

# The Open Space Office and the Relationship with the Shift in Social Meaning

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## ABSTRACT

The development of the organizational structure is necessitating additional office space. However, not all offices are inclined to expand their spatial resources. Those designed with a closed layout face challenges in meeting the spatial demands posed by the evolving organizational structure. In such cases, transitioning to an open-space office design presents a viable solution. On the other hand, the transition often gives rise to issues pertaining to the social dynamics between leaders and employees, as it disrupts established traditions, leading to a shift in the perceived significance of office space. Understanding this shift within the workplace requires an effective examination of the empirical phenomenon. Moreover, it demands a strong theoretical foundation to develop a precise conceptual framework. Design science serves as a problem-solving approach, addressing the physical elements of structural organization systematically to achieve desired outcomes. This problem-solving process is intricately connected to how individuals respond to their workspace. One of the key design challenges revolves around spatial users and their proximity. The proximity is closely intertwined with the requirements for personal spaces, which significantly impacts privacy. Achieving this balance is accomplished through the application of ergonomic principles and the understanding of proxemic distances. This study used the design method and integrated design thinking theory into the strategic process. The primary objectives of the analysis were twofold, including (1) to reconsider traditional design approaches based on absolutes of right or wrong, likes or dislikes, suitability or unsuitability, and precision or imprecision, and (2) to embrace changes aimed at enhancing the existing workspace without expanding the spatial area while ensuring a seamless workflow for employees.

**Keywords:** *Interior Design, Open Space Area, Social Meaning, Teamwork.*

## INTRODUCTION

Humans, as social beings, are integral to culture, implementing facts and procedures with both uniformity and differences in the establishment of empirical laws and definitions. This process generates social meaning corresponding with human ideas and actions, and results in cultural objects rooted in agreements that evolve with changing times (Bell, 2023; Sugiharto, 2023; Bakker, 2022; Koentjaraningrat, 1987). Culture, as a value system, articulates its way of thinking through symbols. These symbols, serving both communicative function and holding intrinsic value, are intertwined with the substance that accompanies the ideas presented.

There is a cultural system that delineates what is important and valuable in life. This functions as an action system of higher significance in society, with values deeply ingrained in mentality. The expression of cultural thought through symbols is inseparable from its meaning, which continuously evolves without always achieving complete understanding. Therefore, a plethora of interpretations has become widely available (Sugiharto, 2023; Agustianto, 2011; Wardani, 2010), and the shift in social meaning is an inseparable part of culture, altering pre-existing traditions. The transformation of the organizational structure significantly affects spatial requirements. Closed office layouts often fall short of meeting these needs, and not all offices can expand the workspace as the organizational structure develops. While transitioning to the open space design is an ideal solution, it often causes challenges related to the social meaning of leaders and employees. This transformation poses questions about whether tradition can be altered. Primarily, tradition is not an immutable concept but rather a product of human decisions. When office design undergoes changes, a shift in tradition is unavoidable. An in-depth understanding of empirical phenomena is crucial to explain the transition toward open office spaces.

The shift in the social meaning of an office and changes in the system of arrangement can be attributed to limited land availability and the need for increased collaboration in the form of teamwork (Privett, 2020). Although modernity introduces innovative logic in terms of novel meanings, demands, and opportunities, it does not alter the social meaning of the workplace in the context of overarching culture (Djadjuli, 2017). The overexposure of a culture is a foundation for solid bastion of identity, characterized by rigidity, reluctance to adapt, and an inclination to view outsiders as adversaries who should be opposed or destroyed. This phenomenon is characterized by a shift from a closed system to the open system, resulting in contested transformation. This raises the question of why openness is considered a challenge to be undermined, and whether leadership undergoes a transformation in social meaning when the workspace of leaders becomes open without barriers.

