

Is it Too Cold in Here?

Don't rely on anecdotal tales to find out if your reps are happy where they work. Instead, use **occupancy research**, a more methodical tool for analyzing facility performance.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF AGENT JOB SATISFACTION and work performance on retention and operational effectiveness? How do you improve these factors? Finding strategies to address these questions can significantly and positively affect the bottom line of a call center operation.

One strategy is *occupancy research*, an analytical approach to call center facility design. It provides the call center manager with a degree of predictive accuracy regarding the operational and organizational consequences of modifying call center occupancy design conditions that are likely to influence both the perceptions and the performance of the employee.

approach to occupancy research. A CBPM study typically comprises two major stages — a pre-occupancy phase and a post-occupancy phase.

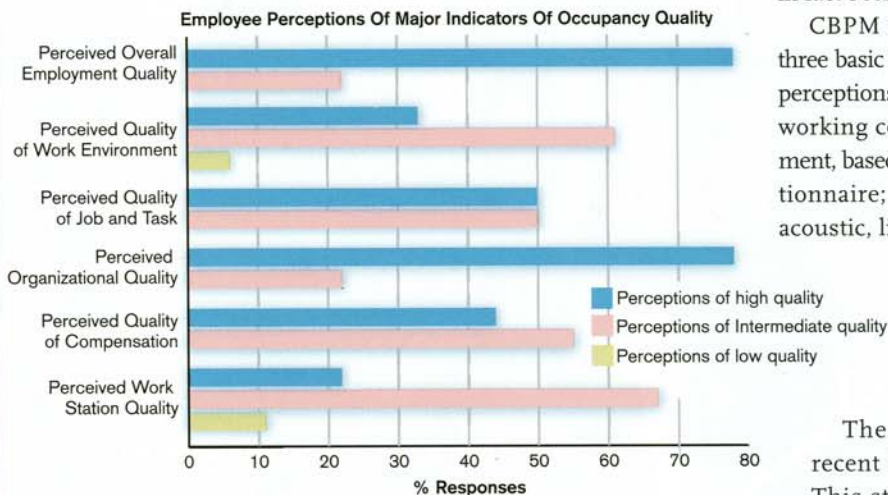
One common impetus for such a study is a pending move by a group of employees from an existing to a new or redesigned facility. The pre-occupancy phase evaluates the existing facility; the post-occupancy evaluates the new facility. With this two-stage approach, the CBPM will: (1) reveal design flaws in the existing facility that can be targeted for mitigation or avoidance in the new facility; and (2) document the extent to which design predictions and targets for the new facility have in fact been realized.

CBPM occupancy research collects three basic types of information: employee perceptions regarding the quality of their working conditions and work environment, based on responses to a survey questionnaire; physical measurements of acoustic, lighting, and thermal comfort conditions in the work environment; and standard metrics (to the extent available) regarding on-the-job performance.

The following data is from a recent CBPM pre-occupancy study. This study anticipates a follow-up post-occupancy study of a new facility to which a selected number of employees for the organization soon will be moving.

Figure 1 illustrates responses collected for questions in the survey dealing with six major indicators of occupancy quality: overall employment quality; work environment quality; job quality; organizational quality; compensation quality; and workstation quality.

