The Restorative Effects of a Plant Enriched Environment on Employee Performance in the Workplace

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Abstract

With the fourth industrial revolution, employees are having to change the way they work to accommodate new technological advances. This reliance on technology for employees to operate may cause strain and it has been suggested that working on a computer for an extended period of time can cause mental fatigue, which increases the need for psychological restoration. It is therefore important for organisations to design an effective working environment which enables employees to perform at optimum levels. In order to do so, examination of the employee's workspace and how their surroundings may impact them, and their performance levels are of growing interest. This is especially relevant to Industrial Psychologists, with concern regarding the effect of environmental influences such as indoor plants, on individual performance outcomes in the workplace. The *Attention Restoration Theory* was applied within the current study to examine the effect indoor plants had on the restorative needs of employees within a South African organisational context on performance. This study aimed to investigate the relationship of indoor plants on employee performance in a real-working context. Nature identity was also examined to investigate whether one's concern for the environment moderated the indoor plant to performance relationship. The current study aimed to provide evidence which served as a framework for the use of indoor plants in a South African organisational context on employee performance, as this has not been researched extensively with enough justification. In this quasi-experimental study, a sample of employees within the OPS department on two floors within the same organisation characterised the treatment, and contrast groups. The treatment group had indoor plants implemented into their workspace and served as the presence of plants group which was assessed over a period of a year. The contrast group had art pictures installed to counteract for any Hawthorne effects and served as the absence of plants group which was also assessed over the same period. After a settling period of 3 months, a survey was administered to the employees with 3 scales to assess perceived performance, work engagement, and nature identity with 40 responses. After a six-month waiting period, performance and error rate scores were obtained of every employee within the OPS department for each month of 2018 and yielded a sample of 130 employees. The results from the statistical analyses demonstrated no statistically significant effects on the performance outcomes. The result from the one-way ANCOVA's established that nature identity was not a moderator variable in the current study on the relationship between indoor plants and the

performance outcomes. The current study adds to literature regarding the impact of indoor plants on performance within a South African organisational context.

Key Words

Indoor plants, Performance, Perceived Performance, Work Engagement, Connectedness to Nature, Attention Restoration Theory

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