The transition to the open space office arrangement should not inherently cause a shift in social meaning. Therefore, addressing empirical phenomena and cultivating a solid theoretical foundation are the initial steps toward achieving this objective. The design method and thinking theory are also ideal solutions. Interior design science, as a systematic process for addressing issues related to the physical components of a structure, enables the attainment of primary objectives (Juliá Nehme, 2020; Dewi, 2018; Hidjaz, 2011; Santosa, 2005).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Interior Design Science

The primary objective of interior design is to address complex problems related to human responses to space. This process is carried out methodically, producing a design concept of four key components, namely design object, user, new idea, and corporate image, with user needs playing a crucial role in the preparation phase. Humans, as users, interact with various elements within a space, including floors, walls, ceilings, windows, doors, and furniture, resulting in a unique spatial experience (Sari, 2005).

Spatial users are influenced by two main dimensions, namely ergonomic-instrumental and affective. Ergonomic-instrumental is a product of structuring the workspace with an ergonomic design. This includes the provision of work desks and chairs tailored to the body size of the user, as well as functional lighting. The provision of relaxation facilities, such as lounges, can be categorized under this dimension. On the other hand, affective dimension pertains to emotions and feelings. The ambiance of the office space is integral in shaping the behavior and activities of users. Interior spaces are designed to enhance environmental conditions, leading to more effective and efficient user activities.

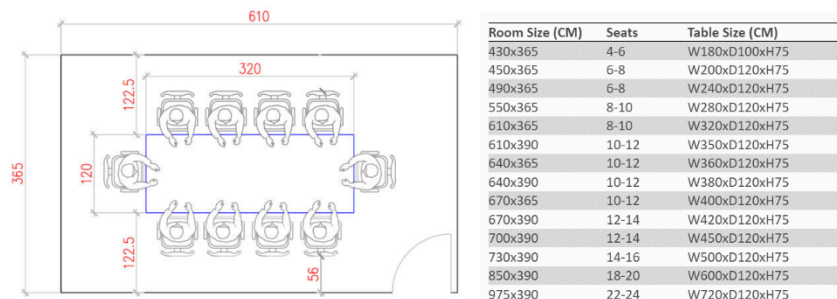
Effectiveness is achieved through the optimization of space efficiency and the presentation of an aesthetically pleasing visual appearance. The interior design process comprises two main stages, namely the idea proposal and the design solution. Idea proposal is carried out through data collection, problem identification, discussions, and the identification of issues. Space requirements and zone division are the outputs of this phase. Design solution, on the other hand, builds upon the existing proposal, including the creation of furniture layouts based on zone divisions and the development of comprehensive working drawings to guide fieldwork. Furthermore, the guidelines for on-site work are closely related to the anticipated costs, calculated based on working drawings, material selection, and selected furniture. A systematically executed design process can lead to the resolution of issues that are both appropriate and beneficial for the users.

## Proxemic

One of the challenges of the design relates to spatial users, with a particular focus on the concept of proximity, which is intricately related to the need for personal areas directly impacting privacy. This consideration is guided by the application of ergonomic principles and proxemic distances. Proxemic addresses how individuals perceive and use space in communication. The four proxemic zones are:

1. Intimate distance of 0-46 cm
2. Personal distance of 46 cm - 120 cm
3. Social distance of 120 cm - 360 cm
4. Public distance above 360 cm

The zones serve as a framework for understanding the interactions between individuals and the physical environment, offering guidance for shared spaces. Also, the arrangement and spacing of shared spaces are closely intertwined with furniture design, an important element in the context of physical settings. Interior designers can identify optimal and comfortable distances for users by using a guidebook. Below is a visual display of a meeting room layout.



**Figure 1. Circular conference table.**

(Source: <https://workspace.ae/content/meeting-table-size-guide>)

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The concept of culture can be applied to address challenges related to the social culture in meeting space requirements. Analyzing the culture and systems in the office with closed design models is a crucial step to ensure that design changes do not negatively impact employee performance. The design method, based on Rosemary Kilmer theory, was adopted, with the process classified into two distinct stages. The first stage comprised data collection, problem identification, and discussions to find solutions. The second stage, known as synthesis, was dedicated to processing the formulation of problem-solving strategies to yield a design solution output. The entire process was driven by Design Thinking theory guiding the creative strategy process.

