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**An Exploration of Employees' Experience of Privacy in an
Open-Plan Office Environment**

Karissa Lachman GVNKAR001

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award of Masters Degree in Organisational Psychology**

**Faculty of Commerce
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This work has not been previously submitted in whole or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

This study explored employees' experiences of privacy in an open-plan working environment. An auditing organisation was chosen as a result of the growing demands for trainees to work in open plan environments. An attempt is made to explore the way in which employees regulate the amount of privacy experienced through the use of control mechanisms such as territoriality and personal space.

The subjective nature of the research topic implied the use of a qualitative approach. Focus groups were used as a research tool and data was analysed using a thematic analysis. Focus groups were used for an in-depth and synergistic group effect as well as for their strength in providing insights into the sources of complex behaviour and motivation.

It was found that inconsistencies between organisational culture and environmental spatial design resulted in trainees experiencing more difficulty in the regulation of privacy. As a result, trainees became uncomfortable when expressing emotion, exhibited more conflict behaviour and were often distracted. Furthermore, trainees seemed to make use of coping methods such as adjusting to a new work area, avoiding coming in to the office, creating an informal territory and coming to work early to secure the most efficient resources.

Results also revealed that the need to regulate privacy amongst these trainees was influenced by their perception of certain issues such as hierarchical status, teamwork, and success. As perceptions and hence the need to control privacy varied, it was evident that a balance between a public and private environments was required. Furthermore, adequate, yet cost effective resources would also allow for a better regulation of privacy. Lastly, it was implied that if the organisational culture evolves into one that is less driven by hierarchical status, then respect and responsibility within an open environment will increase and coping mechanisms may not be as necessary.

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1. INTRODUCTION

What was once the reality of daily living and working, is slowly beginning to change. We are moving away from the structured mechanistic paradigm of the industrial era towards a more holistic, transactional and systems orientated way of thinking (Banner & Gagne, 1995). This means a bigger, more realistic picture of work life is taken into consideration. Employees as well as the work that they do are not approached in isolation.

This change in paradigm has led to pronounced changes in the meaning of work and organisational culture (Coolidge, 1999, Rosen and Berger, 1993, Lieber, 1996 and Wallace, 2000). These authors have described the new approach to work as one that encourages and rewards teamwork and collaboration. Furthermore, all of these articles have commented on the way in which this change in the organisational culture has been reinforced by the physical structure of the working environment. They illustrate the way in which organisations have torn down walls and created open plan environments to facilitate communication and teamwork.

However, implicit in the requirement of change, is that the organisation should thereafter be more effective (Szilagyi, Holland & Oliver, 1979). According to Van der Voort (2003) the aim of changing the environmental space is to stimulate dynamic working; improve labour productivity; and reduce cost, without reducing employee satisfaction. Environmental space should therefore be conducive to the organisational culture.

While the open plan environment has significantly led to a reduction in cost and increased dynamic working arrangements, it has also been criticised for a lack of privacy. Coolidge (1999); Rosen and Berger (1993); Lieber, (1996) and Wallace, (2000) all seem to have mentioned the implications that these changes have had for human spatial behaviour, an umbrella term referring to privacy, territoriality, personal space and crowding. While the meaning of work has changed and the

physical environment has been restructured in relation to this, many organisations have been criticised for not taking employees' need for privacy into account.

Van der Voort (2003) has therefore emphasised that one needs to start questioning the benefits and risks in specific environmental designs in order to move away from the dichotomy of those that support the open plan environment and those that do not. Furthermore, Vischer (1999) introduced the principle of 'form follows function,' whereby employees in any given organisation should work in a physical environment that is conducive to their particular job requirements. There is therefore an implicit need for the employees within an organisation to see the value that the spatial environment offers in allowing them to carry out their jobs effectively.

The decision to research this particular topic has emerged out of a growing need to address the recurring issue of privacy, evident in literature on open plan environments. Furthermore the privacy needs of individuals are also informed by organisational culture; social norms; work requirements and personality. This suggests that one work design may not suit the needs of all employees. A qualitative study focusing on how employees experience, regulate and cope with a lack of privacy in the open plan environment therefore has relevance.

