

PERSONAL WORKPLACE
HMI TEAM

START OF PROJECT

July 15 1988

We have defined the following first questions and areas of work, to give us our starting point.

1. DESIGN OF A MIDDLE MANAGERS OFFICE.a. What is the overall pattern which makes it unusual, more pleasant. Why is it so worth while.b. What are its main elements.c. What is missing from the twelve items we have defined so far, i.e. in what way are we short of having the most comfortable and useful possible place.

2. VARIATION OF MIDDLE MANAGERS OFFICE. How is it achieved that each manager feels his office is unique, in a genuine sense, and not a carbon copy of the next guy's. This uniqueness must be present in **feeling**, not merely in layout and geometry (which is obvious).

3. OVERALL PATTERN OF SPACE. How do we make 200 workstations feel OK. Three subproblems:a. What are the main problems with existings office landscape etc: rat maze. b. What will it take to solve these problems. What is the generic structure of the space going to be. c. How do we solve the mass repetition problem.

4. DETAILED FINAL DESIGN OF KNOWN ELEMENTS. For immediate work with HMI group. What is the order of priority and sequence, assuming one per month to be sent to Michigan.

Flat red desk

Green table

Black rolling table

Hard sofa

Upright red desk

White upright cabinet

Low white bookcase

Japanese silk pin board

Overhead storage

Ceiling light in overhead storage

Many drawer cabinet

Counter top storage wall with cabinets

5. COST ACCOUNTING. We must get an immediate feel for actual cost breakdown of an individual item, and the way we distribute available budget over the items of cost within the piece. This is essential, and essential to establish rapid communication weith production engineers on this point.

6. PRELIMINARY DESIGN OF SO-FAR UNKNOWN ELEMENTS. The following list are items which will ultimately be part of system (probably). Which are most important, and what is the tentative order in which we begin considering these items.

Developed thick wall
 Upright spun graphite chair
 Filing cabinet
 Ceiling elements
 Floor elements
 Possible reclining computer chair
 Computer table
 Window in wall
 Alcove for small workstation
 Additional lighting system
 Second black rolling table
 Catalog counter with inclined top
 Other items

6. GENERAL PHYSICAL SPECIFICATIONS OF THE SYSTEM. What we have at the moment is a collection of items with a similar feeling, but no intentional conscious quality as one thing. What is the "style" of the furniture. What are the pieces mostly made of. Are there any general characteristics we can define.

7. MATERIALS BOARD WITH PERCENTAGES OF MATERIALS. Refine our previous efforts to find the best percentage mix of materials, and then develop elements which preserve this mix.

8. COLOR VARIATION. One red desk is OK. But how do we handle 35 desks like this. Are they all red. Many-colored. More subdued. How does it work.

9. LEVEL OF DIMENSIONAL VARIATION IN INDIVIDUAL ITEMS. How many different desks are there. What is needed by variety problem for the managers office.

10. CONTENTS OF THICK WALLS. Since the customized method of making thick walls is essential, how do we actually handle the problem of specifying, and "filling" and combining to get variety.

11. MOCKUP PROBLEM. We know that office works best when

it is fine-tailored as you install it. What is the procedure for handling the gap between manufacturing and installation, so that installation is customised in feeling and reality. Cut and paste furniture. Should we produce a system of cardboard mockups, as a cheaply manufactured kit that is supplied to all buyers before installation. Is this too wild.

12. WORK DESCRIPTION. A pattern language which gives more insight into the best workpatterns for the new office. What are the main problems with the work patterns people have.

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REAL COMFORT

The basic definition of the system will be towards comfort. This middle managers office, will allow you to get a truly comfortable office. Your office will be unlike anyone else's office, adapted to your own needs, based on your layout, and your own special needs, altogether as comfortable and efficient as it is possible to make it. If you install the HMI system, you get a custom environment, which has just the features you want, and the layout you want, virtually without constraint. It is designed, above all, to make **you** comfortable in your own terms. The meaning of comfort is personal. We are not talking about an abstract comfort defined by work efficiency experts. We are talking about getting an office to be the way **you** want it, with no ifs ands or buts, as personal to you as your study at home. The meaning of comfort is effective and efficient. We are talking about a place that makes it easier to work, more pleasant to work, more efficient to work. It is like a custom office, that you have made yourself, that has grown around you to fit your own needs and habits perfectly.

