraskar, 2011: 90). Among the factors affecting workers performance, physical factors such as office building space have been strongly associated with workers performance in private sector office employees. Environmental factors including office layout, level of interaction and the comfort level of office have had a significant effect on workers performance.

2.5.3 Performance feedback

Performance feedback is an information exchange and conflict resolution process between the employee and supervisor. While the supervisor gives his/her feedback and requirements, the employee is enabled to give his/her feedback regarding his/her requirements. Although this process is formal, it could be managed informally by gaining closer relations between the two sides. Each employee has a role in the organisation. These roles are explained in job descriptions forms in a formal way. Employees' roles and task should be allocated consistently by his/her supervisor (Chandrasekar, 2011: 90-91) which is defined as role congruity.

2.5.4 Workplace incentives

The organisation determines what motivates its employees and sets up formal and informal structures for rewarding employees behaving in the way required. Studies in some Sub-Saharan countries show that the overall performance of professional nurses is poor not only due to working environment factors but also

due to lack of human resource management aspects such as recognition of employees who perform well, poor working conditions, absence of performance appraisal systems and poor feedback on performance outcomes (Chandrasekar, 2011: 91). A study from Malaysia reports that significant changes in promotions, compensation and benefits helps in keeping employees satisfied and in turn increases production.

2.5.5 Comfort level

Comfort level factors such as temperature, lighting, presence of privacy and ventilation can have a direct impact on employees' health; for example very high temperatures can lead to heat stress and heat exhaustion and as a result poor performance. A study conducted in Malaysia reports that the brightness of office light effects alertness, concentration, and task performance (Chandrasekar, 2011: 93). Adjusting the type and quality of light can significantly improve working experience and performance.

Study conducted in Mbeya city showed that (14%) of health staff had a good perceived performance of reproductive and child health care and the rest which is (86%) didn't perform well due to poor working conditions. While a study in Muhimbili National Referral Hospital showed that (50%) of workers were not satisfied with their working condition leads to decreased morale for work hence suboptimal performance (Chandrasekar, 2011: 94).

2.5.6 Supervisor support

Supervisor Support is crucial for employees to complete the job. Supervisors' interpersonal role is important to encourage positive relations and increase the self-confidence of employees. Skilled and respected people are available to employees to help them to perform better in their current role and to assist them develop further into a future role. Chandrasekar (2011: 95), defines the situation as mentoring/coaching. Time and material resources should be available to employees, enabling them to perform to the best of their ability. Individual workloads and organisational systems and processes do not hinder employees from applying established skills or from practicing newly learned skills. Thus,

employees should be provided opportunities to apply these skills. The work environment is set up so that templates, guides, models, checklists and other such workplace aids are readily available to help minimise error rates and customer dissatisfaction.

A widely accepted assumption is that better workplace environment produces better results. Mostly the office is designed with due consideration to the nature of job and the individuals that are going to work in that office. The performance of an employee is measured by the output that the individual produces, which is their productivity. At a corporate level, productivity is affected by many factors such as employees, technology and objectives of the organisation. It is also dependent on the physical environment and its effect on health and employees' performance (Chandrasekar, 2011: 95).

2.5.7 Office design

Office design is defined by Beautyman (2006:12-13), as "the arrangement of workspace so that work can be performed in the most efficient way". Office design incorporates both ergonomics and work flow, which examines the way in which work is performed in order to optimize layout. Office design is an important factor in job satisfaction. It affects the way in which employees work, and many organisations have implemented open-plan offices to encourage teamwork. Office design is vital in employee satisfaction, and the broad concept of office design also includes the workflow. The work is analyzed initially and it is identified how it is accomplished and then the overall setting of the office is developed according to that flow. This ensures the smooth running of work in the office without hindrances.

2.5.8 Workplace and productivity

Over the years, many organisations have been trying new designs and techniques to construct office buildings, which can increase productivity, and attract more employees. Many authors have noted that the physical layout of the workspace, along with efficient management processes, is playing a major role in boosting employees' productivity and improving organisational performance

(Black and Lynch, 2011: 36). Reports on research on the US workplace environment in March 2006 which was a survey with a sample size of 2013. The research was related to workplace designs, work satisfaction, and productivity. Eighty nine percent of the respondents rated design from important to very important. Almost (90%) of senior officials revealed that effective workplace design is important for the increase in employees' productivity. The final outcome of the survey suggested that businesses can enhance their productivity by improving their workplace designs (Gensler, 2011: 367-370).

A rough estimation was made by executives, which showed that an increase of almost (22%) could be achieved in the company's performance if their offices are well designed. But practically, many organisations still do not give much importance to workplace design. As many as (40%) of the employees believed that their companies wanted to keep their costs low which is why their workplaces had bad designs; and (46%) of employees thought that the priority list of their company did not have workplace design on top. When data was summarized, almost one out of every five employees rated their workplace environment from 'fair to poor'. Ninety percent admitted that their attitude about work was adversely affected by the quality of their workplace environment and (89%) blamed their working environment for their job dissatisfaction (Gensler, 2011: 367-370).

2.6 DIMENSIONS OF OFFICE ERGONOMICS

The lack of ergonomic principles in the office can negatively affect some of the key human body parts i.e. the eyes, neck, wrist, arms, back, hips, legs, knees and feet. Moran (2010: 101), suggests that because of the health risks posed by poor posture and repetitive stress, proper ergonomics are too important to ignore. Figure 2.3 illustrates ideal ergonomics for working at a computer workstation.
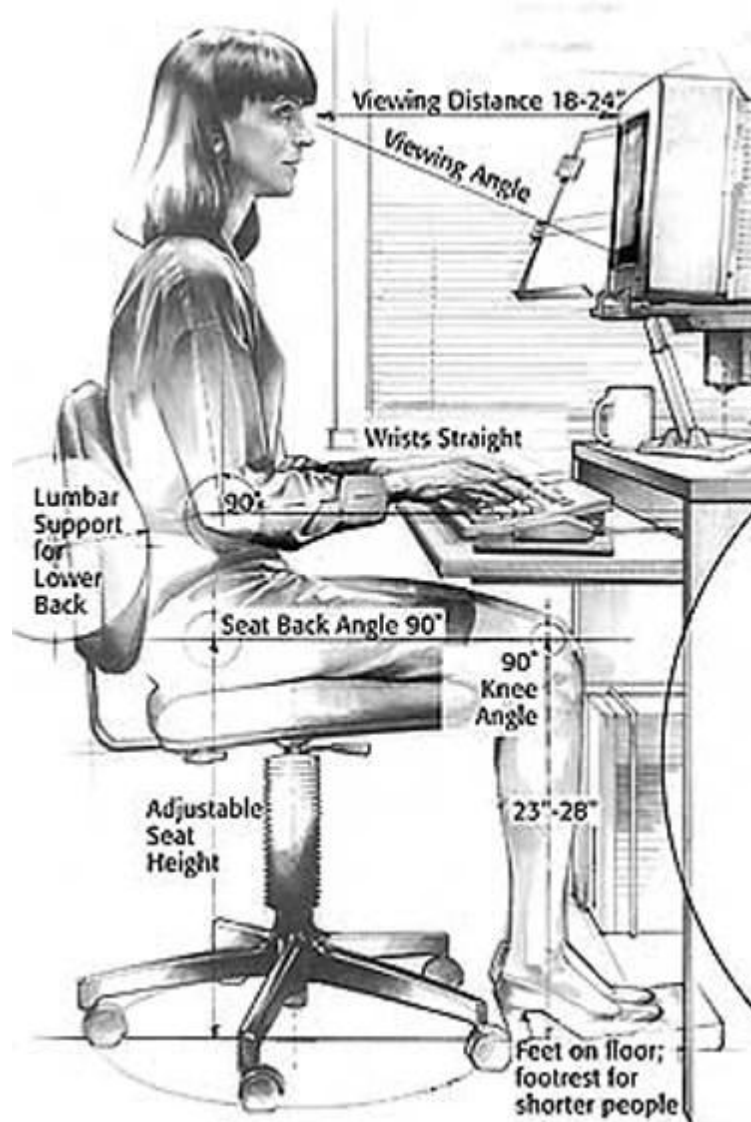
Figure 2.3: Computer workstation variables
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Computer_Workstation_Variables.jpg

2.6.1 Eyes and neck

Incorrect monitor positioning can cause neck and eye strain, and can lead to poor seat positioning, which creates pressure on the back. Costello, the ergonomics consultant, says the top of your monitor should be positioned just above your eye level when you're seated. This is the best place for your 'vision cone,' your most immediate field of vision, which starts at the top at your eye level and descends at a 30-degree angle. When monitors are too far away, people tend to lean forward to see well. This is increasingly true as people age, since vision inevitably declines over time. A rule of thumb: if you can extend your arm and just touch the screen with your fingertips, then you're in the right position (Moran, 2010: 103).

2.6.2 Wrists and arms

To keep wrists and arms at an optimum position, reducing the risk of repetitive-motion injuries, your keyboard and mouse should be at the same level as your elbows when you're seated. Since most desks are too high for this position, a simple fix is an adjustable keyboard tray that attaches to the underside of your desk, says Cynthia M. Burt of the Environmental Health and Safety Department at UCLA (Moran, 2010: 104).

2.6.3 Back and hips

Good news for aging disks: sitting properly takes (20% - 30%)of the pressure off your lower back. Your chair should be between 17 inches and 19 inches deep, and it should have good lower-back support. Your body should be positioned with your back against the chair and your hips open. If you find yourself leaning forward to see your monitor or reach the keyboard, move them toward you (Moran, 2010: 104).

2.6.4 Legs and knees

Leg positioning contributes to your overall position in the chair, says Burt, so be sure your legs are bent at about 90-degree angles at the knees. This helps alleviate pressure on the back. Burt warns that movement is essential for circulation, however, so allow for subtle shifts in positioning and be sure to stand, stretch and walk a few steps at least once an hour. Move about more frequently if you have diagnosed circulation problems (Moran, 2010: 105).

2.6.5 Feet

Feet should be firmly planted on the floor. If the chair positioning you require for proper wrist alignment results in your feet not reaching the floor, use a block, a few books or some other type of footrest to support your feet. However, make sure that the height of the support keeps your knees at a right angle, says Costello (Moran, 2010: 106).

2.7 THE CONCEPT OF EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

Every organisation requires highly performing individuals in order to ensure competitive advantage and attainment of corporate goals. High employee performance is therefore one of the critical determinants of the level of organisational productivity and accomplishments. Accomplishing tasks and performing at a high level can be a source of satisfaction, with feelings of mastery and pride. In defining the concept of employee performance, Campbell et al. (2010: 29) as cited in Sonnentag (2002: 26), differentiate between an action (i.e. behavioural) aspect and an outcome aspect of performance. The behavioural aspect refers to what an individual does in the work situation. It encompasses behaviours such as assembling parts of a car engine, selling personal computers, teaching basic reading skills to elementary school children, or performing heart surgery.

The outcome aspect refers to the consequence or result of the individual's behaviour. The above described behaviours may result in outcomes such as numbers of engines assembled, pupils' reading proficiency, sales figures, or number of successful heart operations. In simple terms, employee performance can be defined as the extent to which an organisational member contributes to achieving the goals of the organisation (Sonnentag, 2002: 27).

2.7.1 Factors affecting employee performance

Al-Anzi (2009: 35), suggests that the key factors that affect employee productivity and performance fall into two categories:
  - Management driven factors and;
  - Factors that arise from premises, offices or factory design.

2.7.1.1 Management driven factors

Al-Anzi (2009: 36), identifies the following as some of the management driven factors that tend to affect employee's productivity and performance:
  - Organisational plans such as the allocation of responsibilities at all levels of the organisation, definition of job descriptions and the degree of access

to the management and administrative support needed to complete their tasks;

☐ Working patterns, shift-working, break times, absence or holiday cover; and

☐ Health and safety policies, including the provision of training, development of safe working practices and the adequate supply of protective clothing and equipment.

2.7.1.2 Factors that arise from premises, offices or factory design

Al-Anzi (2009: 38), proceeds to further identify the following as the key premises or office factors that tend to affect employee productivity and performance:

☐ Furniture;

☐ Workspace availability;

☐ Light intensity;

☐ Weather/temperature;

☐ Ventilation/humidity;

☐ Noise/vibration; and

☐ Premises hygiene/welfare facilities.

Similarly, Leblebici (2012: 10), identifies two (2) major variables as affecting employee performance and productivity:

☐ Physical components of the environment; and

☐ Behavioural components of the environment.