2. Literature Overview

2.1. The changing organisational culture

The employees of today are finding themselves in work environments that are very differently designed to those that dominated the working world of the previous generation. Banner and Gagne (1995) have noted that the past has emphasised an individualistic hierarchical culture. Working environments conducive to this culture were closed offices with furniture and space that represented the individuals hierarchical status.

Over time, the nature of work in response to the dynamic external environment has changed significantly. A competitive market, symbolised by efficient and dynamic teams has meant revisiting organisational work design (Jorgensen, 2002). The organic model representing fluid decentralised work processes and design is therefore thought to be more applicable (Robins and Coulter, 1999).

Also synonymous with this new era is a holistic approach to work (Banner and Gagne, 1995). In relation to organisational space, Coffman, Smethurst and Kaufman (1999) have argued that planning and design should not be separated from organisational strategy, as was the case in the past. Rather, strategy should inform and drive the planning and designing of the organisational spatial environment. Furthermore, if teamwork and collaboration represent this new approach towards work, then one must remove all boundaries that fail to recognise the advantage of teamwork.

Sunoo (2000) has also emphasised that the new world of work brings with it, a competitive labour market. According to the American Society of Interior Designers, employees ranked the look and feel of their workspaces as the third most important consideration after salary and benefits in deciding whether or not to accept the job. The emphasis has shifted towards people, who are now acknowledged as the most important asset of the organisation (Jorgensen, 2002).

In striving to optimise this valuable asset, organisations have come to realise the debilitating effects of closed environments and hierarchical structure. These effects have been widely documented as a lack of communication and a lack of synergistic teamwork (Coolidge, 1999). The trend is now towards creative open environments where employees do not feel confined to workstations and offices (Krekhovetsky, 2003). Employees are encouraged to use the open spaces provided to be as creative as possible.

Glover (2002) notes that multidisciplinary teams and professional interaction are crucial to modern business, and that putting people into isolated cells is no longer applicable. Glover states that employees are nomadic and that they require more than one work environment. Workspaces have therefore evolved into a more dynamic structure, providing for different groups of employees within the organisation to come together at any time.

Mosher (2003) has described the ergonomically designed 'Liquid Workspace' which allows for teams to reconfigure with the changing economy. Employees therefore find that they are not necessarily given designated workspaces, but that they need to make use of flexible resources whenever required. Besides the emphasis on dynamic teamwork, this is also based on the assumption that the 'new generation' employee is not office-bound. Mawson cited in Glover (2002) states that under-performance occurs in white-collar workers as a result of employee immobility. According to Mawson, it is becoming increasingly more important to break the psychological link between work and location.

While the open plan working environment benefits the organisation in two ways, namely increased teamwork and reduced cost, it has also been criticised for the effect that it has on human spatial behaviour, that is, privacy, territoriality, personal space and crowding. Furthermore, the open plan environment brings with it, an increased level of distraction that is a hindrance to performance (Van der Voordt, 2003). In a study conducted by Kupritz (1998), it was found that

employees who were moved to an open plan environment experienced a greater potential for mistakes. This was due to a lack of privacy caused by visual and acoustical distractions. Furthermore, barriers were appreciated more for the acoustical property of regulating privacy than for its height or visual property. An interesting finding during Kupritz's study however, was that the basic requirements for performing a job, such as adequate desk space and storage facilities for private belongings, were more important than visual and acoustical privacy. It is therefore questioned whether this basic need may be sufficient for those in an open plan working environment to regulate privacy.

The human nature to regulate privacy has been controlled by territoriality and personal space (Altman, 1968). The changing nature of work and spatial design however has left the employee with a lack of these control mechanisms. The organisational culture that has dominated the past, allowed for employees to define privacy hierarchically (Coolidge, 1995). The more status one had determined the amount of privacy afforded in terms of environmental spatial design. With open plan environments symbolising a flatter organisational structure, employees now find themselves in an environment where status is not defined by space and privacy cannot be regulated. The symbolic meaning attached to territory, namely status, has left employees who still have the old mindsets, feeling as though they have lost something significant in the organisation (Zalesny and Farace, 1987; Oldham and Brass, 1979).

