Comparison of Designer's Productivity in Online and Offline Working Systems
The Optimal Productivity Working System in Post-Pandemic for Interior Designers

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ABSTRACT

The covid-19 pandemic has forced changes in human behavior in activities, including the interior design studio work system. Online communication media that continues to develop as the pandemic progress affects designers' daily workflow and their productivity in carrying out responsibilities in the office. It is essential to adjust the communication process between apprentices of design studios' work systems. This paper discusses the optimal application of WFO and WFH in a complex design process, in which achieving optimal productivity requires a hybrid work system. The direction of the design world's work system development during the pandemic becomes the focal point of the discussion. The analysis was carried out through the interpretive lens method, ethnography, in which the data were collected through interviewing Interior Design Scholars as outsider participant observers, as well as having semi-structured interviews with informants to obtain in-depth data while keeping the topic on track.

Keywords: Internship, Communication, Productivity, Online, Offline.

INTRODUCTION

As the COVID-19 pandemic progressed, many offices in various fields underwent adjustments in the implementation of the work system to WFH, due to the Imposition of Restrictions on Community Activities, including interior offices. Design firms and designers have adapted to this condition and discovered a convenient way to work, which provides flexibility to uncover their creativity. However, there were

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doubts about when the pandemic conditions had begun to improve. Will it return to WFO or carry on WFH? Which is the most effective and efficient work system to go through a complex interior design process? To find a way, we have to learn how the workers can be productive in every design stage. So that interior offices can operate optimally and bring the best output in the post-pandemic era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The changes in WFO and WFH office atmosphere are directly related to the work system implemented by the office. According to Miller (2021), there are three core experiences to support the work needs of office employees. This was found after surveying 19000 workers. [1] Community Socialization, communication between co-workers or divisions that form a social relationship for collaboration, mentoring, or just brainstorming together, spurs workers to build a connection to collaborate between workers. Communication that can be done expressively at WFO must change to non-verbal communication at WFH. The presence of community socialization will give workers an instinct for the vision and mission of the design firm. [2] Team Collaboration, a media or space for workers to collaborate on a project, encourages workers to interact and where spontaneous response occurs, produces a more effective and efficient work system for the flow of data. [3] Individual Focus, which is the space and time that workers have to be able to think deeply, explore creative ideas, or have an area to rest, restore energy to workers to do work that affects productivity.

An environment that maximizes workers' capabilities to achieve goals indicates productivity. With the work-life balance, it is expected that employee productivity can increase to support the purposes of the office. In pinpointing offices with good productivity, the company must have an excellent and smooth work and communication system. But not limited to the communication aspect, Adiputra (2021), states that there are certain comparisons in the transition from WFO (work from the office) to WFH (work from home) that are reflected in various pros and cons, including aspects of (4) flexibility, where the biggest challenge is in determining the right time to leave work for the day, for there is no physical cue at WFO. (5) Productivity, where a person can create a more personalized work environment at WFH, supporting productivity.

Thus, it is interesting for the author to understand how the five aspects adjusted of the two different systems affect the productivity of office workers. The formulation of the problem in this research are: (i) What are the differences in the implementation of online and offline work systems in the design office? (ii) What is the most optimal work system during this Covid-19 pandemic?

METHODOLOGY

This writing is achieved through an interpretive approach, ethnography. Understanding, researching, and interpreting work culture and subject, understanding their respective office work systems, through detailed descriptions (Geertz, 1973). In collecting data, the author acts as an 'outsider researcher' who

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does not participate in activities at the intern's office location, taking a step back to observe and obtain data. Data collection was obtained qualitatively. This method is combined with the Non-Standardized Online Interview (Mann and Stewart, 2000), where the questions are conducted online and are not too structured, conducted face-to-face via Zoom, to build relationships to understand and obtain better details of the information that the informant wants to disclose.