## FINDINGS

The concept of renovating the second-floor workspace of the Annex Building of the Protocol Bureau commenced with a headcount of employees. The subsequent step included dividing the area into the main and supporting sections. The main area consisted of a workspace with a closed room for the strata 1 leader, the open space room for the strata 2 leader, and a staff work area. The supporting area included a file area and a lounge. The new standardization was implemented without reducing the existing facilities.

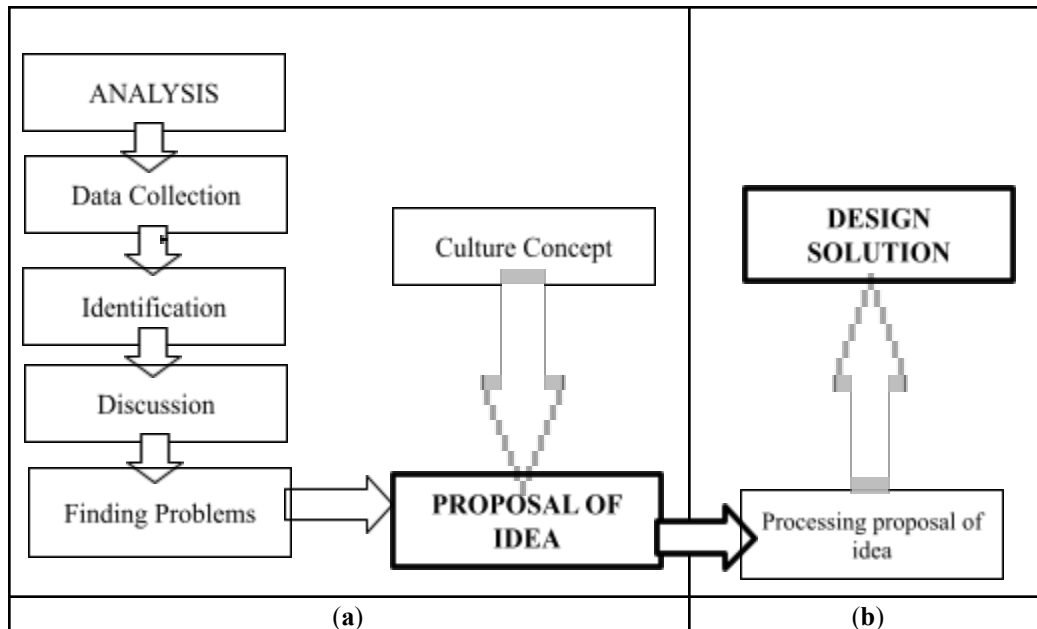
**Table 1. Space standardization**

No	Space	Space Requirement	Wide
<b>MAIN AREA</b>			
1	Head of Bureau (Strata 1)	Work desk and chair Small meeting desk Sofa set File cabinet	42 sqm.
		Restroom and bathroom	10 sqm.
2	Head of Section (Strata 2)	Work desk and chair Sofa set Lemari file	14.2 sqm.
3	Head of Subdivision (Strata 3)	Work desk and chair Sofa set File credenza	10.5 sqm./ 3 people
4	Staff	Work desk and chair Sofa set File cabinet Storage credenza	10 sqm./ 6 people
5	Non-civil servants	Work desk and chair (open space)	8.5sqm./ 4 people
6	Hot Seat	Work desk and chair (closed space)	9.5sqm./ 4 people
7	Bureau Head Staff	Work desk and chair Sofa set for Bureau Head guests File cabinet	9.5sqm.
<b>SUPPORT AREA</b>			
8	File, print, photocopy area	Credenza	
9	Lounge	Sofa set	20 sqm.