Interestingly, Glover (2002) has found that preference for particular environments varies amongst different professionals. Associate professionals such as nurses and police had the strongest preference for shared space, whereas admin staff had the strongest attachment to desks. Furthermore corporate staff at managerial level were most in favour of private offices. Burnett (2004) points out that people experience the environment psychologically. If an employee values a communal environment and teamwork, then he or she will experience the open plan office positively and this will result in a more productive employee. If privacy

is valued however and the employee has not bought into the culture of teamwork and sharing, then the open plan environment may be perceived as degrading and productivity may drop. Burnett therefore believes that in designing the environment, three factors should be taken into consideration. This includes understanding what the employee is used to, his or her personality and lastly, the prevailing culture.

If the communal working environment is to therefore reduce costs and increase productivity, then it is important to ensure that the effect on human spatial behaviour does not negate this. It is for this reason that organisations are starting to realise that it is important to consider how employees themselves perceive space and privacy, and that this information could be valuable in the design of their specific organisations.

2.2. Human spatial behaviour

Human spatial behaviour is included as a study within the field of environmental psychology. It is based on the perspective that the way in which people are spaced, determines the reciprocal relationship between them and their environment (Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995). In other words, the way in which space is defined will determine whether the environment is positively or negatively experienced and will affect the way in which people respond to it, and to one another.

Space within the bureaucratic working environment was and probably still is to a certain extent defined by status. Industrial era thinking has caused us to value the hierarchical promotion and the external symbols attached to it, such as private furnished offices (Banner & Gagne, 1995). The recent trend however, towards a flatter organisational structure, encouraged by the systems thinking of the post industrial era paradigm, has meant that there is a greater emphasis on teamwork. (Coolidge, 1999). Furthermore, rewards of the past such as private offices are now in fact seen as a hindrance to communication (Lieber, 1996).

However, while many are beginning to see the importance of teamwork and group space, the need for privacy, personal space and territoriality are being ignored (Rosen & Berger, 1993).

The human spatial behaviours of privacy, crowding, personal space and territoriality are all related to one another (Altman, 1975). Altman mentions various mechanisms that people use in order to employ privacy. Firstly people may use verbal cues that may be direct or indirect (sarcasm). People may also use non-verbal mechanisms such as body posture and facial expression. These nonverbal mechanisms are related to the mechanism of personal space and interpersonal distancing, which is usually noticed when a person experiences the psychological feeling of being crowded. Thirdly, environmental or cultural mechanisms may be employed where people use spatial markers such as a fence to defend their territories, or sit in a designated chair around the dinner table. In the workplace, this may mean workspace partitions or offices. Hence the issues of personal space, crowding and territoriality are all related to an individual regulating his or her privacy, and it is to these issues that this discussion will now turn.

2.2.1. Regulating privacy

Most people can identify with the need at some time or the other to be alone or to have control over their accessibility. While people often hear themselves consciously or unconsciously saying 'I need some privacy', many don't consider the functions of privacy and the reasons for requiring it. This is probably due to the fact that the western world encourages independence and individuality. There is a need to have control over the self, which is seen as separate from the organisation.

Newell (1994) describes privacy as a condition of physical, psychological and information separation from the public domain. It is a voluntary and temporary condition into which the public domain does not intrude. Westin, (1970, in Veitch

& Arkkelin, 1995), distinguishes between four kinds of privacy. These include solitude (being alone), intimacy (two or more people separating themselves from others), anonymity (being in a public place where one is not recognised) and reserve (setting up psychological barriers when forced to be with others). While these may be temporary, they represent the need to be separate from others.

However privacy is perhaps best defined by understanding its functions. According to Altman (1975), privacy is defined as an interpersonal boundary control process, an optimising process and as a selective control. Privacy as an interpersonal boundary control refers to the fact that people regulate inputs and outputs. What one chooses to acknowledge and respond to depends on the nature of the interaction and the content of the information. This likens the individual to a system that needs to maintain a level of homeostasis. Privacy as an optimising process means that when privacy is either too high or too low, people will experience either a feeling of being isolated or crowded respectively. Lastly, Altman's (1972) description of privacy as a selective control focuses on the fact that people need to feel that they are in control of regulating their privacy. This means that at any given moment, should a person wish to avoid or invite interaction, he or she should be free and able to do so.

