

Lunch Is Served! Workplace Meals Improve Productivity

Organizations may see a boost in employee productivity by providing them opportunities to eat together.

Eating with your colleagues offers more benefits than you might think — not just for employees, but for employers as well. These advantages can include stronger employee relationships as well as increased engagement, inclusiveness, wellness and team morale. A Cornell University study found that employers may see a boost in productivity if they encourage their employees to eat meals together, much like the camaraderie built in many firehouses.

Researchers found that firefighters who eat meals together experience better job performance as a group than firefighters who dine individually. The study's authors believe their findings have implications for all organizations looking to improve team performance. Kevin Kniffin, one of the study's authors and a visiting assistant professor in Cornell's Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, said eating together is a more intimate task than just looking over an Excel spreadsheet, and that intimacy spills over into work. "From an evolutionary anthropology perspective, eating together has a long, primal tradition as a kind of social glue," Kniffin said. "That seems to continue in today's workplaces."

Based on the study's results, the Cornell researchers believe employers would do well to look at funding cafeterias and catered meals as investments in employee performance. "Although the costs that organizations invest to support onsite eating are clearly measured as direct expenses, our research highlights the opportunity that exists to start measuring and optimizing less direct organizational benefits that can be obtained through institutional support for commensality among coworkers," the study's authors wrote.

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