

Why every office needs a window: The influence of a view on cognitive performance

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

People looking at blue sky and trees through a window are more creative and happier than those without a view according to a new study that has implications for workplace design and productivity.

Previous research has shown that being in nature generates [positive](#)

[emotions](#)—but getting outdoors is increasingly uncommon in industrialized nations where people spend about 90% of their time inside.

A team led by Assistant Professor Oliver Baumann of Bond University on the Gold Coast, Australia, wondered if pleasant views through a [window](#) might offer similar advantages.

Participants in the study donned [virtual reality](#) (VR) headsets that beamed images of an office with either no window, a shuttered window, or a window view of nature.

They were then asked to complete a series of tests to measure attention, creativity, working memory, and mood.

Dr. Baumann, a cognitive neuroscientist, said those in the room with a view performed best.

"When people were able to see the sky and trees they produced more answers in a task that demanded they come up with creative uses of everyday objects," he said.

"And people reported more positive mood and less negative mood."

Alertness and working memory remained the same in all scenarios.

VR headsets were used in the study to counter variables such as noise and weather.

Dr. Baumann said a better understanding how of the built and natural environment affects human moods and behavior could guide urban planning.

"It could allow stakeholders like developers, councils and governments to provide places in which people are not only healthier but also happier and more productive," he said.

"Often architects are like artists and rely on gut feeling and experience.

"But evidence-based knowledge can be used to convince a builder that we need windows in a [particular place](#) and we have to also think about what people see when they look out of the windows.

"Potentially we might be able to say a certain environment leads to five less work errors in a week."

Dr. Baumann said bosses of the future might be able to tailor individual workstations to get the best from employees by looking at their type of work, personality and cognitive profile.

"You could get a profile of a person and their task and then determine what environment would be most optimal for their performance and well-being," he said.

As for humans' affinity with nature, Dr. Baumann said a 300,000-year-old habit was hard to break.

"For me, the most convincing explanation is likely through evolution. Humans were hardwired to like blue spaces of water and [green spaces](#)," he said.

The paper appears in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*.

More information: L.A. Sharam et al, Design by nature: The influence of windows on cognitive performance and affect, *Journal of Environmental Psychology* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101923](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvp.2022.101923)

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