2.7.2 Physical components of the environment

Leblebici (2012: 11), explains that the physical components of the environment include:

☐ Comfort level: ventilation, heating, natural lighting, artificial lighting, decor, cleanliness, overall comfort, physical security.

☐ Office layout: informal meeting areas, formal meeting areas, quiet areas, privacy, personal storage, general storage, work area – desk and circulation space.

2.7.3 Behavioural components of the environment

According to Leblebici (2012:11), the behavioural components of the environment include:

☐ Level of interaction and distraction: social interaction, work interaction, creative physical environment, overall atmosphere, position relative to colleagues, position relative to equipment, overall office layout and refreshments.

Leblebici (2012: 12), also identifies the list below as being some of the workplace factors affecting employee performance:

☐ Performance feedback;
☐ Role recognition;
☐ Defined processes;
☐ Workplace incentives;
☐ Supervisor support;
☐ Mentoring/coaching;
☐ Opportunity to apply skills;
☐ Job aids; and
☐ Goal-setting.

2.8 RELEVANCE OF WORKPLACE SETTING

The ultimate aim of workplace setting is to generally ensure employee safety, enhance performance and productivity. Beyond these objectives, many other benefits are known to accrue to an organisation when management commits to the development and maintenance of ergonomics in the workplace. Practical Solutions for a Safer Workplace (2002) published by the Washington State Department for Labour and Industries observes that while office setting improvements to the work environment are primarily used to create a safer and more healthful work environment, companies may experience other benefits, including:

☐ Increased productivity;
☐ Increased work quality;

☐ Reduced turnover;

☐ Reduced absenteeism; and

☐ Increased morale.

From a safety perspective Gyekye (2006: 90), emphasizes that environmental conditions affect employee safety perceptions which impact upon employee commitment. Similarly, extensive scientific research conducted by Roelofsen (2002: 25), has also yielded indications suggesting that improving the working environment results in a reduction in the number of complaints and absenteeism and an increase in productivity.

2.9   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Following from the literature reviewed, the relationship between office design and employee performance can be conceptualized and depicted as in Figure 2.4. The conceptualized framework defines the set of workplace elements that are perceived to impact on an employee's performance. The elements such as furniture, noise level and temperature are essentially independent variables impacting on employee performance, the dependent variable.

Figure 2.4: The relationship between office design and employee performance
Source: Nonkululeko Mazubane own construct, 2015

For instance, poorly designed furniture set out in an inefficient spatial arrangement and noisy environment will most likely increase employee stress and fatigue levels, and lead to back, neck and eye strain. These negative outcomes consequently lead to high rates of employee incapacitation, absenteeism, low morale and low interest. The gross result of these happenings is impairment of employee performance. It is significant to note that these elements have different impacts on different employees based on their objective assessment of the role the workplace environment has on their performance (Al-Anzi, 2009: 81).

In terms of the relationship that exist between an employee's workplace environment and his/her level of performance on the job, Al-Anzi (2009: 82), posits that how well employees engage with the organisation, especially with their immediate environment, influences to a great extent their error rate, level of innovation and collaboration with other employees, absenteeism and, ultimately, how long they stay in the job.

2.10 Nature of poor work performance

In general poor performance has a negative effect on both the organisation's image and the personnel especially those members that are making an effort to ensure the organisation's goals are accomplished. Therefore, different authors and company policies were consulted by the researcher to view their perspective on how they see the nature of employee poor work performance. Poor performance means the failure by an employee to meet the required performance standard. A labour relations article, *Advice on Managing Poor Performance* (2012: 1), says "Poor performance has a negative impact on productivity and workplace effectiveness and in severe cases could lead to an increase of work accidents."

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (1998: 7), explains the difference between poor performance and misconduct as follows, misconduct is generally a

failure to follow a workplace rules whereas poor performance on the other hand, is simply the failure of an employee to do the job at an acceptable level.

According to the SA Labour Guide (2012: 1), poor work performance falls under the broad heading of incapacity. Poor work performance or failure by an employee to reach and maintain the employer's work performance standards in terms of quantity and quality of output is an ever increasing problem. After the employee has undertaken to perform accordingly then fails to perform the duty, then the employee is said to be incapable, and the employer has the right to dismiss them after following a fair procedure and ensuring that the dismissal is for a fair reason. The Public Service Commission (PSC) toolkit for management of poor performance (2007: 14), explains poor performance as, "Simply put, poor performance is the failure of an employee to do his or her job, or to do it at an acceptable level."

Furthermore, poor performing employees are also characterized as "employees with whom you are seriously disappointed. You have little confidence that they will do their jobs, and/or do them right. You often have to do or redo their work, or you may have had to modify their assignments to such an extent that you are left confident to only give them work that they can do, which is much less than you would otherwise want them to do" (PSC toolkit for management of poor performance, 2007: 14).

The South African Police Service (SAPS) Discipline Regulation (2006: 8), makes a distinction between misconduct and poor work performance as follows: misconduct refers to cases where the employee intentionally or negligently does not adhere to the norms and standards of required conduct, while poor performance refers to those cases where the employee is unable to adhere to the set norms and standards of service delivery. It is important to mention that misconduct is punishable by the law as much as poor performance though the degree of punishment may vary.

Grogan (2007a: 257) says, there is an obvious overlap between negligence and poor performance and perhaps in some cases between negligence and

incapacity. Grogan further mentions that it is permissible in appropriate circumstances to treat both negligence and poor work performance as forms of misconduct.

2.11 Causes of employee poor work performance

Poor work performance is prevalent in all sectors. This is evident as the media constantly conveys the unhappiness that leads to protests by communities regarding the failure of service delivery and the failure to perform by the government departments is alarming. Some departments even resort to terminating or revoking managers due to non-performance. In the PSC Toolkit for the Management of Poor Performance in the Public Service (2007: 2) Professor Sangweni, the Chairperson of the Public Service Commission, in his foreword says: "In its recently released Reports on the Management of Poor Performance and Grievance Trends in the Public Service, the PSC has observed that poor performance is a problem in the Public Service. Furthermore, the causes are multiple, but a lack of skills and shortcomings associated with the management of performance itself, in particular the management of poor performance, were specifically evident in both Reports."

2.12 Incompetence and incompatibility

Albert and Rimsky (2012: 1), mention that most managers have been in the situation where an employee's performance is not meeting their expectation. Furthermore, many times the poor performance has to do with miscommunication or an employee not understanding the expectations of the job. The South African Labour Guide (2012: 1), mentions that the reason that disciplinary action is rarely applied for poor performance is that poor performance is usually not the fault of the employee and the employee cannot be disciplined for something that is not his or her fault. Furthermore, the Guide mentions that there are many factors that can be the direct cause of poor performance or that may contribute to it. These causes are:

- Lack of training, qualifications and experience
- Alcohol or drug addiction
- Outside influences

Work related stress

 Ill health or injury

 Incompatibility

2.13 Poor decision making by management

Grogan (2007a: 201), points out that decisions taken by management sometimes cripple the employees' morale, discouraging them from performing at an acceptable level. The manner in which they communicate with employees and take decisions without considering the circumstances of the employees is a big contributor to poor performance. A major problem is that managers do not always do the necessary interviews with the employee to establish the causes of the changed behaviour instead just charging the employee with misconduct. Often internal processes are not followed properly and the necessary steps not taken against poor performers if they are a favourite of the manager. A lack of leadership skills from the managers can disadvantage employees because then organisational prescripts are not always properly implemented. Improper placement of members and promotion of incompetent people to prominent post due to favouritism of some employees over others can also play a big role in members' morale (Grogan, 2007a: 201).

Grogan (2007b: 2015), discusses a case where the employer made the mistake of shifting an employee to another position not requiring skills he allegedly lacked. They then dismissed the employee for not possessing those same skills, even though they were not needed in the new position. The dismissal was ruled unfair. In another case discussed by Grogan (2007b: 2015), an airline pilot was awarded compensation because the employer failed to give him an opportunity to state his case before dismissing him after he received a poor rating in a flight simulator test.

2.14 Consequences of poor work performance

A labour relations article, *Advice on Managing Poor Performance* (2012: 1), explains that acceptable level as usually, but not always documented in written performance standards and typically defined in terms of quality, quantity, or

timeliness. Furthermore, the possible effects when poor work performance is not addressed, the following may occur, resentment and negative impact on those employees that are performing to a satisfactory standard. Then the performance of the individuals assists in accomplishment of the set standards for the organisation.

According to the PSC Toolkit for the Management of Poor Performance in the Public Service (2007: 9), by failing to address poor performance, management sends a clear message to employees that they need not meet their performance expectations and they should not expect any consequence for their unacceptable behaviour. Apart from that, taking action against one employee does not lower morale amongst other employees. In fact, the opposite is true; often taking action leads to a more productive work environment. The article *Advice on Managing Poor Performance* (2012: 1), states that poor performance has a negative impact on productivity and workplace effectiveness and in severe cases could lead to an increase of workplace accidents.

In support of the above points, Jayasuriya (2011: 1), says that "Performance can drive an organisation towards success while poor performance may slow down its growth." The author goes on to say that failure to address poor performance could cause resentment and have a negative impact on those employees who are performing satisfactorily.

2.15 Motivation

The other possible manner to improve performance is motivation which can play a big role in improving employee performance. Swanepoel et al. (2000: 353), define motivation as the willingness to do something, and is conditioned by this action's ability to satisfy some need of the individual. Swanepoel et al. (2000: 355), mention the hierarchy of needs and state that probably the best-known theory of motivation is Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory postulates that within every person there exists a hierarchy of five needs. The five needs are:

- Physiological needs – these are associated with biological survival of the individual and species.
- Safety needs – include security and protection from physical and emotional harm
- Social needs – these include needs to belong, to be liked and for friendship.
- Self-Esteem needs – these include internal mental states such as self-liking autonomy, achievement as well as external factors such as needs relating to status, recognition and attention.
- Self-actualization – this concerns the need to become what one is capable of becoming and includes needs relating to growth and development, achieving one's potential and self-fulfilment.

Cascio (1998: 299-300), discusses managing for maximum performance as the need to manage performance effectively at the level of either individuals or the work team, for them to stay focused on the overall objectives, recalling information about performance that builds on the foundation of earlier lessons.

Cascio (1998: 300), further discuss alternative strategies for building employee trust and productivity, mentioning that to attract both domestic and foreign investment, it is critical for any nation to improve its productivity growth rate, relative to that of other industrialized nations. As motivation Cascio says many firms proudly point to their productivity increases and claim that the increases are due to employees' working smarter, not harder. But many firms fail to reward employees for working either harder or smarter. Furthermore, performance management requires a willingness and commitment to focus on improving performance at the level of individual or team every day.

To practice sound performance management, managers must provide timely feedback about performance, while constantly focusing everyone's attention on the ultimate objective (for example world class customer service).

2.15.1 Rewards that motivate behaviour

Cascio (1998: 301), says rewards tend to reduce turnover and to increase loyalty to the company, furthermore there are a number of alternative strategies available to building employee trust and productivity.

2.15.2 Integration and application of motivation theories

Cascio (1998: 301), indicates three key areas of responsibility in order to coordinate and integrate human resource policy. These areas to energize employee motivation are;

- Setting goals – goal setting has a proven track record of success in improving performance in a variety of settings and cultures.
- Measures – managers must also be able to measure the extent to which goals have been accomplished.
- Assessment – here is where performance appraisal comes in. Regular assessment of progress toward goals focuses the attention and efforts of an employee or team. If a manager takes the time to identify measurable goals, but then fails to assess progress toward them he or she is asking for trouble. In a nutshell, to define performance properly, therefore, you must do three things well: set goals, decide how to measure accomplishment, and provide regular assessment of progress.

2.15.3 Performance facilitation (provide resources)

Managers who are committed to managing for maximum performance recognize that one of their major responsibilities is to eliminate roadblocks to successful performance.

2.15.4 Performance encouragement (provide timely rewards that are valued by employees)

To encourage performance especially repeated good performance, managers must provide a sufficient number of rewards that employees really value, and do so in a timely and fair manner. Do not bother offering rewards that nobody cares about, like a gift certificate to see a fortune teller. On the contrary, to determine

the types of rewards employees' value, begin by asking people what is most important to them, for example, pay benefits, free time, merchandise, or special privileges. Then consider tailoring your awards program so that employees or teams can choose from a menu of similarly valued options.