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THE HMI SERVICE

To provide you this level of comfort, there will be a continuous service, provided as part of the system. This service will gradually customise your office. One of the problems with existing office furniture, is that it is "hard". i.e. difficult to change, relatively stiff and inflexible. The HMI office is more like a custom car, or like your own study at home. Every few months (more often at the outset), small things need to be done, to make you more comfortable. A new light, a shelf, a different counter configuration. The system is soft enough, so that these changes can be introduced regularly, so that the office grows with your use of it, and is continually adapted to your needs.

This is provided as a service. A local HMI trained rep, who is essentially a modern equivalent of an old-time cabinet maker, will come by every two or three months, to ask you if there is anything you want done, to be more comfortable. You tell him. It is done during the night, so that there is no nuisance. But with a few days it appears there, as if by magic. The service is provided as part of the system. There is no additional cost, and no clearing with middle management, to get a phone, or a shelf, or a light. It simply comes with the package, that this ongoing adaptation is part of the service. The intention is that within a few months, you have an office that feels like home. As a result of this service, the office gradually gets to feel unique, and personal. Like an old Mercedes, it gradually become yours, so that, even though it has system products, you soon become unaware that it is a mass-produced thing, and it becomes personal to you. The actual physical thing, gradually becomes unlike any other office, and even the components are transformed so that it becomes absolutely yours in smell, feel, touch, color, sound, and arrangement.

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THE COMPONENTS OF THE MIDDLE MANAGER OFFICE SYSTEM
CORE SYSTEM AND SECONDARY SYSTEM

We are now beginning a series of experiments to find out just what it takes to make a person feel that they really have the office of their dreams, under realistic conditions, and using the elements of the CES system we have defined.

The base conditions are the following. Assume a 9x12 office, with no windows, stud and sheet rock walls, carpet on the floor, no lights provided overhead, 9 foot ceiling. We ask each person to sketch the ideal arrangement that they want in this office. We do this, to find out the kind of items people want, what kind of dimensional variation we need to provide, and how many items we need in the system to make each person really happy. Because we assume a windowless office, lighting, view, and decorations are extremely important. First experiments have given us the following preliminary conclusion. In general, each person chooses about 15 items. Of these about 10-12 are standard items -- i.e. items that appear on most peoples lists in one form or another. However, 2-5 items on each persons list are personal items -- items which do not typically appear on other people's lists, and which would not sensibly be part of the core of the system. Nevertheless, these 2-5 personal items on each persons list are really critical. Each person has a few items that are really critical to their own comfort, and to the sense that it is a personal and comfortable office. These elements tend to be different from person to person.

Thus, the items which are common (desk, filing cabinet etc, which are called for by most people) are not enough to provide the level of comfort we are looking for. Each of the people questioned, if asked to give up those items in their personal list, but which are not common items, essentially shrugs their shoulders and says "well, then it is OK, but it isnt really great, and it is not what I really want". Thus the standardised components, if not supplemented by a second list of more personal items, is almost certainly not capable of generating the depth of feeling we want.

It is our belief that the second list, as well as the first -- i.e. the personal items as well as standard

items, should be provided by HMI as part of the system. It is only this, that will really distinguish the HMI system from others, and give a genuinely different product, and a genuinely better level of service.

STANDARD LIST

Listed by more than 65% of people questioned

Flat desk
 Hard sofa
 Light arm chair
 Counter top
 Low table
 Lights (desk light, hanging light, wall light)
 Pin board
 Filing cabinet
 Flat files
 Bookshelves

PERSONAL LIST

Listed by less than 30% of people questioned

Aquarium
 Soft arm chairs
 Blow up color photograph
 Curtain
 White plastic board
 Counter with many components
 Special computer table
 Typing chair on wheels

We believe that the service provided **MUST** be capable of giving a person just what they want in these terms, and **CANNOT** be limited to the twelve core items only, since this will get us right back to the banal machine-like restricted lack of choice familiar from typical office furniture systems. To do this, within the new HMI system, we may propose that the Rodney (local rep) arranges for the special items requested, and installs them together with the core items in an HMI-compatible way, so that it feels as though the HMI system is able to deliver an enormous variety.

Technically, then, the variety is made of a core system and a secondary system. The core system would include 12 items which come in a limited range of sizes and colors and are manufactured by HMI. The secondary system would include hundreds of items which are subcontracted or purchased outside, and are installed together with the HMI system as part of it, so that it all feels like one operation.

CHRIS OFFICE

lat red desk

Hard sofa, also red, 5' long.

Round low table.

Two light arm chairs.

Counter top computer area, with disc files.

White formica-top counter

Bookshelves above counter

Large color blow up of favorite photo (6'x8') on one wall.

Yellow curtain along one wall.