Six key Informants participated in this research, with a background as a scholar undergoing internship program in interior design firms for nine months, since June 2021. All went through the WFH phase and some chose to carry on the system. Based on the vision of this research and the experience of the informant, topics that are carried out in the interview are ramifications of the 5 main points that are mentioned in the literature review.

How do you analyse your data?

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. Community Socialization
Communication or social relations is an essential aspect of the office work system, as it determines the culture as a productive work environment and job satisfaction. It determines the productivity of new employees. Workers who are in the same office can get acquainted and make direct interactions in explaining work habits. Workers will adapt to a new work environment where acceptance will allow them to recognize and align the design firm's goals.

"When I went offline for the first time, the workers were very welcoming, they didn't mind being asked questions." - Informant AG (22)

When conducted online, workers will have blurry ideas about work ethics, work environment, and the office culture, which would potentially cause them to be reluctant to communicate with co-workers, for there is no connection created by spontaneous interactions. Some informants who are fresh graduates admitted to having the excitement to learn while guided by senior designers. This will affect the efficiency of task execution time.

"In this pandemic, we use Whatsapp to communicate, and work assignments are unclear. Every time I ask, the answer comes after 3-5 hours." - MH informant (22)

It took informant MH several weeks to be able to communicate comfortably in his daily work, affecting her work productivity. In the success of the design stages, Community Socialization also plays a vital role in how workers can expressively use facial expressions, intonation, and body movements to convey design goals. Expressive communication will be easier to understand, thus, the execution of design stages will be more precise. During online conditions where demonstrative communication cannot be fulfilled, chances of failure for both parties to interpret the message fully are increased. It will take more effort to align their thought

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processes and be on the same page. Face-to-face communication can reveal characters and personalities, interlocutors may adjust their speaking style for a more fluid conversation, affecting the process of subsequent communication that is more effective, efficient, and intimate.

"WFH causes a lot of miscommunication, where what they try to convey to me is not the same as what I understand. ... In the WFO system, I can always just ask directly, 'Is this correct?' - Informant FH (22)

"The people in the office are relaxed. At WFO, we like to chat in the evening and the principal has even asked, "Have you had a girlfriend yet?" - Informant FH (22)

Karimi (2014) said that community socialization is parallel to productivity. The more workers that have social construction in the work environment, the more work performance will improve, especially in work that requires collaboration between divisions. This aspect shows the crucial role of community socialization presented in the offline work system, which affects workers in psychological factors, social construction, effectiveness, and design stage efficiency for optimal work productivity.

2. Team Collaboration

Most interior design firms work as a team, especially on large projects, with individual workers based on their scope of work, designers, drafters, visualization, and so on. Good team collaboration is crucial. In WFO, workers easily interact and respond spontaneously to the joint project being worked on. Employees can easily understand the opinions, criticisms, and suggestions of other colleagues on what they do. Especially for workers who still need a lot of input and adjustments to the standards and design style of the firms. When working online, the interaction between co-workers and spontaneous responses are reduced. In addition to the time wasted waiting to get replies on messaging apps.

"Because it took a lot of time, sometimes I have to wait for the answer before I can revise it" - Informant FH (22)

During the design process, an interior designer must collaborate with various divisions to build the design. Clients, Lighting consultants, contractors, material vendors, architects, and ventilation are among them. At WFO, each party can express their aspirations clearly and spontaneously respond to the opinions of other parties, so that the best decisions can be taken together with more certainty. "If something goes wrong, it can be corrected immediately after being reminded at WFO. In WFH; the workflow is I must finish the task first and assist after." - FE Informant (22)

Team collaboration also acts as a psychological boost for the workers. In a healthy work environment, each individual would feel the team's energy, possibly keeping them motivated. At WFH, where designers work individually, workers are aware that no one is watching over them, hence the absence of enthusiasm and performance

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guidance, which possibly reduces their productivity. Yang (2022) strengthens this discussion with his research, where companies that choose to change their work system to 100% online are badly impacted. In this case, it is difficult for workers to collaborate, which hinders the flow of information exchange.