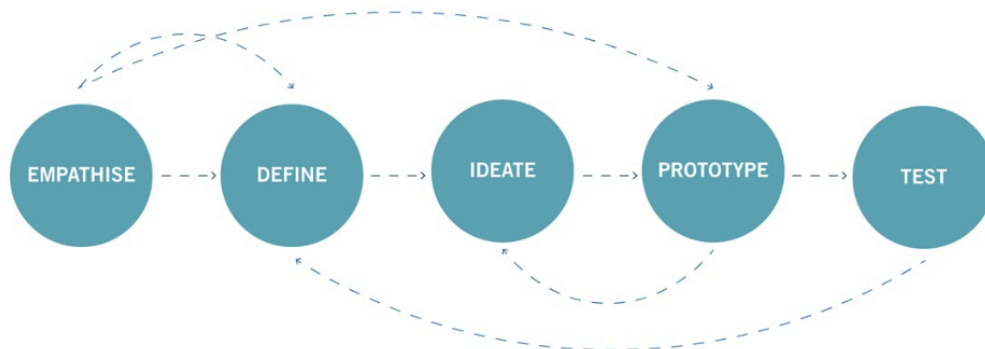
The first stage comprised the calculation of work area requirements based on the needs of employees. This required determining the necessary area by multiplying the area per room by the number of employees and considering any requirements for additional space. The next stage included determining the circulation area by adding 20% of the initial calculation. The circulation path adhered to a standard width of 120 cm, designed to accommodate two people walking together, and 150 cm for the main

circulation path. This path played a crucial role in ensuring safety in the event of fire or earthquake. The table above shows the adjustment results standardizing the space based on the results of data analysis. The second stage comprised mapping the work area based on the desk division, while the third stage entailed creating exposure images that visually conveyed the ambiance of the office. Subsequently, the process proceeded to the stage of transforming the proposal into a design solution.

### Interior Design Concept



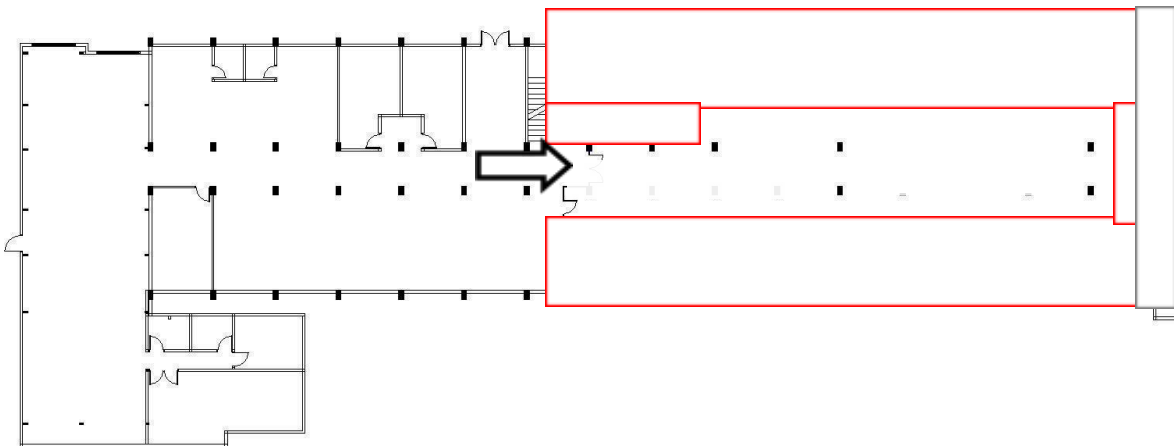
**Figure 2. Design Solution Process.**  
 (Source: Author's collection)



**Figure 3. Design Thinking Process.**  
 (Source: <https://careerfoundry.com/en/blog/ux-design/design-thinking-process/>)

The workflow of the design method comprised two main stages: (a) The first included data analysis, where social problems were identified through data collection. The data were subsequently scrutinized, and the problems were formulated in the idea proposal. (b) The second stage was dedicated to processing the idea proposal into a comprehensive design solution. This stage followed a creative strategy process, providing an innovative solution to accommodate organizational structure development necessitating a shift toward a more human-focused design. The specific flow of thinking comprised the following steps:

1. Emphasize: Understanding client needs by immersing oneself in the perspective and emotions of the client.
2. Define: Sorting and analyzing the information obtained to derive a systematic problem statement.
3. Ideate: Generating innovative solution ideas through out-of-the-box brainstorming. It is essential not to limit ideas during this stage to maximize innovation.
4. Prototype: Creating a physical form in an experimental module, allowing for direct observation, testing, and analysis.
5. Test: Conducting an assessment to ensure errors are avoided during field implementation.

