HealthCare Professional's Perceptions of Shared Workspaces – Differences between Professional Groups

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Background and purpose. Shared workspaces are applied in healthcare, yet research on healthcare professional's (HCPs) perceptions remains limited. Prior research on activity-based workspaces (ABWs) suggests that workspace switching can support the fit between tasks and spaces and thus work performance (e.g. Hoendervanger et al., 2022; Wohlers & Hertel, 2017). However, findings from knowledge work may not generalize to healthcare, where patient interaction constrains autonomy. This study compared the perspectives of physicians, nurses, and rehabilitation professionals on the two sub-concepts of shared workspaces: non-assigned consultation rooms (CRs) and ABWs.

Design/methodology/approach. A cross-sectional survey (N=425) and interviews (N=37) were administered in five healthcare organizations providing outpatient care. The survey consisted of individual items related to perceived support of facilities for different worktasks, work performance and work environment quality. Group differences were analyzed using Kruskal–Wallis and Critchlow–Fligner tests, complemented by deductive content analysis.

Results. HCPs were satisfied with ergonomics, lighting and safety, but dissatisfied with storage space, natural light, soundproofing, security in ABWs, and perceived work performance. ABWs were rated less suitable for work than CRs. No differences emerged between professional groups in overall CR suitability, however nurses and rehabilitation professionals rated soundproofing more negatively than physicians ($p < .01$) and reported greater disturbance from speech ($p < .01$). Nurses perceived lower safety than other groups ($p < .01$). ABW evaluations were negative across all groups, with physicians and rehabilitation professionals rating their suitability more negatively than nurses ($p<.0.5$). Rehabilitation professionals also reported lower perceived work performance than nurses ($p<.01$).

Discussion with practical implications. This study provides novel insights into HCPs' perceptions of two sub-types of shared workspaces and the differences between professional groups. Non-assigned CRs were perceived suitable, suggesting standardized rooms can support diverse users. However, interview findings indicated that frequent workspace switching reduced efficiency, challenging the assumption, that switching improves performance in healthcare, where autonomy is limited by scheduled patient work. Providing longer or

dedicated access to rooms for tasks involving sensitive patient interactions (e.g., mental health care) or specific equipment may improve efficiency for certain specialists. Differences in soundproofing and safety perceptions highlight the role of spatial design solutions (e.g the presence or absence of emergency exits between CRs), beyond task requirements alone. ABWs were perceived as less suitable, particularly by physicians and rehabilitation professionals, indicating a poor fit with tasks requiring confidentiality and concentration. This underscores the need to adapt ABWs through clear spatial and behavioral zoning (i.e. separation of quiet and conversational activities), and explicit rules for managing noise.

Conclusions. The results provide novel evidence on how shared workspaces can be aligned with professional tasks to support work performance in healthcare. Differences between professional groups reflect both work tasks and spatial design. While CRs were generally suitable, their design should ensure adequate sound insulation and opportunities for dedicated or extended use. ABWs should be developed to improve acoustic conditions and support the alignment between tasks and workspaces. The results challenge the underlying assumption that workspace switching support work performance in the healthcare sector. Comparing perceptions between HCPs and knowledge workers could offer insights into workspace suitability across sectors.

Keywords. Shared workspaces, Flexibility, Activity-Based Office, Non-assigned consultation room, Healthcare professional

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