Flat files, in two systems, current and dead files, very many drawers (50 drawers current, and 50 dead).

White plastic board, for magic markers.

Wall lights above

Hanging light over coffee table

Desk light

Typing stool on wheels

GARY OFFICE

Flat red desk

Hard sofa, 4' long.

Aquarium

Round low table, small diameter.

Two light arm chairs.

White formica-top counter

Narrow bookcase, 6' high, 2 feet wide.

Counter with files and flat files in it.

Wall lights above

Desk light

ARTEMIS OFFICE

Flat red desk

Square low table.

One light arm chair.

Two soft arm chairs

Computer table, sticks out from counter.

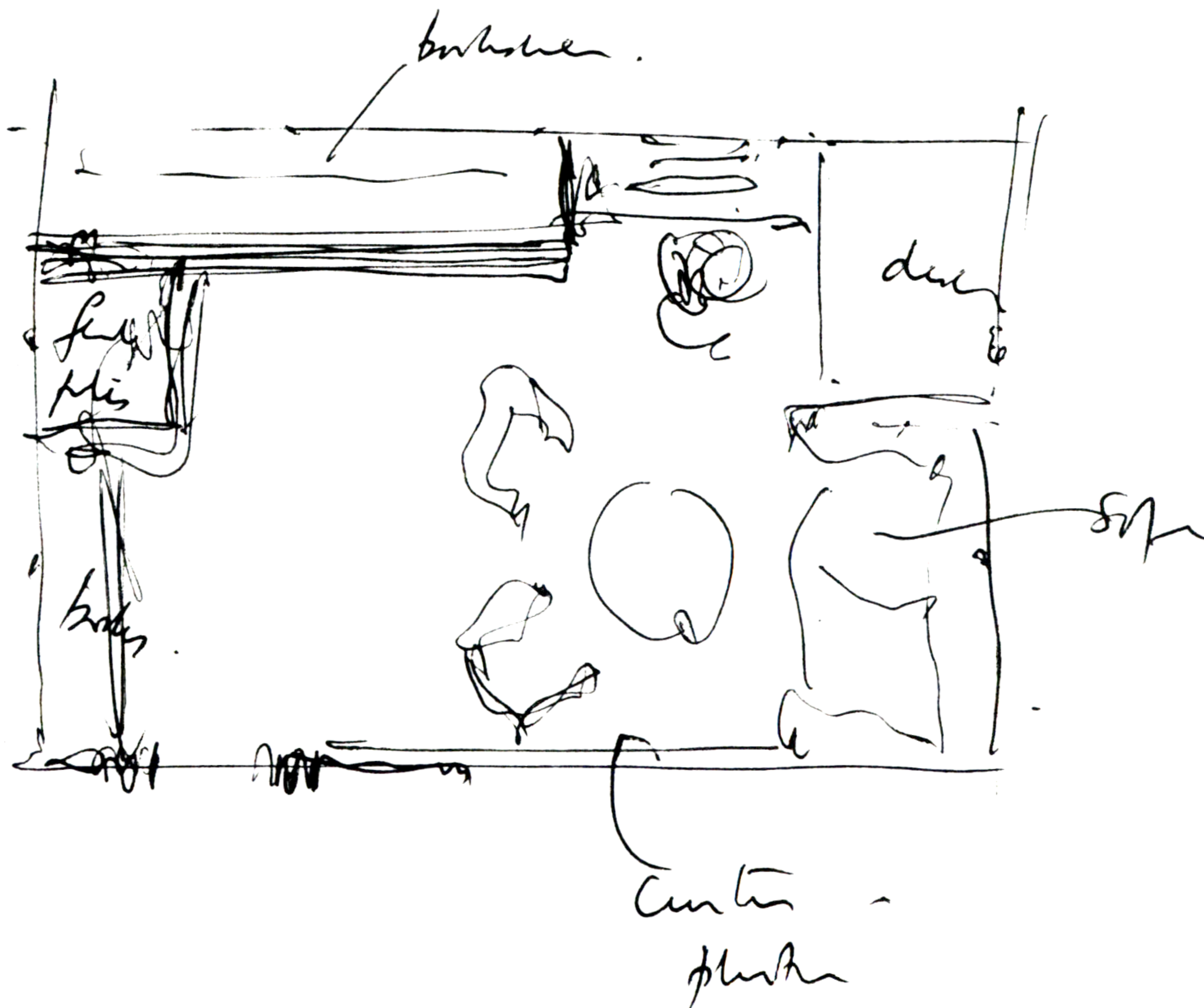
Floor to ceiling bookshelves.