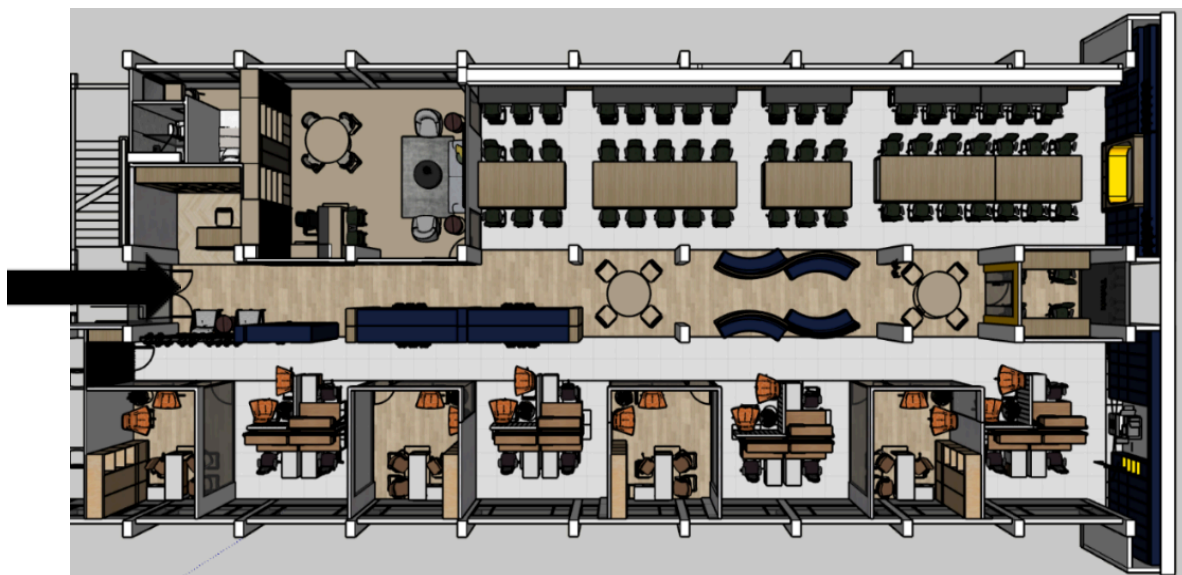


**Figure 4. Grouping.**  
(Source: Author's collection)

Office grouping is visually represented by dividing the space into two distinct areas. The main area is shown with red shading, while the supporting area is depicted in gray shading. The unshaded white area denotes the circulation path, and an arrow shows the entrance.



**Figure 5. Exposure Images**  
(Source: Author's collection)



**Figure 6. Lay Out Furniture. The arrow shows the entrance.**  
(Source: Author's collection)

The karo staff is strategically situated near the entrance and serves as a guest filter. The proximity to the bureau head room aids its function in assisting leadership. To ensure privacy, the head room is also positioned close to the entrance, preventing visitors from entering the private work areas. Furthermore, the leadership and staff areas are located differently to distinguish their functions. A lounge space is also designated for casual discussions between leaders and staff, as well as a relaxation area. Non-civil servants are physically separated from the structural areas due to their differing functions.

The combination of gypsum and glass in the enclosed spaces of the Bureau Head and Section Head ensures that space constraints are distinct. This configuration not only allows for two-way supervision and interaction but also fosters the open space design that promotes collaborative work, enhancing creativity and productivity. Moreover, staff desks are designed with a co-working system, facilitating interaction and teamwork. For strata 3 leaders, a desk system resembling the staff desk model is adopted, featuring different design models with a 160 cm high partition for added privacy. The discussion area between the leader and staff is replaced with a sofa positioned in front of the leader desk. The figure below provides a detailed description.



