

## THE INFLUENCE OF USER'S PATTERN THROUGH WORKPLACE CULTURE

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### ABSTRACT

Working culture is normally very unique in each organization. It depends on many factors such as organization principles, management policies, nature of business and also working environment. This should be taken into account when the designers design a workplace in order to meet the ultimate goal of a workplace itself as well as to enhance the character and image of each organization. Environmental design, especially interior design, basically plays a major role to support or encourage certain behavior and also working culture by unconsciously influencing the 'user-user' and 'user-environment' interactions. The research aims to investigate the behavior of users, which is greatly influenced by workplace. Interview and observation show that traditional office environment can create and encourage users to work creatively. Many users realize that many creative ideas and good conversations have occurred when they accidentally meet, for example, in the elevators, pantry, and walkway. The issues based on 'accidental meeting' are kept in their mind, digested and later become critically considered in the official meeting. Pattern analysis was used to understand the users in order to create design identity and provide more opportunities in their environment. User unmet-needs were systematically classified. Cultural-based design plays an important role in providing more chances of creating conversation naturally. The design elements make users stop and then have a small conversation

that is strongly recommended. 'Just-in-time' small comfortable set of furniture should be provided along the walkway in case the users need to continue or finish their valuable conversation. The workstation is comfortable enough for people to stop by and have some short conversation while standing. The key elements are not necessary to be so comfortable but they need to have sense of welcoming and inviting the users who stop by.

**Keywords :** Accidental meeting, User behavior, Office culture

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

The premise shows that the first offices originated in ancient Rome period while the old admiralty office was the first office building built in 1726 in London followed by East India House on Leadenhall Street which was built in 1729. In early 20th century, open plan office that followed the principles of Taylorism, a methodology created by mechanical engineer, Frank Taylor, became more popular. This methodology was criticized by the public because it focused exclusively on ensuring that employers gained maximum productivity from their staff but lack of consideration of human and social elements. (THE HISTORY OF OFFICE DESIGN, K2 space). In the same period, electric lighting, air conditioning, telegraph system, lift, and steel frame construction were invented. These led to an evolution of open plan office design which combines both private offices

and open plan workstations also sometimes have more functions as staff kitchen or canteen. In the early 1960s, office in Burolandschaft or “office landscape” style was adopted for working place because it encouraged a great degree of human interaction and engagement. Then, the office style developed to “action office” and later “cubicle farm” styles.

#### Organizational or office culture

Nowadays, the consideration of office design engages much more with organizational or office culture than in the past. It is because there have clear and direct benefits for company business in terms of identity, retention, and image (Alton, 2017). Typically, companies with a strong culture tend to produce superior results as compared to those with weaker cultures. When a culture is strong, it leads to motivated employees and high performing managers (Ashworth, 2015). Haworth (2015) said that: Research suggests that architecture, interior design and furnishings provide a tangible way to support – or even change – the culture of an organization. In addition, workplaces or offices that reflect and encourage organizational culture lead to better-motivated employees but companies with low employee engagement suffer from a 32 percent decrease in operating income. (p. 6)

Organization culture or company culture, according to Haworth (2015) started in late 1980s; it includes three basic components: 1) Values: what a company does, its mission, and how it represents itself. 2) Assumptions: the attitudes, often unconscious, formed through company processes and actions that indicate what employees think. 3) Artifacts: what a company represents in the form of products, technologies, publications, processes, dress code, location, and architecture.

However, most organizational cultures that exist nowadays can be categorized into three major culture types. 1) Hierarchy culture which is suitable for the office where workers mostly focus on individual tasks and are serious with meeting deadlines without distractions from surrounding and peers. Therefore, most furniture character and office layout should provide sense of stability and increase the capacity of individuals within a space. 2) Clan culture which is suitable for the office that emphasizes teamwork and shared value; it also surfaces based on sense of “we-ness”. Consequently, there is less individual space and decrease in panel height for workstation in order to increase interaction between workers. 3) Adhocracy culture which is suitable for playful office environment that focuses on creativities and design. Therefore, fun breakout space that allows workers or staffs to break away from their routine work is the key. (ISS, 2018, para. 2)

#### **Interior design related to organizational culture**

Workplace interior design is a key factor in job satisfaction, and it affects the way the employees work. Workplace design may enhance organizational success by creating a workplace that supports work quality, quantity, and style, while improving turnover and absentee rates (Becker, 1981). When interior designers design office space or workplace, the office environment that encourages workplace culture should be taken into account. Interior design is a combination of art and science of understanding people's behavior to create functional spaces within a building through creative and technical solutions applied to achieve a built interior environment; they should be functional,

enhance the quality of life and culture of the occupants, and are aesthetically appealing (R Ali El-Zeiny M, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the literature review, it is possible that interior design can be a solution to enhance built environment in the office that requires a high level of interaction because it can provide a chance of meeting, both formal and informal, throughout interior space planning. This descriptive research was conducted by following three steps which included 1) user interview, 2) user behavioral and site observation, and 3) existing space planning study. These three processes were used to understand the existing behaviors of users and the way they reacted within the existing office environment and space planning condition. The study aimed to seek the interior design solution that can increase the level of unintentional meeting between user-user and user-environment. The new office space plan was offered as a feasible tool to encourage interaction of users.

### Step 1. User interview

In this process, the study was completed with two groups of subjects composed of 2-3 executive staff as the first subject group and 5-6 staff as the second subject group. The user interview was the first process focusing on the following aspects:

- Purpose of interior design (interior style)
- Organizational culture and working style
- Organizational chart
- Function and area requirement
- User lifestyle
- Special consideration
- Office operating system

After the verbal interview, the researcher provided sets of images used as a mechanism to establish common understanding between users and interviewers. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. Sets of images for user to select and critique

The researchers spent two hours for each subject group. The first subject group was interviewed one by one, and each of them clearly mentioned the same point of view about the organizational

or office culture which would typically indicate active working style, close collaboration, brainstorming on projects, etc. In addition, the requirements were increasing more lively and collaborative space, improving flow of working process, more open plan of the workplace, utilizing non-toxic materials, etc.