Veitch and Arkkelin (1995) claim that Altman's (1975) explanation of privacy as a regulating, optimising and control process can be explained according to their framework of human-environment relations. According to this model, people desire the need to maintain optimal privacy, which is done by regulating inputs and outputs. Should present privacy needs be optimal, the person exists in a state of homeostasis and behaviour continues as the person feels a sense of control. Should privacy needs be either too high or too low, the person experiences displeasure and a feeling of loss of control. To the extent that coping mechanisms succeed, behaviour may continue. However, if coping mechanisms are insufficient or environmental privacy worsens in the less preferred direction, the person may experience dysfunctional behaviour.

An important function of privacy as mentioned by Veitch and Arkkelin (1995) is the attainment of a sense of self or self-identity, which is achieved by regulating interaction and maintaining control. Altman (1975 in Veitch and Arkkelin) notes that without interpersonal boundary control and interaction management, one would feel vulnerable and worthless as an individual.

Related to the above is Newel's (1995) remarks around privacy sustaining ego development. Using a systems perspective, Newel (1994) defines privacy as an ongoing process of system maintenance and system development. Newel believes that separation from the public domain allows for system maintenance, as stress is removed, and system development allowing the individual to engage in introspection, decision making and creative thought. Furthermore Newel (1995) states that if one has a choice as to the amount of privacy required, and if others respect this choice around him or her, then the ego will be sustained. Therefore, privacy creates a sense of wellness by allowing the person to reflect on and develop identity.

In a study conducted by Newel (1995), 243 students were asked to write down in a non-directed descriptive style, examples of a privacy situation experienced by them. Newel found that individuals whose well being was threatened by the current environment set out to seek a condition of privacy lasting between one and a half to three hours, after which they reported feeling better. This provides evidence for system maintenance stated above. Furthermore, subjects reported that during these times there was a feeling of being in control, of having privacy respected and developing self-esteem. This then provided support for system development as mentioned by Newel.

From this conclusion, Newel (1995) brings to attention the importance of future research on those who do not have the luxury of privacy, let alone choice. Furthermore, one is asked to consider what this might mean in terms of ego

development for these people. If one relates this to the working environment, one should consider those lower in the status hierarchy who experience a lack of privacy.

2.2.2. The perception of privacy needs

It has been suggested that an individual will regulate the amount of privacy needed by controlling personal space and territoriality. In doing so, the individual allows for system maintenance and development, both of which contribute to the development of identity. A strong employee identity allows for optimal functioning of that individual which furthermore contributes to the overall success of the organisation.

However in order to benefit from this information, it is suggested that one also understands employees' perception of privacy needs. It is only in understanding when people need privacy, that these needs can be addressed in order to restore a sense of balance.

In a study conducted by Marshall (1972), privacy preference was focused on with an aim to understand its relationship with past experience and environmental fit. Significant findings found that those who had spent most of their lives as city dwellers preferred more anonymity and non-involvement than small town residents. It is proposed that those who live in an environment that fosters independence prefer anonymity, while those who live in a culture that permits more contact prefer interaction.

The above has implications for organisational environments and the culture that is created as a result. While organisations that foster independence through private offices will create a strong need for privacy, organisations that praise teamwork will create the appropriate spaces for this activity and hence the need for privacy will not be as strong (Rosen & Berger, 1993).

Privacy is also defined by Kelvin (1973), in terms of norms. If a culture defines certain behaviour to be carried out privately, then a high degree of privacy will be required. If however behaviour is acceptable in public, or people continuously disregard the norm, then privacy needs may be low. Thus the norms in different cultural communities and organisations need to be taken into consideration before living and working space can be organised to accommodate privacy. If the organisation favours a culture of individuality, then privacy will be a priority. If however, the organisation fosters a culture of teamwork, then privacy will not be so important.

According to Swartz (1968), another reason that people perceive the need for privacy is to preserve the group. Swartz states that people regularly seek privacy as a means of making life easier to bear when in company. Hence, it is suggested that beyond a certain point of interaction, people take leave of others. This allows them to tolerate or even enjoy each others company upon return.