Wall lights above

Desk light

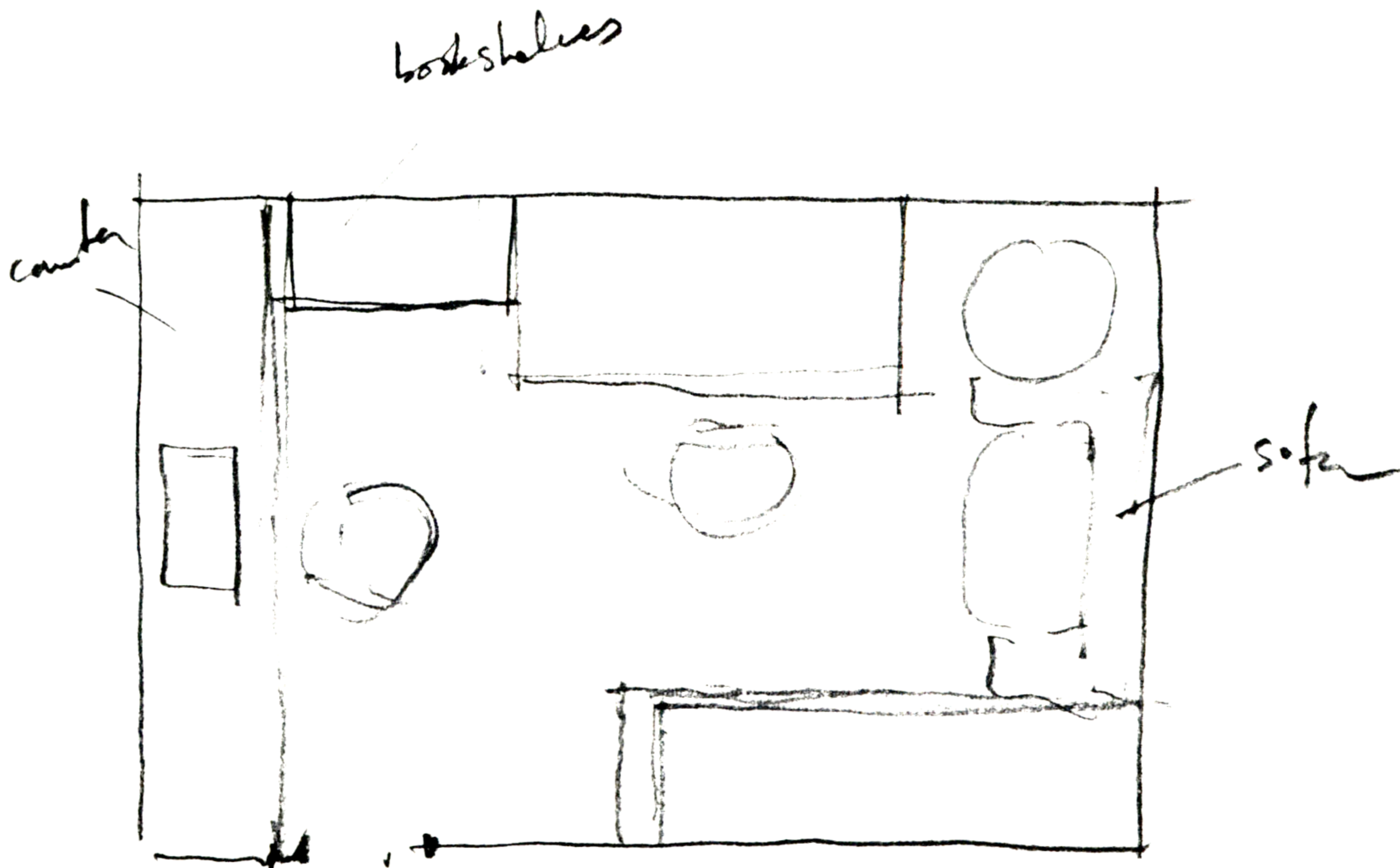
CHRIS OFFICE

Flat red desk
Hard sofa, also red, 5' long.
Round low table.
Two light arm chairs.
Counter top computer area, with disc files.
White formica-top counter
Bookshelves above counter
Large color blow up of favorite photo (6'x8') on one wall.
Yellow curtain along one wall.
Flat files, in two systems, current and dead files,
very many drawers (50 drawers current, and 50 dead).
White plastic board, for magic markers.
Wall lights above
Hanging light over coffee table
Desk light
Typing stool on wheels