**Figure 7. Perspective of bureau head room. The arrow shows the glass partition.**  
*(Source: Author's collection)*



**Figure 8. Perspective of the open space working area.**  
*(Source: Author's collection)*

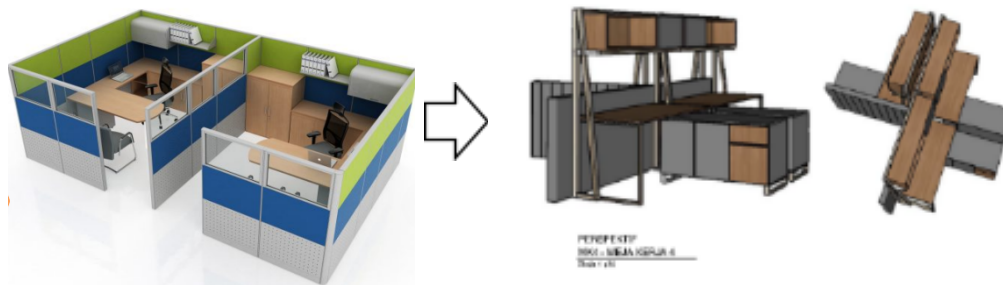
## Furniture Concept

Compact furniture is essential for the open space office, as it offers practicality and lightweight features, while meeting space requirements. However, it is crucial to note that support facilities for work

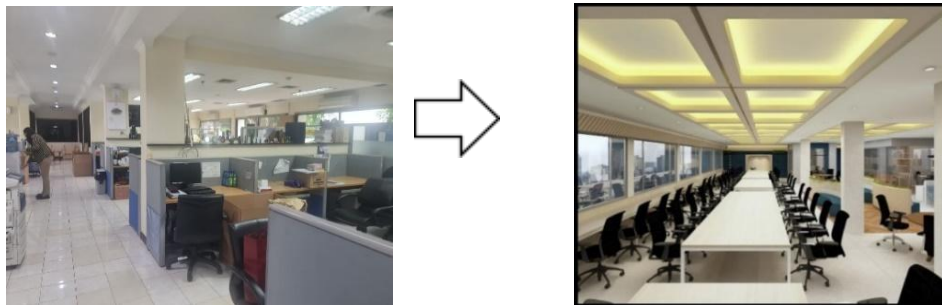


should not be reduced. In the case of strata 3 work area, serving as the workspace for sub-section heads, the original configuration allocated 8.5 sqm for each person, including a work desk and chair, facing chair, and storage credenza with a 160 cm high partition. The new furniture concept maintains the same facilities but replaces the facing chair with a sofa set for collaborative use. Furthermore, the work area is increased to 10.5 sqm to accommodate three individuals. This provides enhanced efficiency by saving 30 sqm of space and promoting direct interaction between sub-division heads.

The original staff work desk features a dividing partition with a height of 120 cm, preventing cooperation. The new furniture concept adopts a co-working style, uses a desk without partition, and provides space for laptops and books. In addition, the requirement of only 1.5 sqm for the new model compared to 2 sqm for the old model results in a space savings of 27 sqm.



**Figure 9. Strata 3 furniture model. Left is the closed model, and the right is the open space model**  
(Source: <https://indovickers.com/product/workx-2/> and Author's collection)



**Figure 10. Model of staff furniture. The left is a model with a cover panel, and the right is the open space model in a co-working style.**  
(Source: Author's collection)

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the transition from closed-system offices to the open space design was a strategic response to the evolving needs of modern organizational structures. While closed offices offered privacy at the cost of requiring substantial space, the open space design, with its adaptable furniture models, provided an ideal solution. Social dynamics and meanings in the open space could be managed through thoughtful facility combinations like glass and gypsum. This transition was advantageous, as it promoted enhanced performance, teamwork, two-way supervision, and the efficient use of space. To address space-related challenges, the integration of the design method and thinking theory served as a valuable reference in the development of contemporary office spaces.

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