Smit et al. (2011: 384), says that improved employee performance motivation is one of the factors that directly affects employee performance, and managers can play a major part in the motivation of their employees. Furthermore, the authors states that nobody can motivate another person: motivation comes from within and motivation is an inner desire to satisfy an unsatisfied need. Smit et al. (2011: 387-392), concur with Swanepoel by also discussing theories associated with researchers such as Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Hertzberg's two-factor theory and McClelland regarding the motivators that people need to be satisfied and the factors that influence individual behaviour. According to this perspective, people have needs that they wish to satisfy and they direct their behaviour towards satisfying these needs (Smit et al. 2011: 387). Below is a diagram illustrating the model of Maslow' hierarchy of needs as adapted from the book of Smit et al. in accordance to the importance of each and every need in the hierarchy. The diagram indicates that the needs are categorized according to higher order of needs and lower order of needs. This basically shows the level of importance of these categories. The five levels of the hierarchy might not be the only needs employees require for optimal performance; however, they are the common basics of every human individual to survive.
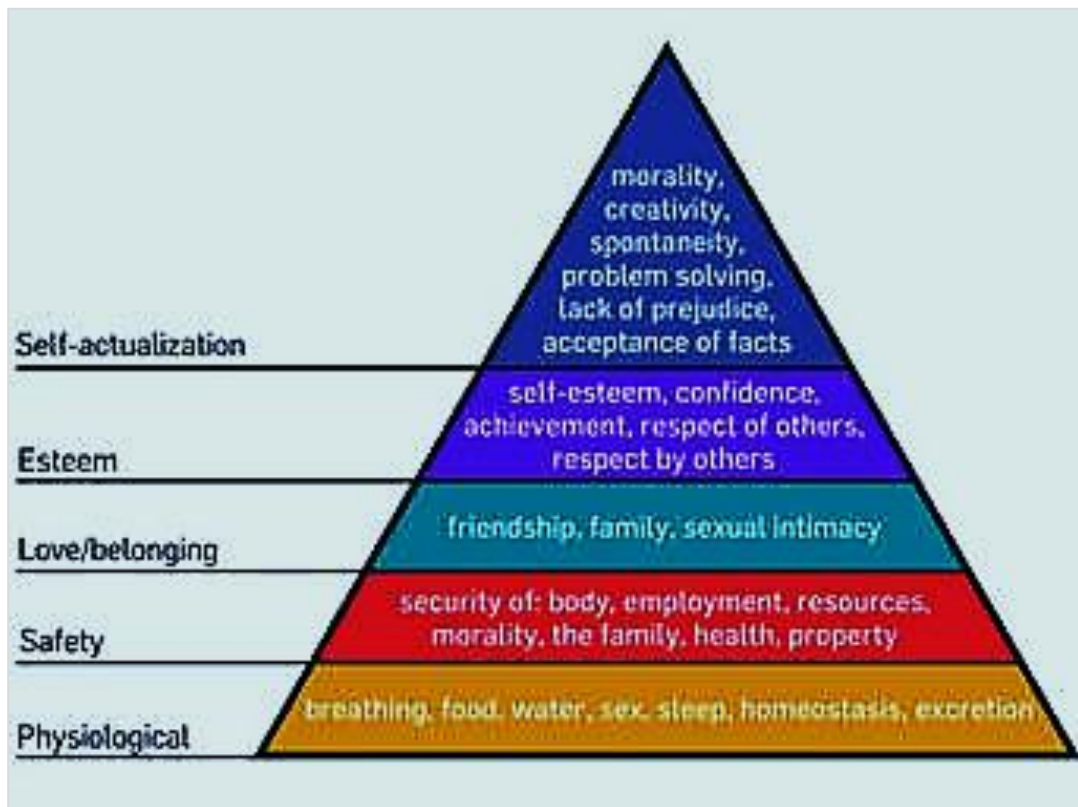
Figure 2.15.4.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs model

2.16 CONCLUSION

In each and every organisation it is imperative that management take into consideration the issues pertaining to the welfare of the human resources. This is a valuable asset for any company that is required to be successful in performance. Employees' poor performance should be regarded as a symptom of a bigger problem that is challenging the employees. Well motivated, satisfied individual needs and pleasant work environment automatically leads to high performance.

Employees that are well skilled and equipped with necessary physical resources determine how best they can contribute to the success of the company.

Therefore, managers need to recognize their staff contribution by constantly encouraging them no matter how little the effort contributed in order to win the employees' trust thereby ensuring that the company values and ethics are maintained.

According to Smit et al. (2011: 389), Maslow's hierarchy of needs stipulates clearly the expectations of each and every individual for their self-fulfilment. Putting people first as per the Batho Pele Principles is very important for all managers to ensure that the staff feel a sense of belonging and are secure in their company. In turn that will eliminate chances of labour turnover and absenteeism which will increase production and rendering of services to the customers and the company or organisation will obtain customer satisfaction.

CHAPTER 3 : RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on a review of the literature with the aim of establishing the relevance of the study by comparing it to previously researched information. This chapter considers the methodology of the research and describes the selection of the sample and the design of the survey instruments used to collect the data from the staff of eThekwini Municipality operating from offices at the City Hall in Durban. The principal aim of this chapter is to present the instruments used in the study and the statistical analysis undertaken in an effort to provide answers to the research questions and the general objectives of the research. The chapter also presents a profile of the City Hall in eThekwini Municipality, the case study for the research.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design spells out the basic strategies or logical steps that researchers adopt to test their hypotheses (Polit and Beck, 2010: 222). Research design guides the researcher in planning/designing and implementing the study in a way that is most likely to achieve the intended goal (Burns and Grove 2009: 218; Schmidt and Brown, 2009: 123). A quantitative method was used in order to accomplish the result of this study. Quantitative method was used to quantify the problem by way of generating numerical data. Data was transformed into useable statistics. It was used to quantify attitudes, opinions, behaviours, and other defined variables and to generalise results from the staff members of eThekwini Municipality at City Hall. Quantitative research uses measurable data to formulate facts and uncover patterns in research. Quantitative data collection methods are much more structured than qualitative data collection methods.

3.3 TARGET POPULATION

According to James (2012: 10-31), study population is the total members of a defined class of people, objects, places or events selected because they are

relevant to your research question. The targeted population of this study was all administrative workers of eThekwini Municipality at City Hall.

3.4 SAMPLING STRATEGY

A census sampling technique was used to conduct the study which means every administrative employee was selected. According to Sundstrom et al. (2010: 352), census sampling refers to the procedure of systematically acquiring and recording information about the members of a given population. It is a regularly occurring and official count of a particular population. The sample size of this study was 65 administrative employees of eThekwini at City Hall. Census was appropriate for this study because the population size was manageable. From the 65 administrative staff, five did not return the questionnaire and 10 were incomplete. According to Ryan et al. (2011: 102), a sample is a subset of a population that is used to represent the entire group as a whole. When doing research, it is often impractical to survey every member of a particular population because the sheer number of people is simply too large.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Questionnaires were used to collect data. Questionnaires had closed ended questions which were hand delivered to the respondents. Respondents were asked consent to participate in the study (Annexure 3). The respondents were given 10 days to fill in the questionnaires, after five days the respondents were called and reminded of the questionnaires and a final reminder was made two days before questionnaires were due for collection. Respondents were requested to tick which response best suited them in that specific question. The questionnaire consisted of likert scales. The researcher then visited the staff to collect the questionnaires and thank the respondents for being part of the research. The respondents were protected and the responses remained anonymous and were and will be treated with the highest confidentiality. A letter was attached to the questionnaires to explain the purpose of the research and its relevance and seeking consent to participate in the research (Annexure 3). Contact information of the researcher was provided in case the respondents had any questions.

3.6 PRE-TESTING OF THE DATA COLLECTION TOOL

Before starting data collection, pre-testing of the research instrument was conducted to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the questionnaire regarding question format, relevance, reliability, wording and order. This was conducted by the investigator and two research assistants. The pre-test questionnaires and a checklist were answered by four secretaries, three clerks and three Administrators from eThekwini Municipality at the City Hall. No amendments were made to the questions. The respondents who participated in the pre-test were not included in the main study.

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained from the questionnaire was validated through vetting for consistency and completeness. Subsequently, the responses were partitioned into homogeneous sub-groups to facilitate analysis. The data collected was analysed quantitatively using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23 and Microsoft Excel, and results presented through graphs, pie charts, and tables. Pictures of unique offices to show office arrangement, seating arrangement, furniture were also taken for good visual effect.

According to Uzee (1999: 26), data analysis and interpretation is the process of assigning meaning to the collected data and determining the conclusions, significance, and implications of the findings. The steps involved in data analysis are a function of the type of information collected; however, returning to the purpose of the assessment and the assessment questions will provide a structure for the organisation of the data and a focus for the analysis.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According Namuba (2008: 23) it is crucial that all researchers are aware of research ethics. Ethics relate to two groups of people: those conducting research, which should be aware of their obligations and responsibilities, and those "researched upon" who have a basic right to be protected.

Administrative employees who were part of the study were treated with respect and respondents were protected from victimization. The researcher applied for an ethical clearance through the DUT research office. The study was not harmful to the respondents in anyway. Questionnaires took 15 minutes of the respondents' time to complete and participation was voluntarily and the respondents could withdraw from the study anytime without giving reasons. The information given by respondents was used for research purposes only. The researcher explained and distributed the information letter to the participants. Participants were given consent forms to read and sign if they agreed to take part in the research study Respondents were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that confidentiality would be maintained in relation to the information collected.

3.9   RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In order to ensure reliability in this study, the researcher conducted pretesting of the questionnaire to 10 administrative workers at City Hall in eThekwini Municipality; the 10 administrative did not participate in the main study. This helped to ensure that the research instrument was reliable and to ascertain that questions were simple and easily understood. Validity checks whether the questionnaire was validated and measured what was supposed to be measured. It also helped to identify minor grammatical errors before the administration of the instrument.

3.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter described the quantitative design and research methodology used in the study, specifically focusing on the assumed and actual target population and resulting sample. Ethical considerations are described as well as the collection and management of the data. The data analysis process is introduced. Results will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4 : PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the analysis of the results of the fieldwork and discussion of the findings of the study. It examines the design and furnishings of eThekwini Municipality and their effect on the performance of City Hall employees. It then seeks to establish a link between workplace environment and employees' performance at the City Hall. The study's overriding concern is that the quality and functionality of a workplace environment wields a considerable influence on the level of employee productivity and overall performance.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

A total of 65 questionnaires were administered to staff of eThekwini Municipality who operate from the City Hall. Out of this, 50 questionnaires representing (88%) were completed and returned. Over (80%) of the respondents were less than 50 years old indicating the youthful nature of eThekwini Municipality employees at the City Hall. Indeed (76.1%) of the total respondents were females whiles (23.9%) were males. The respondents who were drawn spanned the various job levels with the majority of the respondents being junior and middle level staff, accounting for (92.0%) of the total respondents. Senior Administrator accounted for only (8%) of the respondents.