Swartz (1968) goes on to state that weak social relationships, particularly in the formative stages, cannot endure dissociation, however strong social relationships are not endangered by the maintenance of interpersonal boundaries. This point can be linked to the importance of maintaining a balance between privacy and interaction. By allowing interaction between people, so that strong social ties are formed, privacy is more likely to be an acceptable part of life.

Swartz (1968) also argues that privacy is hierarchically defined. It is often parents, managers or headmasters that dwell in the luxury of more spacious and private offices and rooms. This suggests that those higher up in the status bracket have greater control and regulation over input and outputs (Altman 1975). Leading on from this, one may also suggest that those higher up experience more stress and hence require more privacy. While in the past, subordinates like employees, teachers and even children were viewed as unimportant, the new era has envisioned a future where power is more equally

distributed and subordinates are respected. Hence there is a need to educate those in authority positions on the importance of privacy to subordinates.

Many organisations are now moving away from defining status based on external symbols. It has become evident that status and worth in an organisation is now being defined internally and through group and team contribution (Banner & Gagne, 1995). However, the notion that privacy is a luxury is still deeply ingrained within management and employees. Perhaps moving towards the new era will allow for an even distribution of this 'luxury', as it slowly becomes less important.

Deprivatisation (Swartz, 1968) is also a concept that can be linked to management. It also contributes to the argument that people need to experience both public and private spaces. Schwartz explains that people who have too much privacy need purposeful interaction in public domains. This occurs as private information becomes too much of a burden to carry. In doing so, they reveal some aspect of their self which needs reinforcement. Furthermore, the person is able to even out both the deep identification of the self as well as losing oneself in public roles.

Those who experience too much interaction require privacy, while those with too much privacy require exposure to people in order to maintain a sense of equilibrium (Swartz, 1968). It is believed that while attention has been paid to the former part of this statement, the latter aspect is largely ignored. However, literature is now beginning to focus on the need to create flatter organisations that are more open plan and it is believed that this will help in making management more accessible to employees (Lieber, 1996; Coolidge, 1999).

Newel (1995) suggests that after understanding how people acquire a desired level of privacy and the advantages of it, the next step should be to educate people on the importance of making use of it. While Newel's work emphasises

the importance of individual privacy, one must not discard the importance of teamwork. What is criticised however is the fact that many organisations tear down offices to fit into the new paradigm, while failing to take into consideration the meaning of privacy to people who have not kept pace with this change (Coolidge, 1999). It is therefore important to educate employers on the need to fit the environment with the spatial needs of the employees, whatever this may be at any point in time. An optimum level of personal space therefore needs to be recognised.

2.2.3. Personal space

The term personal space was first coined by Katz, (1937, in Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995), who compared it to the shell of a snail. Veitch and Arkkelin note that others have used the analogy of a person surrounded by a soap bubble. Sommer (1969 in Veitch and Arkkelin, 1995), expanded this definition by stating that personal space is an area with invisible boundaries surrounding the person. This is not a fixed distance, but depends on the individual as well as the social and situational variables.

Veitch and Arkkelin (1995) note that all people are familiar with the uneasy feeling of someone standing too close to them in a grocery store queue, or a stranger sitting too close to them on a bus. This highlights the pervasiveness of personal space in everyday life. Evans (1974 in Veitch and Arkkelin, 1995) states that personal space acts as a mechanism that allows one to protect oneself from unnecessary stress. Maintaining personal space then, prevents excessive stimulation from social sources. Furthermore, Veitch and Arkkelin remind one that personal space also serves to protect one's privacy. Personal space can therefore serve as a controlling mechanism in the regulation of privacy.

According to Gifford (1987 in Kaya and Erkip, 1999), when density increases, interpersonal space decreases and people feel crowded. This is due to the fact

that the same amount of resources must be distributed to a higher number of people. As a result, more physical interference occurs and a sense of control and privacy is reduced. Furthermore, Gifford explains that when social density is undesirable, social outcomes are negative and that this leads to aggression and less cooperation. Kaya and Erkip state further that people often respond to high density by withdrawing, that is, by moving away, choosing less personal topics to talk about and avoiding eye contact.

