

Clutter's real effect on mental health, productivity in the office

August 27 2021



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

Office clutter, such as extra papers, supplies or trash, can be a frustrating nuisance. Joseph Ferrari, a social-community psychologist at DePaul University, said it also can have a very real negative effect on mental

health and productivity.

Emotional exhaustion, stress and burnout are just a few consequences that can stem from clutter in a person's life, said Ferrari. A professor in DePaul's College of Science and Health, Ferrari added to his body of research on clutter this year with new findings published in two journals.

"Clutter is an overabundance of possessions that create chaotic and disorderly living spaces," he said. "It's not the same thing as hoarding. It's broader than that. It's not a psychological disorder like hoarding is, at least not yet."

He conducted his latest research with co-researchers Helena Swanson, a DePaul doctoral student, and Devki Patel, a DePaul student pursuing a master's in general psychology, and published it in the *International Journal of Psychological Research and Reviews*. The team found [office clutter](#) negatively affected participants' satisfaction and pleasure from work, and increased the likelihood of burnout and tension. Both Swanson and Patel have 2022 Student Grants through the Institute of Challenging Disorganization, an international group of professional declutter coaches, to follow up on the research Ferrari started on home and office clutter.

"To build a work environment that promotes work engagement and productivity, employees and employers must recognize environmental aspects that contribute to a worker either loving their job or being at risk of burnout from their job. We believe clutter could be one aspect," said Ferrari.

The researchers believe companies would be wise to help employees eliminate office clutter as a potential solution to improving productivity and well-being.

Previous research from Ferrari and Trina Dao, a DePaul graduate with a master's in industrial organization, in the *North American Journal of Psychology* found a positive correlation between office clutter and [emotional exhaustion](#) and stress.

"Emotional exhaustion and stress can lead to all sorts of negative health outcomes," said Ferrari. "While not determined as part of this study, previous studies have found emotional exhaustion and stress can have a negative effect on workplace outcomes like job satisfaction and performance."

Additional research in the *North American Journal of Psychology* from Ferrari, Swanson and Patel looked specifically at home office clutter. The researchers found employee-related behaviors are adversely affected by office clutter among remote workers from home.

Ferrari believes people are attached to "stuff" because it is an extension of themselves and of their identity. However, he reminds people, "overabundance will not make you happy."

First steps toward decluttering an office space, advises Ferrari, might include getting rid of items you don't use, such as old computer equipment or last year's desk calendar.

"You probably don't need three staplers," he said. "Hold onto relationships, not relics. Don't just throw out or recycle, actually organize if piles are necessary, have them in some systematic order. Hold onto the memory, not the materials."

More information: Joseph R. Ferrari et al, Office Clutter: Comparing Lower and Upper-Level Employees on Work-related Criteria, *International Journal of Psychological Research and Reviews* (2021).
[DOI: 10.28933/ijpr-2020-12-1805](https://doi.org/10.28933/ijpr-2020-12-1805)

Provided by DePaul University

Citation: Clutter's real effect on mental health, productivity in the office (2021, August 27)
retrieved 25 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-08-clutter-real-effect-mental-health.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.