Figure 4.2.1 Demographic Characteristics Of The Respondent

- 88% Completed & Returned
- 80% Less than 50 years old
- 76.01% Females
- 23.09% Males
- 46% Junior Level
- 46% Middle Level
- Senior Administrator
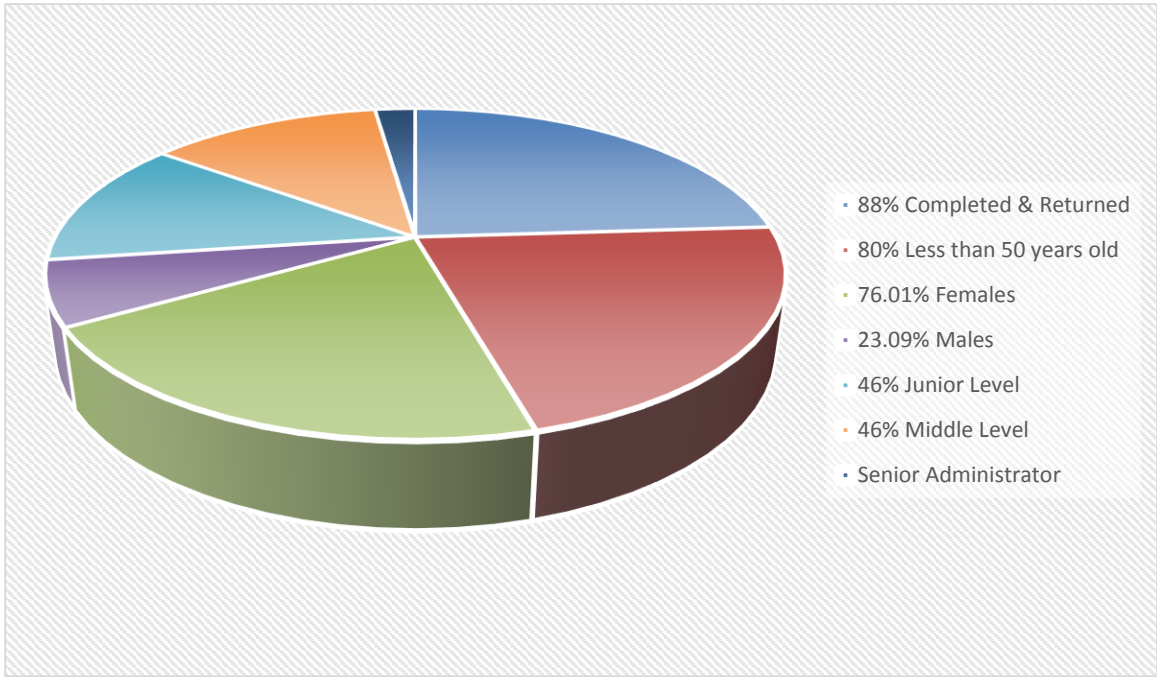
The respondents were drawn from the various divisions, departments and units at the City Hall to ensure adequate and fair representation of views of employees on the subject. Those from the Administration Division were however in the majority accounting for (17.5%) of the total, followed by the Finance Division with (14.77%) of the total. Besides the respondents of the questionnaires.

4.3 OFFICE DESIGN, FINISHES AND FURNISHING AT THE CITY HALL

All senior administrators at City Hall have been allocated cellular offices which are next to senior managers' offices (Plate 4.1).The rest of the employees share offices, with the number of occupants per office increasing as one goes down the job levels (Plate 4.2). At the lower levels, between 2 to 4 employees were observed to be sharing one cellular office.

Figure 4.1: A cellular office accommodating one staff member
Field Survey, November 2015

Figure 4.2: An open plan office
Field Survey, November 2015

The state and decor of most of the offices were observed to be unimpressive due to the outdated plywood partitions which have over the years grown darker in colour creating a dull and uninspiring working environment. The situation raises serious ergonomic concerns regarding inadequate lighting of offices and uninspiring walls which have the tendency to stress employees and affect their health and overall performance.

The study also observed that most of the offices at City Hall have been fitted with window unit air-conditioners that often created considerable noise in the offices. Nearly all employees have been provided with furniture, however, much of the furniture was found to be outdated, less functional or inappropriate for the users. For instance some employees were found using un-adjustable chairs which could not be adjusted to fit the employee or the assigned task raising serious health concerns. The manager in charge of the Registry Department during my visit while taking pictures expressed concerns over the continuous use of old and less functional furniture within his department. He indicated that his earlier request to the Administration Division for some old furniture to be replaced in his secretariat was yet to be met.

Indeed, it was observed that the finishes at the City Hall had seen some improvements over the years. The few improvements that were identified included tiling of some of the hitherto terrazzo floors, replacement of selected plywood partitions with formica material fixed in aluminium profiles and the replacement of the building's disused passenger lifts which were effected in 2011. These improvements were confirmed by the Chief Facilities Officer. Similarly, at the time of the study, City Hall had taken delivery of a new 700 kVA standby generator as a replacement for the existing 500 kVA generator which had been in use since the year 2005 and had become unreliable.

4.4 THE SETTING IN THE DESIGN, FINISHES AND FURNISHING OF THE WORKPLACE

The study identified considerable lapses in various offices at the City Hall. Generally, the lapses concerned mainly poor office décor/finishes, inadequate office illumination, appreciable office noise levels, uncomfortable room temperatures and in certain cases inadequate office furniture. The views expressed by the respondents on the various poor office setting are presented graphically in Figures 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4 confirm some of the challenges identified in offices at the City Hall.

4.4.1 Office design and decor

The City Hall workplace environment is generally defined by cellular offices created with polished plywood partitions. The plywood partitions give the offices a dull monotonous and uninspiring ambiance. The study revealed that a total of (60.2%) of the employees surveyed are not satisfied with the office design and decor at the City Hall. Respondents who are dissatisfied with the office design and décor alluded to the dark partitioning walls, seemingly noisy window air-conditions and inadequate lighting. Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the respondents' level of satisfaction with the office design and decor at the City Hall. The Chief Facilities Officer and the Principal Human Resources Officer expressed similar sentiments and hinted that the organisation was considering renovating the City Hall in the near future.
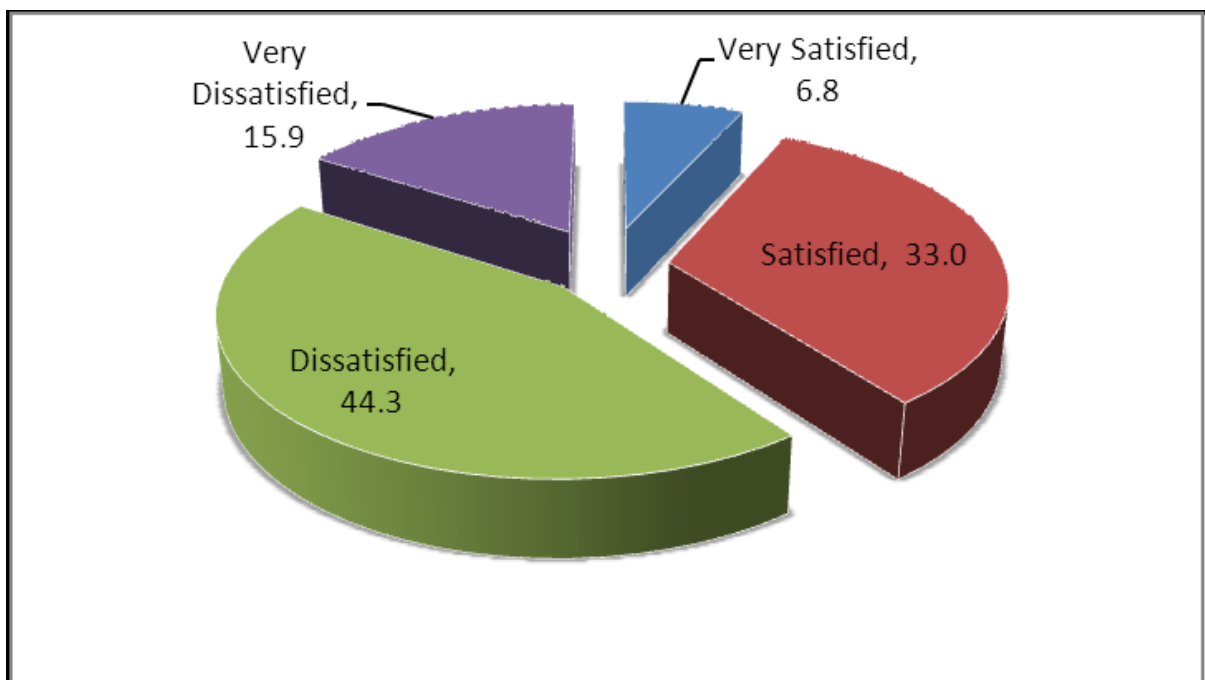
Figure 4.1: Respondents' satisfaction with office design and décor

Only (6.8%) of the respondents were very satisfied with their office design and decor, while (33.0%) were satisfied. As many as (44.3%) indicated that they were dissatisfied while (15.9%) were very dissatisfied. As already indicated, some of the offices at the City Hall have over the years been given facelift in the form of floor tiling, replacement of old plywood partition and introduction of window

blinds. The respondents who indicated their satisfaction with their office design and decor are most likely to be occupants of such improved offices.

4.4.2 Office furniture

In terms of the functionality and setting of the office furniture, the study revealed as presented in Figure 4.2 that, although (53.4%) of the respondents are satisfied with their office furniture, (42.1%) are dissatisfied with their office furniture as they found them not suitable for their comfort and work.
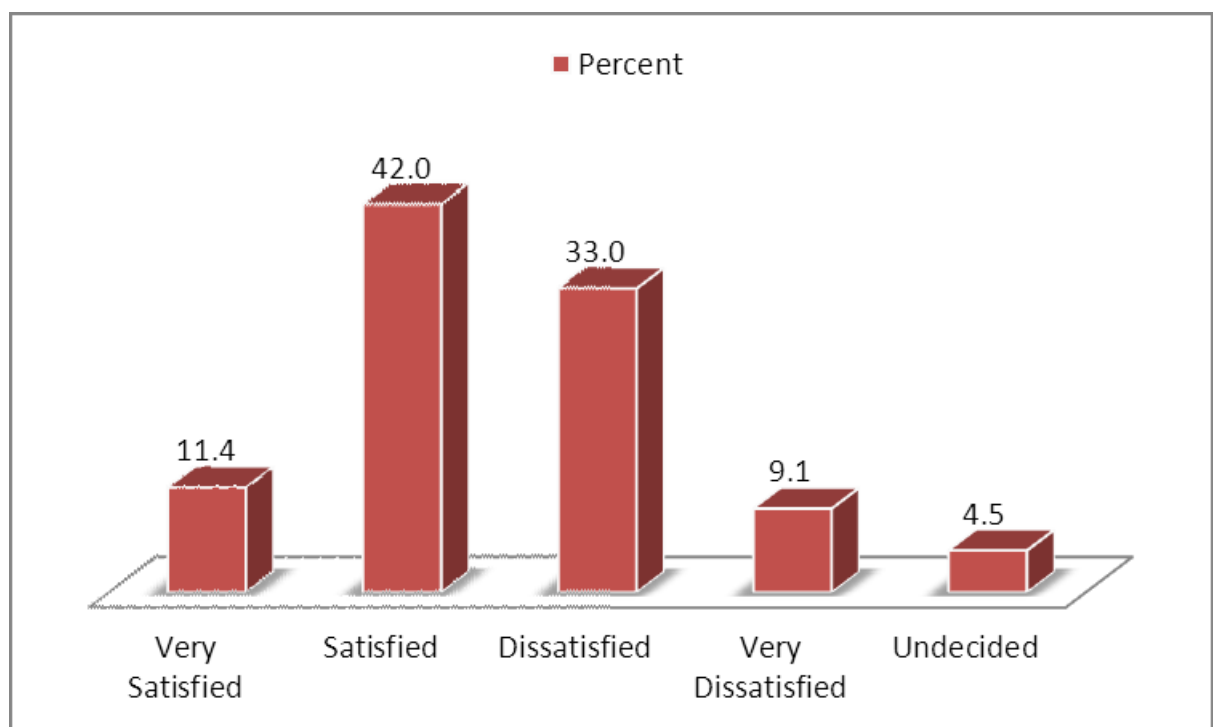
Figure 4.2: Employees' satisfaction with office furniture

Obviously, City Hall's effort to replace old furniture does not appear to have been effective as evidently, much of the old furniture (most of which were procured over 20 years ago) are still in use at the City Hall. The manager in charge of the Registry Department recounted that their earlier requests to the Administration Division for some old furniture to be replaced in their respective departments were yet to be met.