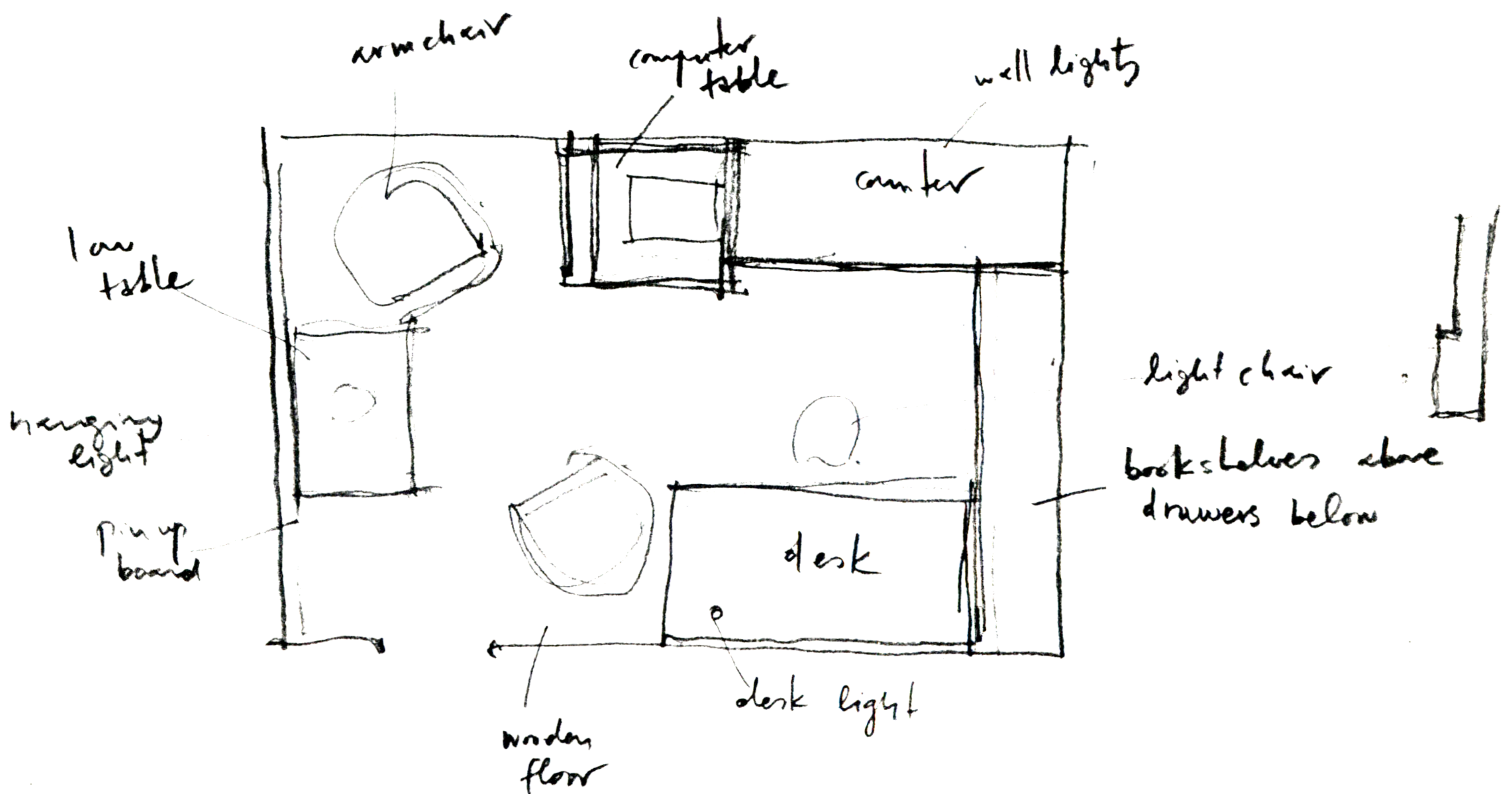
GARY OFFICE

- Flat red desk
- Hard sofa, 4' long.
- Aquarium
- Round low table, small diameter.
- Two light arm chairs.
- White formica-top counter
- Narrow bookcase, 6' high, 2 feet wide.
- Counter with files and flat files in it.
- Wall lights above
- Desk light



ARTEMIS OFFICE

- Flat red desk
- Square low table.
- One light arm chair.
- Two soft arm chairs
- Computer table, sticks out from counter.
- Floor to ceiling bookshelves.
- Wall lights above
- Desk light
- Counter top
- Pin-up board
- Filing cabinet
- Hanging light



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ASK 100 MIDDLE MANAGERS

We propose to ask 100 representative middle managers, what they want in their ideal office. To make it clear to them, that they should be free to imagine very broadly, and not be confined by present experience, we propose to give them a list of items, which is very long, perhaps 200 items, and contains many unusual as well as many more stereotyped items (the list of twelve). We shall also show them pictures of workplaces which are very comfortable, in an effort to make them feel comfortable, and to expand their imagination. We shall make it clear that the list is open-ended, and ask them to add items. This will allow us to check the "unusual item" theory.

