

Why Office Climate is a **HOT** Button Issue

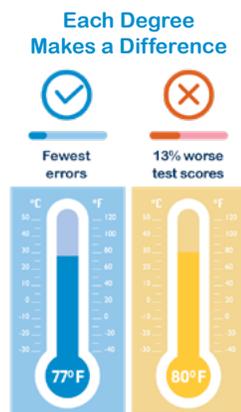
Temperature Is an Employee Engagement Priority That Delivers KPIs Across the Board

Studies by Gallup and others routinely find that high employee engagement leads to impressive business outcomes. Facing the growing mountain of analytics on the employee experience and reading through all the latest strategies for tempting top talent, heating and cooling operations might feel like they don't make the cut.

But the hard data shows that temperature really affects employee productivity. Let's look at some of the ways temperature is fundamental to the workplace experience, and how that transforms what looks like a facility management issue into a clear driver of engagement, productivity, and profitability.

Why We Should Stop Calling It Comfort

Because it's not about comfort – it's about how our minds and bodies function. Let's start with the direct effects of temperature. In an oft-cited 2004 study, Cornell University researchers investigated how the set temperature of an office affected worker output. When they compared the data for a 68-degree office and a 77-degree one, the employees made 44% more errors when it was cooler.



It also halved their productivity.

When we talk about office temperature as a comfort issue, it sounds like a nice-to-have, a bonus that's easy to put off when budgets need crunching. But the facts are clear. When employees are too cold, they're physically distracted. Energy goes to regulating body temperature, instead of performance.

Too much heat also drags down productivity. A study of Boston students found a group without air conditioning scored 13% worse on arithmetic tests. The study found that working in 80-degree temperatures impacted attention, processing speed, cognitive speed, and memory. Note that these students suffered those deficits only three degrees away from the preferred temperature of the Cornell study.

Employees also notice these effects themselves. In a 2015 survey, 53% agreed they are less productive when the office is too cold. Too warm rated even worse, with 71% agreeing that they are less productive when it's too hot.

Which result of high employee engagement interests you?



From Hard Data to Harder Truths

We know that temperature directly, physically affects our performance, but employee awareness of that problem leads to another level of issues. Employees know the temperature impacts their productivity, and that can lead to disengagement. Employees feel they can't do their best work, causing anxiety over performance review and rising frustration that they have no recourse to fix the problem.

In fact, respondents in one study of workplace environments ranked the inability to control temperature as the worst of several workplace complaints – worse than workplace privacy issues, poor lighting, and noise levels.



That frustration boils over into bigger problems: a 2018 poll found 15% of respondents admitted to having in-office arguments over temperature, and 19% admitted to secretly changing it without permission. Compare a UK survey from 2017 where 32% admitted to regular arguments about the temperature.

The same study where temperature control ranked the “worst” complaint also reported a remarkable correlation between workplace dissatisfaction and disengagement. While 80% of employees highly satisfied with their workplace environment said they generally liked their jobs, only 33% of employees less satisfied with the workplace said the same.

Even more striking are the productivity effects: the less satisfied group was half as likely to say they always help colleagues with work-related problems. They were two-thirds less likely to say they always offer ideas to improve the organization.

Effects of Workplace Satisfaction

● = Highly Satisfied ● = Less Satisfied

Agreed with “In general, I like working here.”



Strongly disagreed with “I frequently think of quitting.”



These results show there’s a disengagement feedback loop when it comes to office temperatures. On top of the adverse effects that temperatures can have on performance, employees soon become aware of those effects, leading to frustration with their working environment, wasting more energy and productivity.

It’s Also a Gender Equality Issue



That energy waste can affect some workers disproportionality. A review of interior climate models historically based on the average male show they overestimate the average woman’s metabolic

rate by up to 35%. That rate describes the amount of energy a body uses over time, and that overestimation means colder offices force women to use more energy than men just being present for work.

When that’s built into the ventilation or temperature settings of a facility, it can put women in the workplace at a disadvantage. One study found women preferred temperatures up to five degrees higher than men, on average. Ignoring that preference can unfairly burden women’s productivity.

Is There an Ideal Temperature Setting?

While reviews have compared studies and methods to find an ideally productive office temperature, those results are general. One well-regarded review from Berkeley Labs in 2006 located ideal performance at 22 degrees Celsius (71.6 degrees Fahrenheit).



But consider that men and women can have preferred temperatures almost five degrees apart. And that Cornell study cited earlier? Productivity was better at 77 degrees Fahrenheit.

If 77 °F seems too warm to you, consider what warmth means to us psychologically and socially, and how that translates directly into productivity. Experiments show that a warmer environment promotes clearer, more concrete use of language and a more positive perception of social relationships.

How employees think about their experiences also matters. Beliefs abound that colder temperatures help you stay active or alert, while warmer environments boost creativity or reduce stress.

As tempting as the idea of an ideal temperature is, it’s still an ideal, and your employee productivity is as real world as it gets – every facility and every team is different. The Berkeley Labs review does compare multiple studies using concrete metrics for productivity, so 71.6 °F is a great starting point, but it’s not the last word. Since the performance and engagement data shows how much temperature affects employees, it’s clear that management should take employee concerns seriously and develop a strategy that helps reduce negative impacts and encourage positive ones.



Facility managers can help team leaders respond to feedback faster or enable more discrete control of spaces for individuals and teams with newer control technologies.



Depending on the facility, expert airflow assessments can open up solutions that not only address temperature, but other issues that impact productivity.

Tools That Attract and Retain Talent

Productivity isn't the only way temperature affects engagement. Surveys report that 70% of employees say sustainability affects whether they'll stay with a company over the long term. Nearly 40% of millennials report taking a job over another because of sustainability. With heating and cooling playing a significant role in energy spend, HVAC systems play a large part in a facility's sustainability.

A smaller carbon footprint, LEED certification, and other

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sustainability goals demand efficient heating and cooling, and studies show meeting those goals matters to employees more than ever. The 2018 millennial survey from Deloitte shows that climate now ties with terrorism as the top concern of young workers in developed markets, beating out income inequality and unemployment. That's a big change from the 2017 report, where climate ranked near the bottom of personal concerns.

From Comfort to Critical Need

From productivity to sustainability, temperature in the work environment deserves a top spot in any employee engagement strategy. Facility managers can present solutions for improved employee attraction, engagement, and retention with improvements to temperature control, maintenance, and energy efficiency. Looking at temperature control holistically, even more productivity comes into play. A recent Harvard study found that improved ventilation and reduced volatile organic compounds led to 101 percent higher cognitive scores. Proactive maintenance programs not only extend HVAC asset life – a boon to any facility budget – they also reduce the risk of equipment failures that can saddle employees with stifling or frigid workspaces.

Temperature and how we control it impacts workplace performance, employee satisfaction, sustainability issues, and of course, energy and operational costs. That makes the intersection of facility management and employee engagement into an opportunity for transformation and growth. To help you assess possibilities and strategies for your business, look for a facility services partner well-versed in all the ways your HVAC contributes to your work environment. Comfort is good, but engaging, productive, and profitable is better.



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