4.4.3 Office illumination

Office illumination is one of the key elements of office setting. This is because it impacts on the visual comfort and capabilities of employees. The study therefore sought respondents' views on their office illumination levels. Although (27.3%) described their offices as illuminated, nearly half of them (48.9%) described their offices as only fairly illuminated while(9.1%) thought their offices were poorly illuminated Figure 4.4.
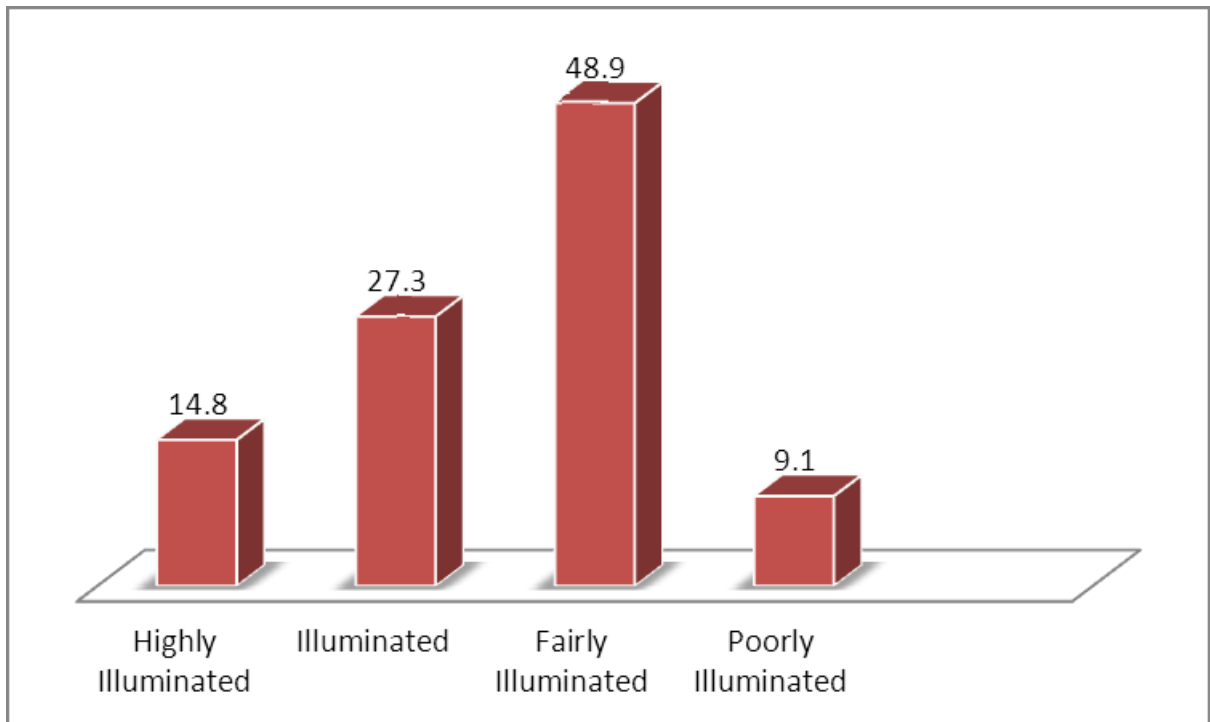
Figure 4.3: Response on office illumination levels

The study observed that a lot of the offices at the City Hall did not appear to be adequately illuminated perhaps due to dark looking plywood partition walls that weaken the illuminative intensity of the compact fluorescent lights installed in the offices.

4.4.4 Noise level

Noise level is one of the essential elements that impacts on employee communication and cognitive activities. Responses were obtained on the noise levels at the City Hall. As shown in Figure 4.5, a total of (27.3%) of the

respondents indicated that their offices are always quiet for productive work, while (31.8%) indicated that their offices are quiet to some extent, but not so all the time. Respondents complained of the window unit air-conditioners as the main contributing factor to the noise at various offices. On the whole, the results seem to suggest that respondents do not have as much of a problem with office noise levels as they did with other variables.
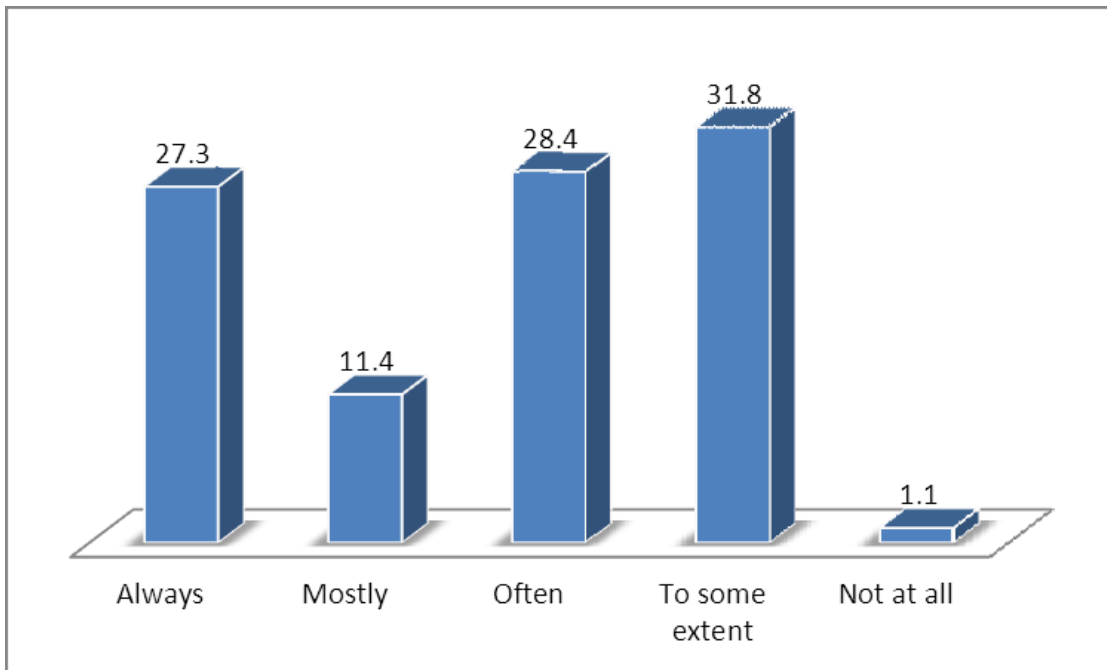
Figure 4.4: Response on office quietness levels

4.4.5 Room temperature

The study considered room temperature as one of the key elements of office setting. It was observed that nearly all the offices at the City Hall have been fitted with window unit air-conditioners to afford employees comfortable working environment. As seen in Figure 4.6, only (1.1%) of the respondents found their office room temperature to be not conducive at all, and like office illumination, it seems this this is also an area that respondents don't have issues with.
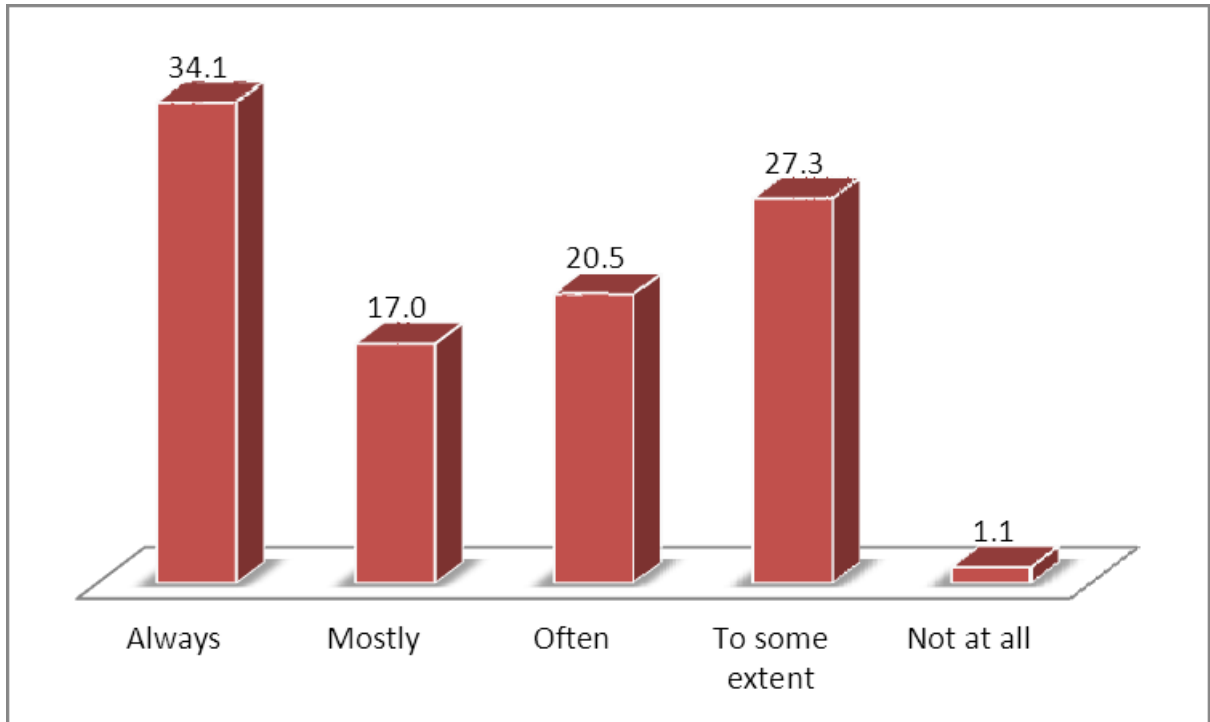
Figure 4.5: Response on conduciveness of office room temperature

Regardless of the appreciable lapses prevalent at the City Hall, it is worthy to note that a few positive features were identified in the areas of office space allocation and equipment. The study observed that the office layout at the City Hall provided employees with ample room and space to conduct their work activities. It is therefore, not surprising that as the majority of respondents, (71.6%), are satisfied with their office spaces.

4.4.6 OFFICE EQUIPMENT

Office equipment such as computers, printers, photocopiers, plotters among others have increasingly become the basic job tools for enhanced performance in the corporate world. Evidently nearly all employees at the City Hall have been provided with computers and other complementary office equipment to facilitate their work. Nevertheless, Figure 4.7 shows that (18.2%) and (11.4%) respectively are dissatisfied and very dissatisfied with their office equipment.
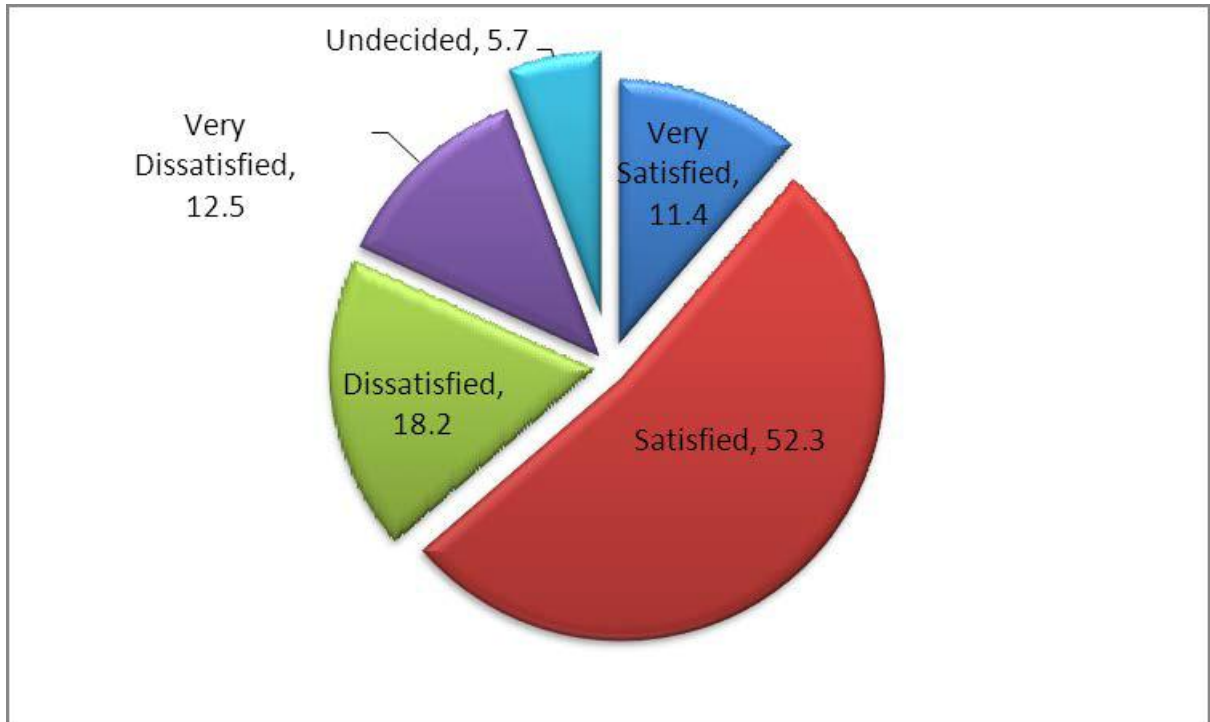
Figure 4.6: Employees' satisfaction with office equipment

4.5 IMPACT OF OFFICE SETTING ON PERFORMANCE OF CITY HALL EMPLOYEES

The study sought to find out whether the City Hall workplace environment has any impact on the performance of its employees. What seems to emerge is that although nearly all the respondents conceded that workplace elements such as office space, room temperature and lighting, furniture and equipment have one way or the other affected their performance, the extent of the impact varied from one employee to the other.