We shall also ask them to draw a scaled sketch of their ideal office, placing these items they have selected on the list. For the purpose of this initial experiment, we shall allow them to draw items at any size they want, without reference to available sizes, just showing us the ideal layout they would like to have. We need HMI help in defining the list of 100 middle managers. One concern we have is that even under these circumstances, people are not necessarily able to describe the workplace which is really good for them. Places that actually work are different from places which people imagine. We must have this element of reality.

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PROBLEM OF BEING REALISTIC

As we examine different layout processes, we find out that there is a great difference between what people think they want, and the arrangements that exists in a truly comfortable and efficient workplace, which has usually grown over time, with many gradual adaptations. The system approach, including our CES system, is usually too uptight and too image-conscious to produce the true shirt-sleeve life-like reality of a good workplace which people arrive at after months or years of use. This has a very loose character, things are relaxed and easy to change. It is therefore very difficult to ask people what they want, and expect to get a realistic answer. The offices that work well often have combinations arrived at by trial and error, which are completely different from the designs, layouts, and descriptions that people give when asked to describe their ideal workplace.

EXPERIMENTAL METHODS OF REACHING A REALITY LEVEL

We have the following possible ways of getting the reality room, as opposed to the imagined room.

1. Draw it.
2. Describe it in words.
3. Computer screen layout.
4. Using models (1" to 1')
5. Full scale mockups with cardboard.
6. Letting it grow gradually -- start with a desk and chair only, and add thing one at a time.
7. Roving Rodney. The room is actually modified every two months, until it fits well.
8. Moving furniture around until you are comfortable.
9. Using cheap tables etc, and then gradually consolidating the definite and clear items over time.
10. Having a very low key system, which never places image-conscious or design conscious demands, and allows everything to be rough enough so that it gradually finds its own level.

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SMALL SCALE OF FURNITURE

We have noticed that the informal and friendly character of the office will be helped by the small scale. Especially when space is at a premium, and office are relatively small (9x12 etc), if items are large you cant get a whole lot in there. If the items are small, the differentiation of the office is increased, and its personal feeling, and the amount of differentiation in there, is dramatically increased.

cf Pamelas office.

The principle is similar to that of Sala house, where everything is slightly reduced, and it feels like a palace in miniature, and has more space-feeling in it, that many other houses which are twice as large.

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MIXTURE OF ROUGH AND SMOOTH

To avoid the strange feeling of modularity, repetition, etc, we shall; have three grades of items in the list.

1. High gloss items, which are very highly finished. They come in one or two sizes, there are noticeable, they give color, and definition to the office.

2. Lower gloss less noticeable items, like files, shelves, and perhaps tables. These come in less astonishing finishes and colors. There come in a variety of sizes, and may be made up from kits, or components, so that variety is easy, but the item is not conspicuous.

3. Lowest gloss items, which are endlessly cuttable, like counters and pin boards. These items can be installed in literally any size and any amount.

Edit this, according to Gary and Artemis table.

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EXTREME VARIETY OF MATERIALS

As we look at the kinds of offices which are most personal, and compare them with the offices which are most impersonal, it is the **system character** which does most to create the impersonal feeling. This system, character comes from the homogeneity of the different items: the fact that they are all made of similar materials, consistent fabrication techniques, same materials, same finishes, same style of curvature etc.

We shall go a long way if the individual elements of the system are **not** consistent in this sense. Thus we shall try to make each element a thing unto itself, with its own character, and its own materials quality.

Some how the trick is to also make it feel comfortable, like something .. so that it does not feel like a rag bag of stuff.

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OPENNESS OF STORAGE

The old rule of thumb is: office must have lots of storage.

However, part of the personal character of an office comes from the lack of storage, the fact that files, papers, boxes, samples, memos, etc are lying about in a comfortable disarray. This kind of office feels more personal, because it does not try to hide the personality of the user: instead it displays it.

We shall therefore try to go for storage devices which tend to leave things more open, and move away from the perfectly clean, uncluttered office, which is partly responsible for the impersonal feeling.