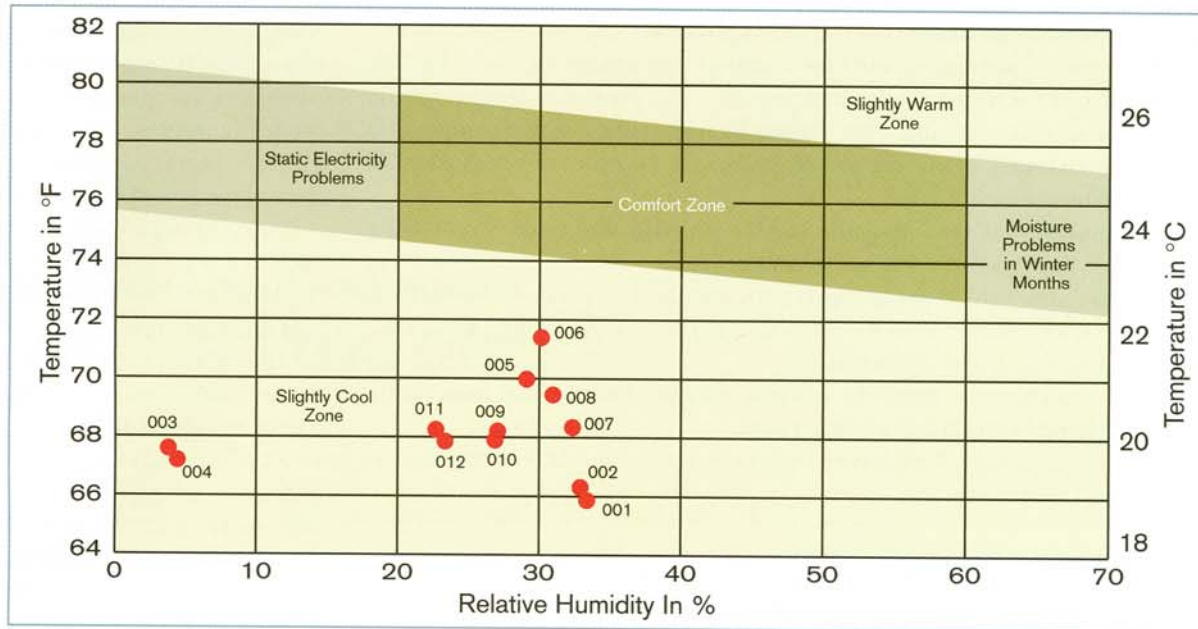
This indicates that over three-fourths of respondents perceive employment and the organization to be of high quality, indicating strong workforce support in



The basic scientific premise, with extensive empirical support, is that most of the variability we observe in on-the-job employee performance is attributable to how the work and the work environment are designed. The practical challenge is to figure out which occupancy design factors have the greatest influence on variability in employee work performance.

To address this question, Orfield Laboratories has developed a Certified Building Performance Measurement program (CBPM) that embodies a systematic

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these areas. It also shows that 40% to 50% of respondents perceive their job and compensation to be of high quality; and that work environment and workstation quality receive the lowest rankings in terms of perceptions of high quality.

Figure 2 begins to tell us why, despite the fact that they rank their job and company highly, they rate working conditions lower. This figure shows thermal comfort zone conditions for different combinations of relative humidity (X-axis) and room temperature (Y-axis) levels. Points in the figure plot thermal comfort levels for a series of workstations sampled in the study, using the CBPM system illustrated above. Conditions for all workstations fall in the "slightly cool" zone rather than the "comfort" zone for thermal comfort.

The CBPM occupancy research approach can provide design decision-making support for the call center manager, in terms of highlighting positive and flagging negative design features for a given call center environment. For example, findings from the recent CBPM pre-occupancy study summarized above indicate exceptionally strong employee support for the quality of employment and for the organization, but also point to problems in the work environment and workstation quality areas. Thermal comfort appears to be one such problem area.

This is just one case in which occupancy research can pinpoint a problem that the call center manager can (perhaps) fix easily. The major research benefit is predictive guidance about which occupancy design prob-

lems to improve in order to provide call center working conditions and a work environment of higher quality.

Experience with the CBPM to date suggests that occupancy design enhancements, based on this information, are likely to lead to stronger employee support for the organization as well as more effective job performance, with consequent organizational benefits in relation to both employee retention and operational effectiveness. ☎

TECH BRIEFS

If solid proof of ROI is what you're after, consider the latest module of **Performix Technologies'** (Burlington, MA) **Emvolve Performance Manager**, a software suite that lets you measure agents' performance. The new module, *Development Manager*, lets you measure the value of agents' training by providing definitive proof of its impact on individual performance.

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