Figure 4.8 shows that (27.3%) of the respondents indicated that their office designs and decor impacted negatively on their job performance by between (70% - 80%). Cumulatively (63.6%) of the total respondents were of the opinion that the effect of office design and decor on their job performance range from (10% - 60%).
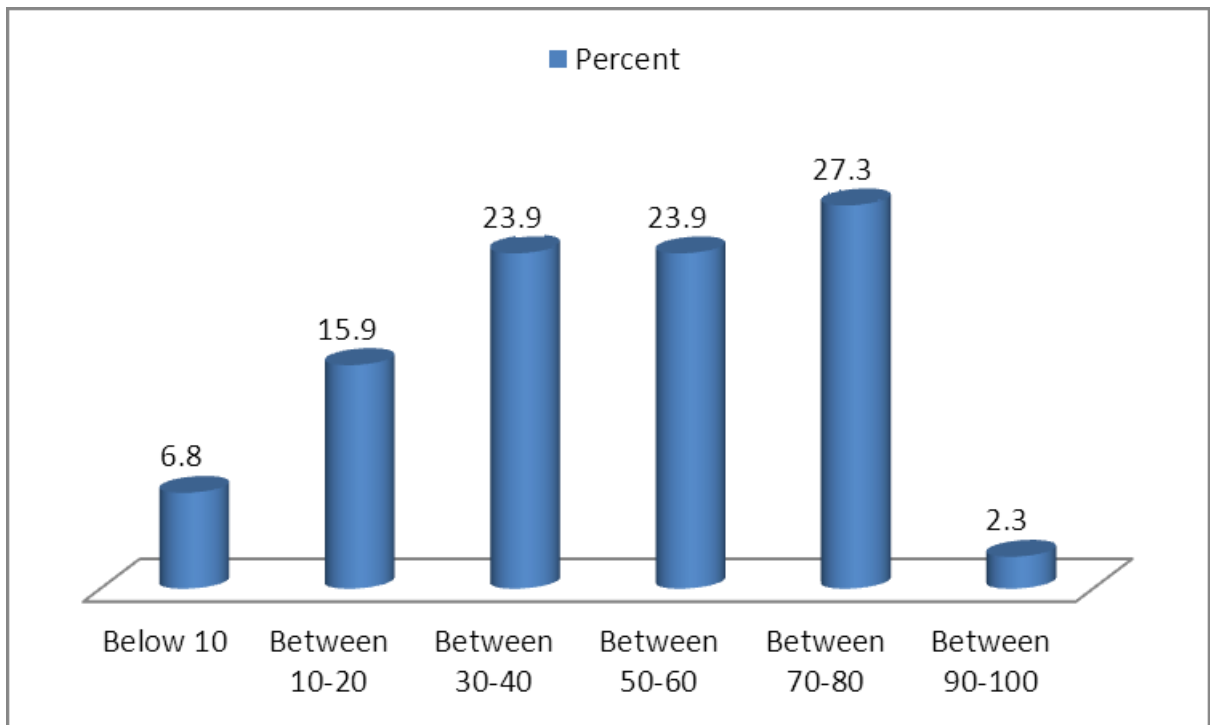
Figure 4.7: Respondents views on the effect of office design and décor on their performance

In their opinion, the cellular offices limit the needed team collaboration and communication. They also argue that the design and the decor was uninspiring, sometimes stressful and in some cases demoralizing thereby affecting their level of productivity. Regardless, (6.8%) of them were of the opinion that the negative effect of their office design and decor on their performance was really less than (10%).

Most of City Hall's transactions with foreign investors and other business stakeholders and technical review meetings take place in the City Hall and as remarked by the Manager in charge of the Registry Department "the current state and décor of the City Hall sometimes indirectly limits our capacity to negotiate hard on certain international deals". Considering City Hall's workplace setting elements and their impact on employee's performance, the study again revealed that workplace elements (such as office furniture, equipment, room temperature, air quality, noise levels and quality of office lighting) negatively affect employees' performance to varying degrees.
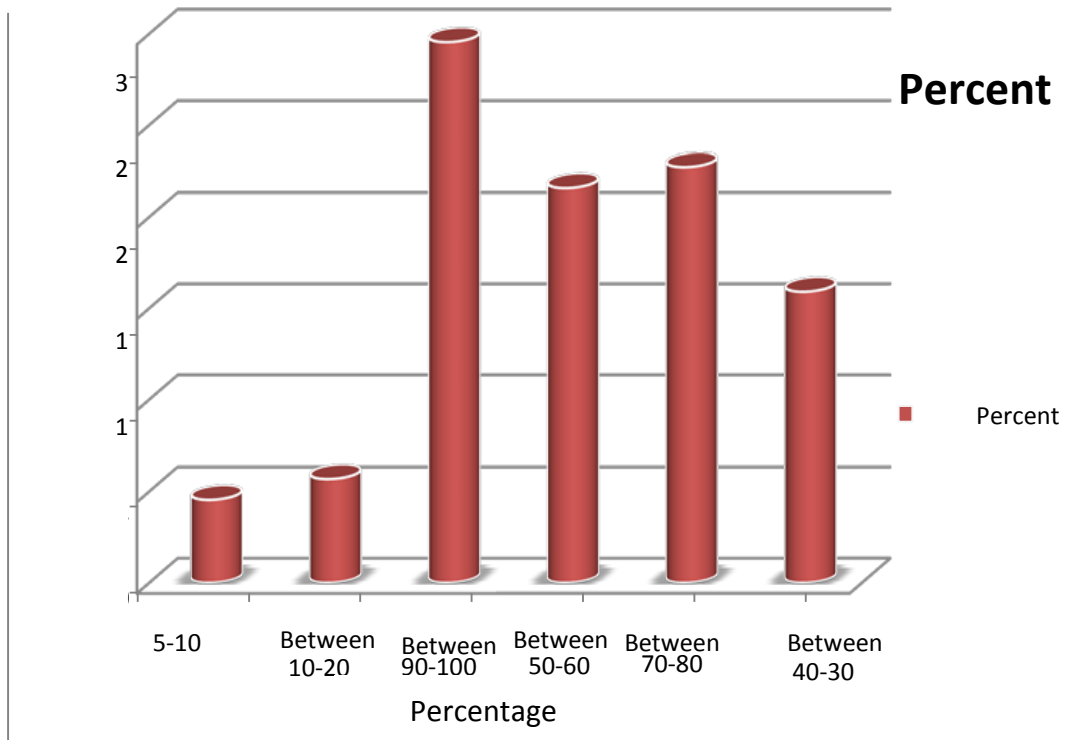
Figure 4.8: Respondents views on the effect of office furniture on their performance

Figure 4.9 gives an overview of the negative effect of office furniture on the performance of the respondents. 26 respondents representing (29.5%) of the total indicated that their office furniture negatively impacted on their performance by between (30% - 40%). Similarly, other respondents as shown in Figure 4.9 expressed their concerns to varying degrees ranging from (10% - 100%) on the effect office furniture has on their performance.

With respect to office environment, (33%) of the respondents felt that this had impacted negatively on their health, while (15%) actually confirmed having suffered an injury or illness due to the nature of their office environments. Some of the respondents complained that sometimes they are unable to sit through the day's work because their furniture causes them backaches and neck strains. Some also confirmed that there had been occasions where they had to stay out of the office for a couple of days due to excruciating back pain which they attributed to their badly designed chairs.

The study sought the opinion of employees at the City Hall on the effect that their office equipment has on their performance. As shown on Figure 4.10, the majority

of the respondents indicated that their office equipment affects their performance considerably. However, 36 respondents representing (40.9%) of the total respondents rated the positive impact of office equipment on their performance at between (70% - 80%). Similarly, other respondents expressed varying degrees ranging from (30% -100%) regarding the positive effect office equipment has on their performance at the City Hall.
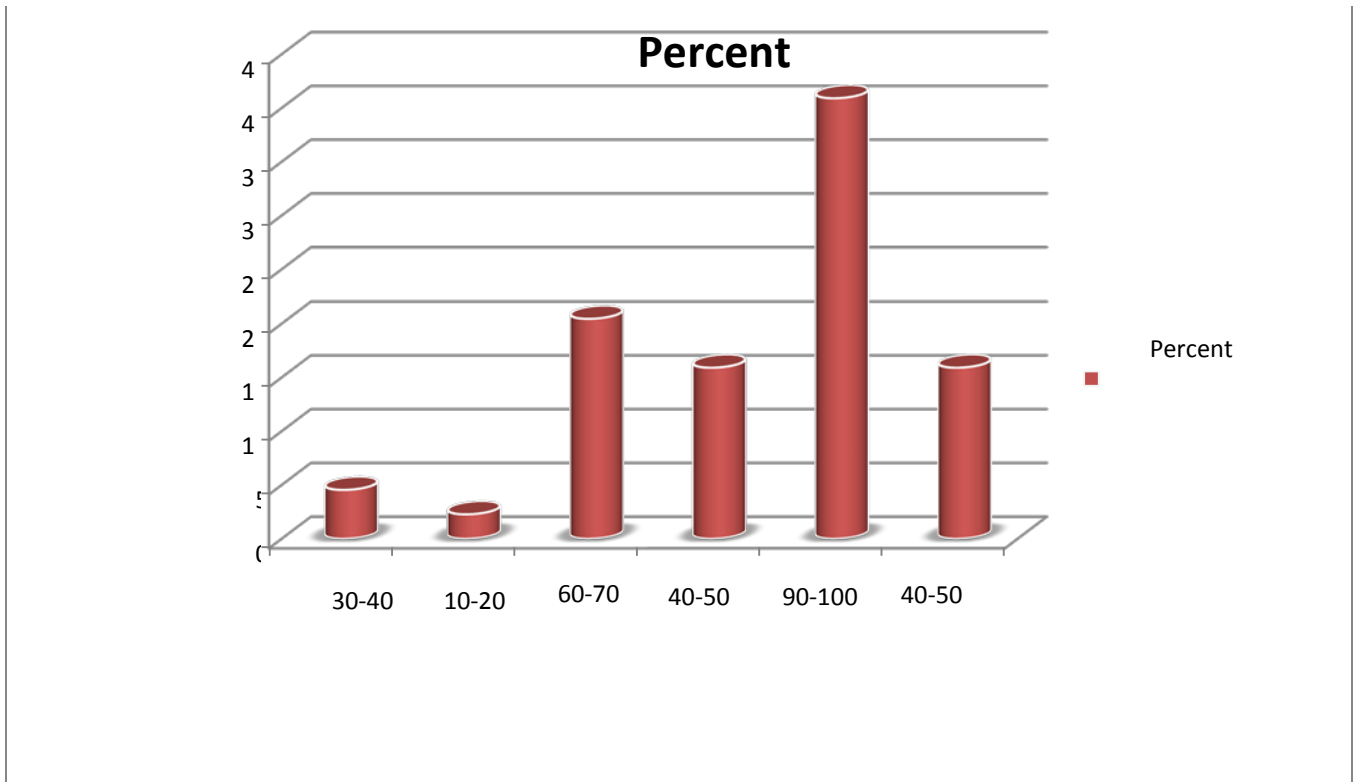
Figure 4.9: Respondents views on the effect of office equipment on their performance

Nearly all employees at the City Hall have been provided with computers to facilitate their work. Employees at the Registry and Communication Departments mostly use computers for their daily operations. Plotters and large format printers are also in use daily. The views expressed by the respondents show that their office equipment offers them the right support for their job delivery and performance. According to some of them, their work-workstations help them in record keeping which is so advanced in a way that every City Hall employee is able to access information.