Open flat files

Boxes on the floor

Filing cabinets lying open (not in drawers, but in boxes)

Trays

Small containers of various kinds, which are visible

Open shelving

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ENTRANCE TRANSITION

The decent character of the office, and its personal feeling, is also partly dependent on the fact that it has a decent kind of isolation. iT works very well when you have to go through something to get into the room, past a zone. iT is not enough to go through a thick wall. iT actually needs an anteroom ,or ante-space of some kind, so that the office feels more deeply buried, and more obviously **yours**.

It may be desirable to make this a feature of every office, and somehow allow the furniture to establish this.

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SIZE AND CHARACTER OF BASIC OFFICE

After discussion with Rob, we have the following basic information.

For the middle managers office, we can assume the following:

1. Size 8' x 10' to 10' x 14'.

This means that 9x12 is the median sized office. Incidentally, Rob confirmed the idea that small furniture may help a lot, and that modern furniture has often overscaled stuff, and therefore created feeling of impersonality.

2. Windows. Most offices will have windows because they will tend to be on the exterior perimeter of the building. If not, they will probably have an interior window looking into typing pool etc.

3. Is carpet fixed under the partition walls. or does wall go to the subfloor, with carpet internal to the office.

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NOT CONNECTED ITEMS

We have always had a philosophy of connecting things, so that the room is more unified, less random and boxlike elementlike. This may be a mistake. It may be that the personal character comes in part from the fact that objects are placed more loosely, thus giving the office more of a chance to become used, personal through use, . This would imply that we keep unified connection as an option, but generally go for a system of smaller, more movable things, which people can arrange to make themselves comfortable.

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DIFFERENT GRADES OF OBJECTS

There may be real value in allowing each item to come in different grades, more expensive, less expensive and so on. This may be more useful even, than size variation, in determining a personal feeling. The reason is, that each person will tend to choose different things for high grade, low grade, etc. For instance, one person will choose a very beautiful desk, and more ratty kind of pin board. Another person will choose a lower grade of finish for the desk, and a beautiful chair or table or pin board.

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SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE

If objects are going to be copied thousands of times, it may be that one can more easily stand to see them, if they are very simple. If they are too elaborate, then there is more of a feeling that this object has been seen before, hence that this office is only a carbon copy of another office. Not sure if this argument is correct.

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August 3 1988

THE PRINCIPLE OF ORGANICNESS

After much discussion, we are now ready to define the essential quality of the workplace we are looking for, and the thing which distinguishes it from almost all existing office furniture systems and the workplaces they produce.

We shall refer to this principle as **organicness**.

The general definition of organicness is one in which each part is comfortably defined and related to the whole; in which each part is unique according to its place within the whole, both in its structure and quality; in which each part has been built and developed over time, according to the adaptation and necessities of its context.

This quality is normal in nature, it is normal in many comfortable places where people feel at home -- often in their own houses, it is common in much traditional art and architecture. The essence of it is that each part is unique and personal, **because each part is truthfully and genuinely related to the whole in which it exists**. As a result of this condition each part is unique in a genuine way which makes us comfortable and personal -- because its uniqueness somehow tells the truth about its situation, and guarantees a genuine and truthful and realistic connection with the world around it and beyond it. This connection certainly includes the people who are using it, their personalities, ways of doing things, idiosyncracies etc. It also includes the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of site, context, light, sound, work needs, associates, nearby functions, location, position, etc.

According to the principle of organicness, no two parts of the world are ever alike -- because the exact system of conditions which exists at any point, is always different from the system of conditions at any other point. Since each part is responsive to the conditions where it exists, then every part is always unique -- this simply follows from the uniqueness of the spot in the world where it exists.

At the same time, we do not expect to find an exaggerated difference or uniqueness. The uniqueness is usually modest, not forced. It exists only so far as it is needed to differentiate truthfully according to real differences in conditions. As a result we also expect to find a certain humbleness and simplicity in the uniqueness.

The main difficulty with office furniture systems is that they completely fail to have this quality. that is why they feel inhuman, sterile, uncomfortable, mechanical etc.

Let us examine different examples of things which have, and do not have, this deep organicness.

Houses in a traditional street

A garden with plants

CES basement

Pamelas office

Indian saris

Here are things which do not have this true organicness, but instead have a sterility or false variety.

