

# Job candidates deemed warm and competent if interviewer is satisfied with room lighting

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Different lighting conditions used in the laboratory study. Credit: Loughborough University

The more satisfied office workers are with the light in a room, the more likely they are to deem people they have just met as being warm and competent, a new Loughborough University study has found.

Workplace illumination is known to impact mood, performance and decision-making. However, until now little research has examined whether [light](#) satisfaction can impact [first impressions](#) in a work context.

The topic is important as it means situations such as hiring, leader selection, voting decisions, performance appraisals and social interactions that are influenced by first impressions may all be impacted by the [light conditions](#) in a room.

Dr. Olga Kombeiz and Dr. Erik Dietl, experts in [human resource management](#) and organizational behavior in the School of Business and Economics, hope their latest research findings will contribute to the design of better and fairer work settings in which first impressions are made.

The pair's latest research paper explores how positive feelings associated with lighting conditions in offices relates to judgments of others' warmth—how friendly and trustworthy someone is deemed to be—and competence, which is characterized by intelligence, confidence, and assertiveness.

They addressed the idea by conducting two studies: a laboratory experiment and a [field study](#) in real working offices.

Both studies required participants to look at photos of male and female faces with neutral expressions and rate their level of warmth and competence.

Results from a [pilot study](#) showed the images to possess "medium levels" of attractiveness, warmth and competence.

One-hundred-and-sixty-one German university students took part in the first study, which was hosted in a laboratory designed to represent an office, and the second field study involved 175 full-time employees in the United States.

All participants were asked to rate the faces in the photos in terms of their perceived warmth and competence and rate how satisfied they were with the light in the office.

Lights of different brightness and color temperatures were used during the experiments as the light settings considered to be the best or most satisfying to an individual is down to personal taste.

By using a variety of light conditions, the researchers hoped to elicit a broad range of satisfaction with light responses.

Dr. Kombeiz and Dr. Dietl found in both studies that

the more satisfied participants were with the light in the office, the more likely they were to deem the faces in the photos as warm and competent.

They found the same pattern of results in the German laboratory experiment and the US field study, which they say demonstrates, at least in Western Culture, that the satisfaction with light appears to be related to positive judgments of other people.

Dr. Kombeiz commented: "Person perception and the evaluation of others in work contexts are very important. The first impressions that we have about other people can impact judgments and decisions.

"First impressions occur automatically and at least partly subconsciously and may be influenced by factors such as light in the office.

"Our research contributes to the understanding of how affective processes—satisfaction with light—relate to judgments of others.

"From a practical point of view, this has implications for the design of settings involving the evaluation of other individuals.

"For example, in order to avoid unfair or biased judgments of job applicants, the lighting conditions during a job interview should be the same across all applicants and/or decision-makers should be able to adjust the [lighting conditions](#) so that they are satisfied with them."

She added: "This research underlines the importance of subjective appraisals of our environment. In addition to light, we intend to take a more holistic approach by examining other features of the workplace."

**More information:** Olga Kombeiz et al. Light as a positive situational cue at work: Satisfaction with light relates to judgements of other's warmth and competence, *Ergonomics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/00140139.2019.1608316](https://doi.org/10.1080/00140139.2019.1608316)

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