"it's risky at home, where there is no one to supervise us. I was once distracted by another task, so I spent 3 hours on other work assignments" - MH Informant (22)

3) Individual Focus.
The productivity of a worker depends on their ability to focus on design processes. Balance is vital in the smooth running and success of employees as human resources (Saleem & Abbasi, 2015). The balance between personal life and career may let workers avoid stress and have good work performance. Scheduling at WFO is relatively rigid where working hours and working space are standardized. In contrast to WFH, which is more flexible and comfortable, increasing productivity. The system allows workers to work according to their respective productive hours. However, communication in the work context is likely to continue outside of working hours at WFH, blending the worker's personal life with his work life. With this, work-life balance will be more difficult to keep.

A quiet workspace is essential to achieve individual focus during exploring ideas. The Gensler Survey (2019) has stated that an office work environment where most of the area is open but provides a lot of on-demand private space, has the highest effectiveness and experience score. Everyone has their way of exploring ideas and has different preferences for spaces that can support them in that regard. Some informants said that they needed to go out to get inspiration from the outside world. Some need their own space, some are not bothered by the atmosphere in the process of looking for ideas so that a crowded place doesn't affect focus.

"If you are prioritizing the work environment, and like to work with friends, working in an office can give ideas, where there can be input from other colleagues."
- Informant AG (22)

In an offline work system, to support Individual focus, the office should be able to provide facilities to maximize the performance of the design office, for example, by providing private space for workers who need it while exploring designs. On the other hand, in the online work system, a worker can be freer to arrange his work area based on his preferences so that it can support the productivity of each office worker.

4) Flexibility.
According to Klindzic (2019), an organization's performance is higher in offices with employee-driven Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA), where work from home has been positively related to various performance indicators. Supporting this theory, an informant stated that she has benefited from the application of FWA because he tends to be productive at night, outside office hours. The disguised physical cue at WFH allows workers to be more flexible in doing office work, where work schedules are adjustable in their respective homes.

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"I feel that the working hours are more flexible, I can work from day to night, and I think, I am more productive working at home." - JL informant (22)

However, not all workers feel the positive impact. At WFO, activities carried out by workers at certain hours can give workers signals, whereas fixed office hours will also affect the daily schedule of workers. This includes time to wake up, time of arrival at the office, lunchtime, and time to go home. The loss of physical cues during WFO has caused a problem for Informant JL. One of the challenges of WFH is when workers have to determine the right time to leave work, where responsibilities are likely to be neglected.

"It's more productive if the timeframe is clearer." - MH Informant (22)

Physical cue in the work environment helps workers in regularity in activities in the office. It's as simple as the signal when workers sit down in the morning to get ready to start working and get out of their chairs to eat at noon. Similar cues indirectly give workers clarity of time through physical signs in carrying out daily responsibilities. However, some informants stated that they were required to be more proactive at WFH, both in completing ongoing tasks and in asking for new ones.

"at home, you can work while eating, you can work in the family room, dining room, you can go anywhere..." - FH informant (22)

It can be concluded that physical cues do not guarantee workers' productivity, but can serve as a time signal for those who carry out WFO.

5) Productivity
Allowing workers to set up and organize the work environment at home opens up the possibility of increasing their productivity. Some of the informants admitted that the adjustable working environment provides comfort for interior designers. Productivity will increase if workers feel facilitated while doing work.