Room temperature and quality of lighting are some of the key elements of office that impact on overall performance of employees. Prolonged exposure to a seemingly dark and hot office environment is likely to contribute to visual and stress related problems among occupants. Figure 4.11 and Figure 4.12 show the extent to which room temperature and office lighting affect the performance of employees at work. In both cases, over (35%) of the total respondents concluded that both room temperature and lighting impacted negatively on their performance by between (70% - 80%).
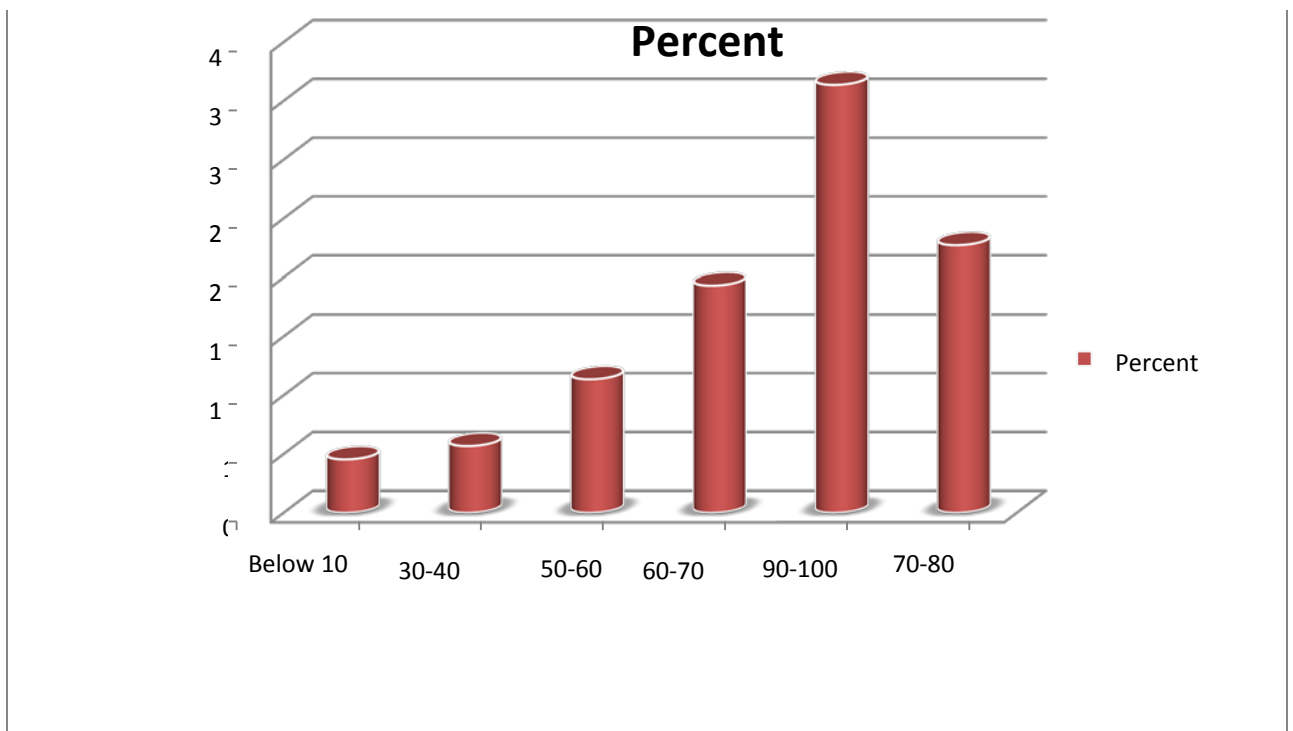
Figure 4.10: Respondents views on the effect of room temperature on their performance

Some of the respondents alluded to the frequent breakdown of air-conditioners which renders the offices unbearably hot and stressful for productive work. Some also mentioned that the not-so-well-lit office environments sometimes prove to be disincentives to performance as it renders the office gloomy and stressful. The responses obtained on the effect of office lighting on the performance of the employees surveyed underscored the need for adequate lighting in the offices.

Similarly, nearly (45%) of the total respondents expressed concerns on the quality of lighting in their offices which they claim exerted considerable negative effect ranging from (70% - 80%) on their performance. Although offices have

been fitted with compact fluorescent bulbs, the rooms appear to be poorly illuminated due to the dark looking partitioning walls. As a result, a number of the employees see their offices as poorly illuminated and wish for brighter offices. Again they pointed to the fact that the offices unexciting and barely encourage one to want to spend considerable hours within them.
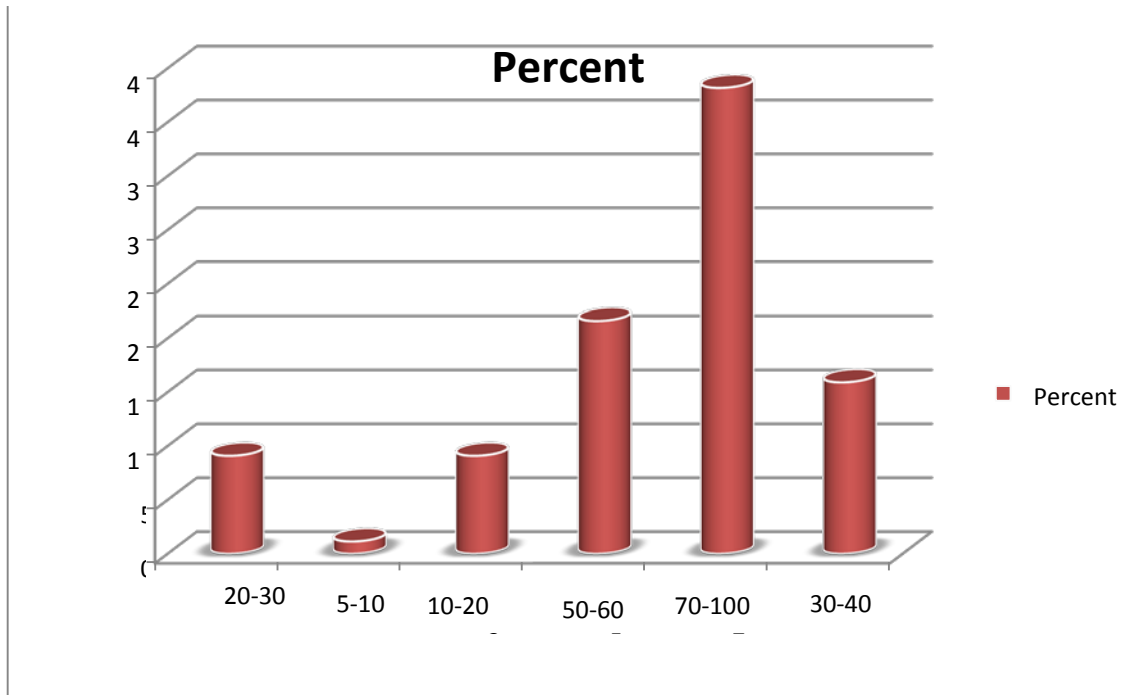
Figure 4.11: Respondents views on the effect of quality of lighting on their performance

4.6 OFFICE WORK SETTING BASED INTERVENTIONS TO ADDRESS EMPLOYEE HEALTH, COMFORT, WELLBEING AND PERFORMANCE

The workplace environment is one of the critical factors that drive employees' performance. Asked whether their current offices will require improvement, a whopping (98.9%) of the total respondents responded in the affirmative. Analysis of the responses in favour of workplace improvement revealed that (43.7%) of the respondents expressed their desire for modern and brighter office partitions fitted with window blinds and other related decorative pieces. Similarly, the interventions requested by (18.2%) of the respondent related to the installation of less noisy but efficient air-conditioners that will guarantee stable and comfortable room temperature. The need to deploy highly comfortable furniture at the City Hall was also suggested by (27.3%) of the total respondents as a

measure to curb the health hazards posed by some of the old and un-adjustable furniture currently in use at certain workplaces.

4.7 DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings from the study to a considerable extent validates and brings to reality the widely accepted assumption presented in Leblebici (2012), that a better workplace environment motivates employees and produces better results. The study demonstrated that office design deficiencies at the City Hall which includes outdated office design and décor, inadequate office illumination, office furniture, unsuitable office design and décor have impaired the performance of an average employee by between (20% - 80%).

According to Beautyman (2006), businesses that ignore the design and layout of their workplaces are failing to optimize the full value of their human capital. The findings from the study confirm Beautyman's assertion in view of the fact that the office design and décor of the City Hall has impaired the performance of the average employee by between (20% - 80%). Selected senior managers interviewed were also of the opinion that the current workplace environment does not seem to enhance employee performance. Practical Solutions for a Safer Workplace (2002), published by the Washington State Department for Labour and Industries observes that proper office setting improvements to the work environment primarily lead to a safer and more healthful work environment. The lack of proper office setting improvements is known to predispose employees to safety and health hazards.

The findings of this study show that (33%) of the respondents felt that their office environment had impacted negatively on their health, while (15%) actually confirmed having suffered an injury or illness due to the nature of their office environments. The findings from the study show that the current office layout at the City Hall, based on a cellular design, is outdated and inefficient. The findings underscore the need to design offices ergonomically to ensure that the workplace environment suits employee needs, functions and enhances performance.

4.8 CONCLUSION

Poor and unsafe workplace environments result in significant losses for workers, their families, and the national economy. A conducive workplace environment that aids the performance of work automatically improves productivity. Improved or adequate lighting improves productivity, fewer rejects, enhanced safety, lower insurance premiums, better morale and increased customer satisfaction. Good workplace communication involves employees in the development and implementation of healthy workplace practices, dynamic employees, enthusiastic employers and sustenance of the organization.

CHAPTER 5 : SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations that emerged from the study. It summarizes the office work setting deficiencies identified in the design and furnishing of the eThekwini Municipality and the negative impact such deficiencies have had on the performance of City Hall employees. It presents the final conclusions of the study and goes on to suggest practical recommendations aimed at incorporating high levels of office work setting standards in the workplace environment to help improve employee performance.

5.2   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Office design is a widely acceptable means of providing an enabling environment that best facilitates employees' performance and general productivity. The need for high office setting standards is vital considering the fact that the type of employee work place environment impacts a great deal on employee collaboration, health and safety, morale, motivation and overall performance. This study sought to discover the impact of office design on employee performance using the eThekwini Municipality as a case study. The objectives of the study were to analysed the office design, finishes and furnishings of the City Hall building, in terms of their suitability and comfort of the employees, assess the impact of office design on the performance of employees at the City Hall and finally propose specific ergonomically based interventions that would address employee health, comfort and wellbeing and thereby enhance optimum performance.

The case study approach was adopted in this study which involved eThekwini Municipality employees operating from the City Hall building. Using a census procedure and a structured questionnaire as the main sampling and data collection tools respectively, responses were obtained from 60 staff for analysis.

In addition, manager was also interviewed for more in-depth information on the subject. The data obtained were analysed quantitatively using the SPSS and Microsoft Excel, and results presented through frequency distributions, pie charts, tables, and graphs. Pictures showing office arrangements, seating arrangement, furniture etc. were also included for good visual effect.

The research identified considerable office work setting deficiencies which included non-conducive office design (predominantly cellular offices), uninspiring office décor, use of dark wooden partitions which results in poorly illuminated offices, and the continued use of old furniture. The study discovered that eThekwini Municipality occupied the City Hall building in 1989. The City Hall was then partitioned into predominantly cellular offices with polished plywood panels which were then in vogue. Over the years, the original design and décor has seen little improvement and modification other than tiling of some of the hitherto terrazzo floors, replacement of selected plywood partitions and replacement of the building's disused passenger lifts.

The study also confirmed that the office work setting deficiencies have had varying adverse effects on the performance of employees and in some cases the health of employees. The elements such as office design, décor, illumination and noise levels and furniture were found to be negatively affecting the performance of employees by between (20% - 80%). It also came to light that a few employees suffered from musculoskeletal disorders which they attribute to their furniture.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This study has assessed the impact of office work setting on the performance of employees operating from the City Hall. The results from the study confirm that office work setting deficiencies at the City Hall are impacting negatively on the performance of the employee. From the findings of the study, which identifies substantial office design lapses such as inadequate office illumination, use of old furniture, appreciable noise levels it is obvious that City Hall is yet to leverage on its workplace environment as a means of motivating and enhancing the performance of its employees.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study and conclusions thereof were based on primary data, which was basically the responses of the respondents; and thus may not represent the actual situation on the ground due to personal perspectives and beliefs. However, the questionnaires were tactfully structured to help identify inconsistencies, traces of bias and lack of objectivity in responses. The relatively small sample size was also expected to limit the extent to which the results and findings from the study could be generalized. To deal with this anticipated limitation, the sample was all the administrators from all the groups at City Hall to ensure fair and adequate representation. The time span within which the study was conducted to some extent put a limit to the depth to which the theme of the study could have been analysed. However, time was prudently managed within the scope of the study to ensure that the objectives of the study were met.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are made for consideration by City Hall as a means of utilizing its workplace environment to motivate and enhance the performance of its employees. The findings from the study clearly show that the design and décor of the City Hall is somehow deficient and has some negative impacts on the performance of employees. Given the state of the City Hall, any attempt to modernize the building will require a huge capital outlay and a considerable

period of time. Against this backdrop, the study recommends the relocation of the head office to a purpose-built office facility that integrates high standards of office work setting.

