

Small Work Groups

People like their jobs better if they work in small spatially defined work groups.

To define the optimum size for a work group the points to be considered are the relationship of the single worker to the whole organization and his relationship to the people immediately around him.

1. When people work in small spatially defined groups, they are more apt to develop a sense of identity with respect to the total organization, than if they are completely isolated or together with a very large number of people. They feel less like a cog in a giant wheel, and they feel more as though they can advance their position in the organi-



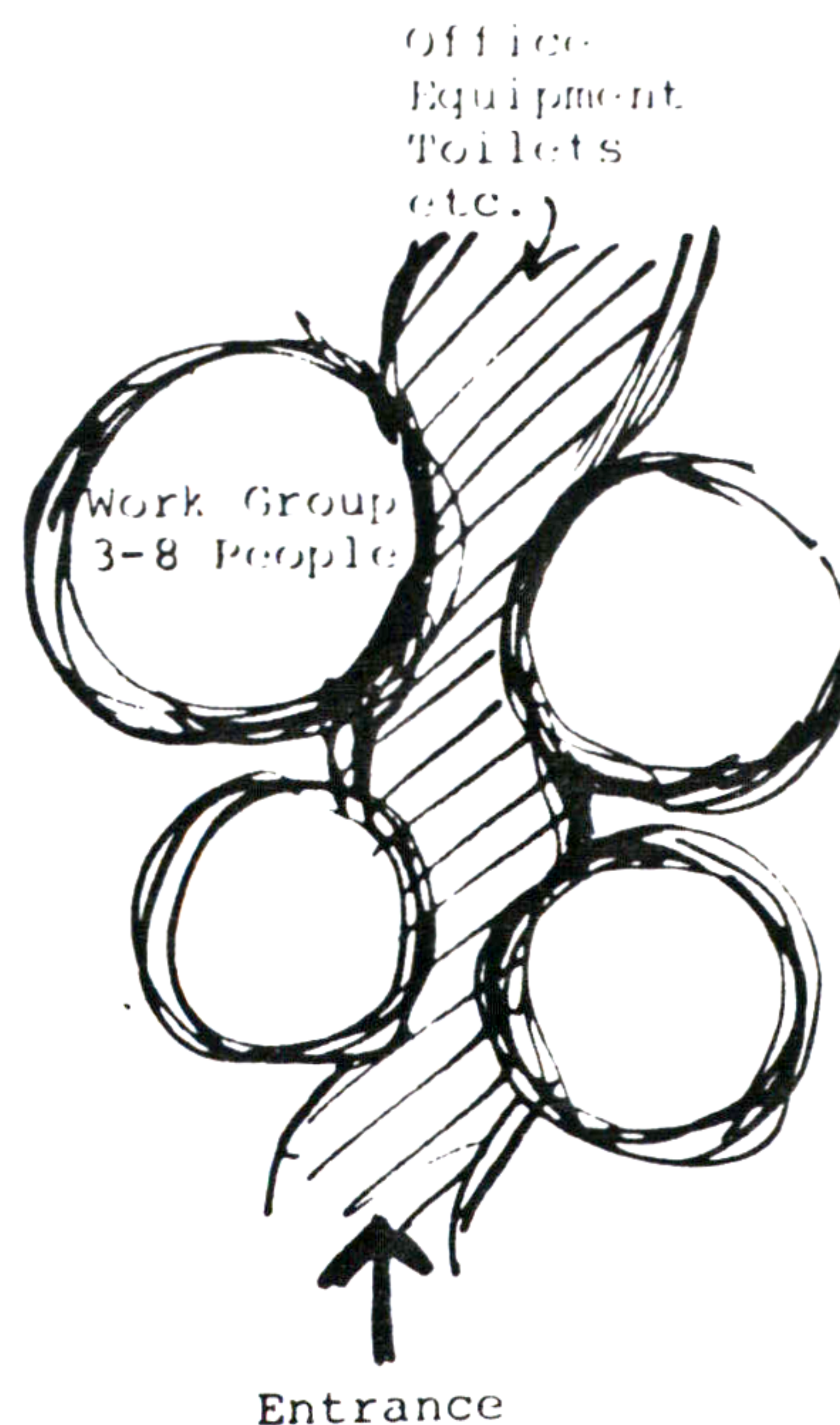
zation (see *Office Design—A Study of Environment, Pilkington Research Unit, edited by Peter Manning, Department of Building Science, University of Liverpool, Table 14 on page 110*). In our own survey of attitudes towards workspace, it was found that people preferred to be aware of two to eight people around them. It seems that if you are aware of more than 10 people, you lose a sense of where you are in the whole. Yet, if you are alone, or with just one person, you feel isolated and as though no one cares about you.

2. Also when the group is small

and spatially defined, intergroup work relationships improve. The group feels more like a team; more responsible to each other; more communicative; and more mutually supportive and concerned. None of these things can happen in a very large work group.

This point is supported by B.W.P. Wells, in his article titled "The Psycho-Social Influence of Building Environment", in *Building Science, Volume 1, pp. 153, Pergamon Press, 1965*. At the same time while small offices do support inter-group interactions, it is true that they do not generally support intra-group interactions which large open offices do. It would seem that this problem can be taken care of by arranging the offices so that several of them share common facilities, such as drinking fountains, toilets, office equipment, perhaps in some common ante room—with a common maintenance. (continued over)

Therefore: Break up large office work groups into smaller identifiable ones with between three and eight people in each. Arrange these groups so that each, together with other groups, share a common entrance, office equipment, drinking fountains, toilets, etc.



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Problem (continued)

3. Additionally more intimate and meaningful social relationships develop in smaller groups. The level of intimacy and the frequency of friendship formation within working environments is directly proportional to the distance people work from each other. (See *Pilkington Research Units, op. cit.*). We would guess that most people would want to get to know four to six people at their job, well enough to have intimate conversations with; perhaps 12 people with whom they share some common interest; and the rest, only to say hello to, and that this range of social contact is necessary for people to enjoy their jobs. It becomes very difficult to develop this range of contact if there is no differentiation in spatial organization to support it. Intimate friendships develop as a rule only in small work groups—not in large office settings. But, large office settings have the advantage of increasing possibilities of the formations of casual friendships.

Another problem of small offices is the high incidence of people becoming "isolates". Pilkington describes an "isolate" as someone who for some reason or another does not relate to anybody else in the organization. In large open offices, this phenomenon is much less frequent because of the higher chances of casual friendship formation. Again, what is called for is the possibility of the complete range of social contact.

It seems then that in order to get the full range, people should work in small offices, to allow for the formation of intimate friendships, but the offices should be arranged so that they share common facilities (like 2 above) to allow for the making of more casual friendships.

Throughout their research, the Pilkington Research Unit found that people preferred small offices to large ones. The same report refers to some evidence from Japan that the most common size of work groups is 5 in Japanese government buildings (see *T. Takano, in documents from Kensetsu-sho Eizen-Kyoko Kenchiku-ka, referred to in the Pilkington Research Unit report, op. cit., pp. 41-42*).

The desirable size of work groups from the above discussion seems to range from three to eight. These groups then should also be arranged so they share a common entrance, office equipment, etc.

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October 1970