"... at the office, the iron backrest isn't comfortable, and the room temperature might be too hot or too cold, but we can't adjust it." - Informant AG (22)

"WFH is more suitable for me, especially during the rendering process where I can rest on my bed." Informant JL (22)

Ideal environmental effectiveness cannot be generalized across all design stages. The stages of design are varied and may require workers to have physical discussions. At WFH, workers are likely to be more physically comfortable because of the adjustable working space. This applies as long as the design stage can still be passed through online communication. Design stages that can be completed individually, such as making mood boards, and others, are still possible to be maximized in the WFH system. These workers can develop ideas at their own pace, in their preferred environment. However, the accessibility of certain facilities

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and resources is a concern in WFH, where physical references, such as catalogs and material samples, may not be available to those who need them at certain design stages. Fowell (2022) has stated that the flexibility offered by the hybrid work system allows workers to determine the most optimal location to support the type of work they are going through, thereby increasing productivity.

"In making layout, mood board, 3d, rendering, I prefer to do WFH because I can do those according to my mood. But the material selection process would be easier to do at the office, to look at the material catalog, some people prefer to work from the office so they can be productive, but some are comfortable with WFH, but yes, it depends on the design stage, too." - Informant JL (22).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Table 1.1 Comparison Table of Offline and Online Work Systems
(Source: Personal Fieldnotes, 2022)

	Community Socialization	Team Collaboration	Individual Focus	Flexibility	Productivity
OFFLINE	A. Expressive Communication B. Creating Social Construction C. Effectively synchronizes the thinking and communicating pages	D. Activeness and practicality in collaborating E. Spontaneous communication F. Efficient data flow	G. Clear scheduling system H. Require workers to adjust office hours I. Limited to the facilities/space in the office	J. An evident physical cue helps the workers' time order K. Time and facilities fixated by office provision	L. Workers must adapt to the physical office environment M. Facilitate the discussion of the progress of the design stages N. Availability of specific facilities (materials) O. A more rigid daily schedule according to the office
ONLINE	A. Communication is limited to verbal B. Does not create social construction C. Difficulties in synchronizing the thinking page	D. Collaboration has limited to media E. Non- Spontaneous Communication F. Inefficient Flow of data	G. Bias of scheduling and time limit H. Allows workers to work according to their respective productive times I. Can form a focus space according to individual needs/preferences	J. The absence of physical cue increases the possibility of delaying tasks K. Flexibility in time and workplace arrangements, mainly supporting the process of finding ideas that cannot be forced	L. Adjustable working environment M. Limited online communication media N. Incomplete personal facilities O. Personalized schedule based on each worker's productive time

☐ : Advantages   ☐ : Disadvantages

With the passage of the pandemic, design offices have been conditioned to implement two different work systems, WFO and WFH. However, it can be concluded that the hybrid work system is the more optimal system option, especially for interior designers. With the implementation of a hybrid system, interior designers can adjust which work system is the most optimal to be applied at certain design stages. Design processes that require color proofing, such as material selection, detailed data discussion, collaborative projects that require regular communication, and the final design process, will require better supervision and thus must be carried out on a WFO basis. WFO allows designers to exchange ideas spontaneously, expressively, accurately, and efficiently. On the other hand, the design stage requires individual concentration and creativity, such as design development, mood board, layout, and 3D rendering, subjectively requiring a more flexible, comfortable environment for their workers to focus on. WFH work system gives the freedom for workers to manage their work environment and working time.

CONCLUSION
In conclusion to the discussion of the five aspects, considering the needs of each design process, a mix of online and offline work systems is needed to accommodate complex interior design processes and stages. Based on the research ~~done,~~ it is recommended for an office to take on a hybrid working system for further practice, combining all of the advantages of online and offline working systems simultaneously. It will allow workers to work with optimal productivity, as the possibility of flexibility in different design stages as mentioned in research findings. WFO is applied during the team collaboration stage,

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compiling material, and assisting design progress, while WFH is applied to stages that need creativity, post-production, brainstorming, mood board, and analyzing client's data. For further research, it is necessary to be aware of different designers' work performance in each work system, understanding in detail which system results in higher productivity at specific design stages. That way, the ideal ratio of the online system compared with the offline will keep on being perfect, based on broad and proven research.

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