In the design and décor of the proposed new head office building, emphasis should be placed on the use of executive suites of open plan offices that inspires teamwork and collaboration. Such open plan offices, as reported in Hamilton et al. (1996), should be complemented with meeting rooms, breakout areas, isolated enclosed offices and other ancillary offices/facilities that will be essential to the particular operations of administration. The new office should incorporate brighter office partitions with exciting colour schemes that will stimulate employees and help reduce stress levels.

The study further recommends that administrators should undertake post-occupancy evaluation one year after occupation of the new head office. The post-occupancy evaluation should involve the circulation of a multi-disciplinary questionnaire once a year among all employees of working in the building to determine how the workplace elements such as furniture, illumination, noise levels etc. are affecting their performance. Based on the results of the survey, office design adjustments should be made to render the workplace environment more supportive to employee performance.

The study further recommends that eThekwini Municipality should develop and implement a Corporate Real Estate Policy that will focus on leveraging the City Hall workplace environment to attract, retain and boost the performance of employees. The Policy should focus on modern ways and systems of working that optimizes employee delivery and productivity.

The study identified a number of health and safety concerns in the form of old furniture, poor illumination levels and poor cable management in selected offices leading to 42% of the respondents claiming not to feel safe and secure in their offices. The development and implementation of a health and safety policy to help identify and deal with health and safety hazards at City Hall offices is

strongly recommended. Similarly, the adoption of enterprise risk management system to systematically identify risk factors in the office and practically deal with them is further recommended by the study.

Lastly, employees should be made to undergo periodic training on office ergonomics issues such as correct sitting posture, the right way to use and adjust computer monitors to avoid neck, back and eye strain, how to reduce stress and strains in repetitive work and how to avoid injury and disorders in the workplace. The training is expected to enlighten employees on the subject to help employees contribute meaningfully to the development of office design interventions.

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Annexures

Annexure 1: University ethics clearance certificate
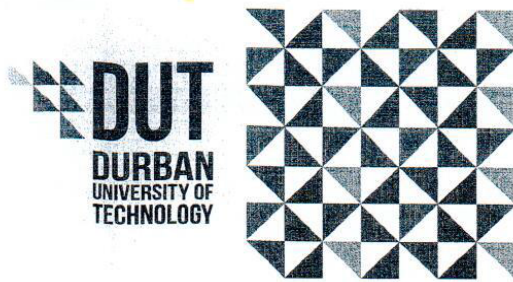
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Faculty of Health Sciences
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www.dut.ac.za

5 November 2015

IREC Reference Number: **REC 116/15**

Ms N T Mazubane
No 1 Greenlea Hewitt Road
38 Glenwood
Durban
4001

Dear Ms Mazubane

The effect of office setting on employee performance: A case study of eThekwini Municipality

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your notification regarding the piloting of your data collection tool.

Please note that Full Approval is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

Yours Sincerely,

Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC

2015 -11- 0 5

INSITUTIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
P O BOX 1334 DURBAN 4000 SOUTH AFRICA

Annexure 2: Letter of Information

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study.

Title of the Research Study: The effect of office setting on employee performance: A case study of eThekwini Municipality

Principal Investigator/s/researcher: (Nonkululeko Thabisile Mazubane Masters in Commercial Administration)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: (Prof MN Sibiya; D Tech: Nursing and Dr KS Ngwane; D: Admin Degree

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: Many executives are under the mistaken impression that the level of employee performance on the job is proportional to the employee's compensation package. Although compensation package is one of the extrinsic motivation tool it has a limited short term effect on employees perform. This study seeks to identify factors leading to poor employee performance in the office environment at City Hall. Every organization has to ensure that employee work stations are designed and maintained in a satisfactory level in order to reduce injuries typically associated with work performed in an office environment and to eliminate potential hazards. Employees should be able to adjust an office swivel chair to an appropriate setup when seated at a workstation.

In Order to achieve the research aim, the study will address the following:

☐ To determine the disorders that results from awkward posture;

☐ To assess the current type of equipment used in offices;

☐ To determine the knowledge, attitude and practices of safety in deployed employees;

☐ To identify how poor working condition affect employees; and

☐ To recommend interventions to improve efficiency.

To achieve the objective of the study a quantitative method will be used: A questionnaire with closed ended questions will be used to collect primary data from the staff at City Hall.

Data will be analyzed in the SPSS and Microsoft word, when presenting the data table and graphs will be used.

Outline of the Procedures: All people who will be part of the study will be treated with respect and respondents will be protected from victimisation. The researcher will apply for an ethical clearance through the research office. The study will not harm animals and will not affect participants. The questionnaires will take 15 minutes of the respondent time to complete and participation is voluntarily and the respondent can withdraw from the study anytime without giving reasons. The information the respondent gives will only be used for research purposes only.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: Not applicable.

Benefits: A journal article will be written for an accredited academic journal in the field of Accounting and Informatics.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: The questionnaires will take 15 minutes of the respondent time to complete and participation is voluntarily and the respondent can withdraw from the study anytime without giving reasons.

Remuneration: There will be no remuneration received by the participant.

Costs of the Study: There will be no costs cover expected towards the study from the participant.

Confidentiality: All people who will be part of the study will be treated with respect and respondents will be protected from victimisation. The researcher will apply for an ethical clearance through the research office. The study will not harm animals and will not affect participants.

Research-related Injury: If the research-related injury or adverse reaction, there be any no compensation allocated.

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:
Please contact Nonkululeko Thabisile Mazubane on (071 707 2380), my supervisor Dr KS Ngwane (031 373 5652) or the Institutional Research Ethics administrator on 031 373 2900. Complaints can be reported to the DVC: TIP, Prof F. Otieno on 031 373 2382 or dvctip@dut.ac.za.

Annexure 3: Consent

Statement of agreement to participate in the research study:

☐ I--- (participant full name), hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher Ms Nonkululeko Thabisile Mazubane about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study – Research Ethics Clearance Number---------------------.

☐ I have also received, read and understood the above written information (Participant Letter of Information) regarding the study.

☐ I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.

☐ In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerised system by the researcher.

☐ I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.

☐ I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.

☐ I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

_____   _____   _____   _____

Full Name of Participant   **Date**   **Time**   **Signature/ Right Thumbprint**

I, _____ (name of researcher) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Researcher   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)   **Date**   **Signature**

_____   _____   _____

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)   **Date**   **Signature**

Annexure 4: Questionnaire

Date-------------------   Participant no. [   ]

Topic: The Effect of Poor Office Work Setting on Employee Performance: A Case Study of eThekwini Municipality.

Please tick or write out your responses where appropriate

SECTION A: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF RESPONDENT

1. Gender

1. Male [ ]   2. Female [ ]

2. Age

1. 20-29 yrs. [ ]   2. 30-39 yrs. [ ]

3. 40-49 yrs. [ ]   4. 50 yrs. and above [ ]

3. Level of work

1. Administrator [ ]   2. Click [ ]

3. Secretary [ ]   4. PA [ ]

4. Division/Department/Unit……………………

5. Length of service at eThekwini Municipality

1. 0-1 year [ ]   2. 2-3 years [ ]

3. 4-6 years [ ]   4. 7-9 years [ ]

5. 10 years or more [

SECTION B: LEVEL OF EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

6. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with each of the under listed workplace elements using the ratings from 1 to 5 described below (by ticking) as:

1-Very Satisfied (VS), 2-Satisfied (S)   3-Dissatisfied (D)

4- Very Dissatisfied (VD),   5-Undecided (UN)

NOTE: For each response kindly indicate the reason for your choice. You may use the sample reasons below the table as a guide.

Table 1: Employee satisfaction with office environment

Brief Description of Workplace Elements	1 (VS)	2 (S)	3 (D)	4 (VD)	5 (UN)
1.General Design and Office Décor					
Reason					
2.Spatial Arrangement & Furnishing					
Reason					
3.Level of office flexibility and comfort					
Reason					
4.Size of space allocated for your workplace					
Reason					
5.Ease of communication and collaboration					
Reason					
6.State and suitability of office furniture					
Reason					
7.State of office Equipment (computers etc.)					
Reason					
8.Room temperature and air quality					
Reason					
9.Quality of lighting – artificial lighting					
Reason					
10.Level of noise from speech, equipment etc.					
Reason					

Sample Reasons

- *Office is too small and crowded*
- *Office is dark and not lively*
- *Furniture/equipment is modern and functional*
- *Office is noisy*
- *Office is well air-conditioned and comfortable*
- *There is ease of communication*

SECTION C: IMPACT OF POOR OFFICE SETTING ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE.

7. Do you find your current office safe and secured?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

8. Does your office have enough space for easy movement and emergency exit?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

9. Have you ever felt stressed by your office environment (furniture, decor, air-conditioner?)

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

10. Do you feel that your office environment (including your chair, desk and computer) has affected your health in anyway?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

11. Have you suffered any injury/disorders/illnesses due to your current workplace environment?

Yes [   ]   No [   ]

   If you have answered "Yes", please state the nature of illness and the attributed course

   _____

   _____

12. To what extent did the disorder/illness affect your job performance?

1. Very much affected [ ]   2. Affected [ ]   3. Mildly affected [ ] 4. Not affected at all

Please explain how your job performance was affected as indicated in the Question above.

_____

_____

SECTION D: IMPACT OF PHYSICAL OFFICE ENVIRONMENT ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

13. Please select the option below that best describes your current office environment

1. Highly Impressive [ ]   2. Impressive [ ]   3.   Least Impressive [ ]

4. Indifferent [ ]   5. Not Impressive [ ]   6. Can't tell [ ]

14. Indicate to what extent your current office environment is a source of motivation to your job performance

1. Highly Motivating [ ]   2. Motivating [ ]   3.   Least Motivating [ ]

4. Indifferent [ ]   5. Not Motivating [ ]   6. Can't tell [ ]

15. Is your furniture comfortable, flexible to adjust, rearrange or reorganize to offer you support and functionality?

1. Completely Flexible [ ]   2. Fairly Flexible [ ]   3. Almost [ ]

4. To some extent [ ]   5. Not at all [ ]   6. Don't know [ ]

16. Is your office environment quiet enough for productive work?

1. Always [ ]   2. Mostly [ ]   3. Often [ ]

4. To some extent [ ]   5. Not at all [ ]

17. Is your office room temperature conducive enough for productive work?

1. Always [ ]   2. Mostly [ ]   3. Often [ ]

4. To some extent [ ]   5. Not at all [ ]

18. Is your office room well illuminated for productive work?

1. Highly illuminated [ ]   2. Illuminated [ ]   3.   Fairly

illuminated [ ]

4. Poorly illuminated [ ]   5. Not at all [ ]

19. Using the scale below, please indicate the extent (in percentage) to which
the workplace elements affect your job performance by ticking.

   a) Below 10% - 0
   b) Between 10% - 20% - 1
   c) Between 30% - 40% - 2
   d) Between 50% - 60% - 3
   e) Between 70% - 80% - 4
   f) Between 90% - 100% - 5

Table 3: Effects of workplace elements on employee's performance

Brief Description of Workplace Elements	0	1	2	3	4	5
1.General Design and Office Decor						
2. Spatial Arrangement & Furnishing						
3. Size of office space and level of comfort						
4. Ease of communication and collaboration						
5. State and suitability of office furniture						
6. State of office Equipment (computers etc)						
7. Room Temperature						
8. Level of air quality (fresh air, stale air)						
9. Quality of lighting – artificial lighting						
10. Level of noise from speech, equipment etc						

20. Does your current workplace environment require improvement?

Yes [ ]   No [ ]

If you have answered "Yes", please state the nature of improvements required

_____

_____

21. Please offer any suggestions that will improve your safety, comfort, security and performance at the workplace.

_____

_____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PATIENCE AND YOUR RESPONSES

Annexure 5: Certificate from the professional editor

DR RICHARD STEELE
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HOMEOPATH and EDUCATOR
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EDITING CERTIFICATE

Re: **Nonkululeko Thabisile Mazubane**

Master's dissertation: **THE EFFECT OF OFFICE SETTING ON EMPLOYEES PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY**

I confirm that I have edited this dissertation and the references for clarity, language and layout. I am a freelance editor specialising in proofreading and editing academic documents. My original tertiary degree which I obtained at UCT was a B.A. with English as a major and I went on to complete an H.D.E. (P.G.) Sec. with English as my teaching subject. I obtained a distinction for my M.Tech. dissertation in the Department of Homeopathy at Technikon Natal in 1999 (now the Durban University of Technology). During my 13 years as a part-time lecturer in the Department of Homoeopathy I supervised numerous Master's degree dissertations.

Dr Richard Steele
5 April 2016
electronic