Bookcases which are kits

Concrete block and shelf music stands

System furniture with variety of arrangement

CES furniture with variety of dimension

Comparisons

Lemonade v sprite

Georgian terrace v modern row houses

Cabanas v Modular things

Kit built plane v bookshelf kit

Beyond the examples, there is a simple principle at work which governs the way these things feel. In something which is organic, the parts are governed in size, position, character and internal structure, by their position in the whole. In something which lacks organicness, this is missing, and the parts are stiff, unrelated to the position in the whole, or in the way they work within the whole.

TWO GLASSES OF LEMONADE

The organic examples feel comfortable and personal, because they feel unique. For instance, two glasses of real lemonade are different, because there are real lemons, which are different, these real lemons require different amounts of sugar, a different person made them, there may be pips in one more than in the other, or more pieces of lemon in one than the other -- and then as a result, other differences follow -- so in one case you drink with a straw because it is thin enough, in another case you do not because fleshy lemonade will clog the straw.

Two glasses of sprite are not like this. They are nearly identical, so that we have no related variety which comes with them, there is no feeling of unity, because it exists as a module which is unrelated to the world. It is abstract, cut and dried, removed and unrelated... and as a result we feel the same, in some degree, when we drink the glass of sprite.

PERSONAL OFFICE

A personal office is the same. Each part, follows, and is connected with some reality, which exists, beyond the immediate thing, and which ties the whole together and to the world beyond, and to the real human experience of working. So, in Pamela's office, the furniture is homemade and awkward ... there are boxes on the floor ... but the boxes arise from necessity, the music cabinet was made for her music, the picture over the desk is hers, the ugly filing cabinet on the floor does not offend by its ugliness it simply holds the files, as necessity requires, the carpet is a spot of loveliness that reflects her need and desire for something beautiful, the small desk is littered with photos and letters from children. Yet this office is also very efficient. Everything is where it needs to be, it is chosen without regard for appearance, but as a consequence of something else.

The cardboard box which holds file folders is chosen because file folders get out of hand. At that moment, it is not possible to "order" a filing cabinet. The cardboard box is a more immediate response which follows directly from the real fact of living with overflowing boxes of letters and documents which must be filed, but also from the reality of the window, and the redwood trees, which filter the light, and whose light must be preserved to keep the room in its loveliness.

The immediacy of response causes the uniqueness of adaptation -- and it is in this quality that we feel the life.

.... not finished yet

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AN ORGANICNESS BE MADE BY A LARGE SCALE INDUSTRIAL
PROCESS

Once we have a clear idea of organicness, and have a clear idea that it is this quality we are driving towards, one question then arises.

Can organicness be made in a modern industrial context.

In principle there is no reason why organicness can not be made by a formal process.

In traditional society it is a simple process of following rules, which produces it.

In the human body the body manufactures cells which have this property and is set up to do just that.

Informal human processes are often set up to have, and produce this quality.

However, in a large scale industrial context, certain processes are set in motion which actively work against the creation of organicness.

However, there is no reason, in principle, why a large company like Herman Miller cannot set up a process, which is specifically designed to produce organicness in the environment.

To study what kind of process might work, we shall begin by listing ways in which we have precedents for large scale industrial processes, which do produce organicness with some success.

**Airplane kit
Nursery
Supermarket
Use of sod
Lumber yard
Kits for lights**

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August 11 1988

THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEW SYSTEM

The main features of the new system are:

Smaller furniture

A beautiful surface on the pieces

More cloth, and more feeling in atmosphere

Some beautiful colors and patterns, together with some subdued and refined qualities

Pieces which reflect the mirror of self. The shape makes you feel peaceful and contained within yourself.

The room is more relaxed, for some reason. What causes this.

More uniqueness and personal feeling. This is created by the way that this system combines with other non system elements, and is comfortable with them. Don't know what causes this.

Very comfortable ... really easy for actual use, tested by years of experiment.

Quality like mercedes. Every piece very solid, the fact of its solidity itself makes you comfortable in your work.

A feeling of permanence in those things which stay permanent.

Very flexible and easy to move, on those things which need to be shifted around.

Variety of quality on different pieces. The system character lies much deeper, and not in any superficial similarity of material or fabrication.

I have a vision of rooms, which have soft carpets, on a hard floor, comfortable pieces that glide like something from the arabian nights, coffee on divans, very intense working atmosphere, very quiet and relaxed. The individual colors, qualities, individual stuff which is added, bright patterns which come from the heart, intense workshop quality of self made order among the tools. Sun coming in, wind blowing, natural quality, being brought face to face with life while you are working.

A feeling of privacy, and communality at the same time: small rooms, well sheltered, with areas of common work.

A new landscape, a new interior world, which is the world a person wants to choose for many waking hours.