An interesting conversation between users and interviewers (researchers) was about “accidental meeting” in relation to time and place. Users mentioned that there were many possible chances to create or encourage an interesting conversation in an accidental meeting place; for example, they met at a staircase, along the walk way or corridor, in front of elevators, in front of a meeting room, pantry, etc. However, the conversation has to stop quickly due to the lack of appropriate space that supports longer interaction. Therefore, this makes an interrupting in between conversation also decreased level of friendly and collaborative atmosphere.

### **Step 2. User behavioral and site observation**

After the interview, interviewers used two hours to explore existing space condition and user behavior. The observation occurred in different places around the office area such as executive staff room, pantry, in front of elevator hall, staff work zone, main corridor, etc. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. Staff working area and executive room

The result shows two interesting behaviors of office users. Firstly, most executive staff prefer to have lunch together in order to use this time to continue their discussion of any issues as well as to meet with visitors. However, there is no appropriate space as the pantry is so small; therefore, the users set up a temporary dining space in their office or even occupy their meeting room longer. Secondly, more than three times a day, the staff carries a lot of paper works and document folders to executive rooms for approval, and these do not include urgent documents to handle in each of the day. Thus, this wastes much of their time and it also causes inconvenience.

### **Step 3. Existing space planning study**

The existing plan of the office space was drafted in order to study the relationship between working zone, corridor, executive rooms, and other facility areas such as meeting rooms, pantry, printer station, storage, waiting area, etc. The most critical point was about the location of staff working area turned their back to the office main entrance (See from figure 3) which does not have an office waiting area. As there is no waiting area, sometime, the office staff's guests wait inside the formal

meeting room or along the corridor, and consequently it causes unwelcoming atmosphere for outsiders and guests, obstructs main circulation and makes them lose the sense of direction which is contrary to organizational culture.



Figure 3. Existing office plan

## SOLUTION

After collecting all information through the three processes, the researcher focused on the solution of “design drive user’s behavior” because design can encourage a better behavior among users through art and science. The researcher tackled the point of “accidental meeting” as the key idea to create the sense of informal meeting spaces which lead to more meeting chances. In addition to this, informal meeting space acts like a transitional space which links from public to semi-public and to private area.

Informal meeting spaces were inserted into new space planning to respond to multipurpose design according to the five following functions:

- 1) Formal and informal waiting area: In new space planning, waiting areas are divided into two areas. The first one is located in front of the office, acting like a transitional space from public to semi-public area, and the second one is located in the inner zone, acting like a transition from semi-public to private area. (Figure 4)
- 2) Wide corridor: Circulation is one of the most important areas for this office design as a wider and clear corridor direction can provide more space for short conversations without obstruction for other users. Moreover, visitors can clearly see their destination at both sides along the corridor;

thus, they can decide whether to see the staff they intend to see in his or her office or wait at a designated space. (Figure 5)

3) Work station: The new logic of a work station is to stimulate an engagement between office staff, executive staff, and the visitor by decreasing partition height at 1.2 m. This will allow visual connection and increase one table height to be higher than normal to make it like a platform for executive staff to do paper works comfortably. (Figure 6)

4) Coffee corner: Pantry is where employees may have coffee and lunch, and researchers offer more options of self service area like coffee corner without clear boundary connected with the main corridor. This area should be provided with coffee table sets mixed with leaning bar. Blurring the boundary will create a sense of welcoming atmosphere in order that users can have more choices whether having coffee and taking a break or having lunch together in this area. (Figure 7)

5) Talking area: From new space planning, talking areas are inserted into two places. The first one is beside the corridor, and the second one is at the end of the corridor. These talking areas are strategically designed to promote the chance of “accidental meeting” as the user can stop by this place and start a short interesting conversation or have informal meeting. Then, they can continue their talk in a formal meeting room later. Moreover, the space can serve multipurpose functions such as informal meeting, discussion and consulting area, waiting area, dining area, etc. (Figure 8)



Figure 4. Formal and informal waiting areas

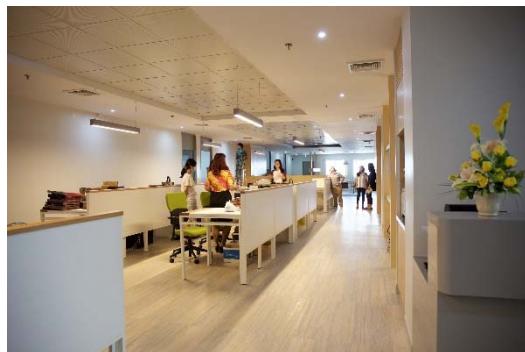


Figure 5. Main office corridor



Figure 6. Staff working station



Figure 7. Coffee corner



Figure 8. Talking area

## CONCLUSION

Each office has a corporate culture or office culture but it will be shown clearly, or it will not be depending on many factors. In a positive way, good office culture usually promotes the development of creative work in the whole office. Organizational culture should be transformed into tangible one, so that people or staff in the organization get to know each other and act in the same direction. Interior design is one of the efficient tools to encourage office culture especially corporate culture that is active and friendly. It can inspire employees to become more creative and productive through many activities in various places whether intentionally or accidentally. Thus, interior space design which creates office environment can tangibly make things happen both directly and indirectly. It improves employees' quality of work and promotes organizational culture.

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