Another response is the use of withdrawal mechanisms in the event of reduced personal space, and is evident in the study conducted by Felipe and Sommer (1964). They claimed that a person will try to accommodate the intrusion to personal space as far as possible, by shifting him or herself, positioning a barrier between oneself and the intruder or avoiding eye contact. Furthermore, if all attempts to decrease stress fail, then the person will resort to flight. This proposal is supported by their study of both mental hospital patients in a hospital setting as well as university students in a library hall. In both cases subjects tried to accommodate the intrusion of the researcher who sat too close. In a significant number of cases, respondents fled the situation, unable to deal with the stress. This has implications for teamwork in organisations. It is proposed that employees finding themselves in environments where space is compromised will experience stress, and that this in turn will lead to ineffective performance as a team.

An interesting point that is brought up by Felipe and Sommer (1964) is that this flight response normally occurs in animals when a dominant animal is close to subordinate ones. Under such circumstances, the subordinate animals flee. Felipe and Sommer suggest that this flight response seen in humans may thus be a result of the intruder being a superior. This reiterates the need for subordinates in any environment to have sufficient space and privacy. This will allow them to carry out their tasks free of stress. It also emphasises the need to

guard against a lack of privacy in organisations where bureaucracy is supported and employees fear authority.

Efran and Cheyne (1974) conducted a study related to animals' needs to convey dominance and status through distance. Subjects were asked either to walk in between two people having a conversation; around them; or down a corridor away from them. Physiological arousal, antagonistic behaviour and subjective mood ratings were measured. Results show that those who passed through or went around the pair experienced more non-verbal antagonistic behaviour (eg putting their heads down) and more negative subjective mood ratings respectively than those who went down the corridor. Efran and Cheyne conclude that even the simplest of events in everyday life cause stress due to interpersonal distance.

It is therefore perhaps wise to consider what it is that could eliminate stress in relation to personal space. Any setting where individuals are expected to interact with others would benefit from the fact that those people are able to get on with each other. Little, Ulehla and Henderson, (1968) conducted a study based on the research findings (Rokeach, 1960; Byrne, 1961; Stein, Hardyck & Smith, 1965) that shared beliefs and congruent values cause people to interact more closely. Subjects were divided based on personal preferences for upcoming presidential election candidates. They were also given toy figurines and asked to place them a certain distance apart from each other. Results showed that those with similar preferences for presidential support placed interacting figurines closer together. This suggests that people do interact more closely based on similar values.

Furthermore, in a study conducted by Dosey and Meisels (1969), an attempt was made to look at the relationship between personal space and personality. Personality was measured on the Rorschach variable of body image boundary. A person with a weak body image boundary was expected to more easily be

affected by stress, and hence make use of more personal space than a person with a high body image boundary. The results were however not significant.

Williams (1971) explored personality and personal space from another angle using all three of the techniques that Dosey and Meisels (1969) used above. One dimension of personality was explored, that is, introversion-extroversion and it was predicted based on Jungs (1953) beliefs that the dimension involves subject-object relations. Hence, Williams predicted that introverts would move away from objects while extroverts would move towards them. Results showed that introverts and extroverts don't really differ in their preference of closeness, but extroverts did allow the researcher to come closer when interacting.

Although all subjects in the study above preferred more or less the same personal space, introverts reported feeling more uncomfortable and self-conscious, while extroverts reported more irritation. These feelings were associated with the introvert moving away from the object while the extrovert moved aggressively towards it. It may therefore be possible that although different measures may not be consistent, they may in fact be sensitive to certain areas of personality and yield very specific results. With regard to methodology, it may be important to consider personal space as a concept that is subjective, as is the feeling of being crowded and the need for privacy. Hence the need for qualitative measures that take this subjective reality into consideration.

Another mechanism used by the individual in order to maintain a level of privacy is that of territoriality. It is to this aspect of human spatial behaviour that the discussion now turns.

2.2.4. Territoriality

According to Veitch and Arkkelin (1995), territoriality was first described by Howard (1948) and popularised by Ardrey (1966) in his book, "The Territorial Imperative". Veitch and Arkkelin define territoriality as "behaviour by which an

organism characteristically lays claim to an area and defends it against intrusion by members of its own species.” (p. 257)

As with regulating personal space, territoriality is also a mechanism whereby an individual can prevent feeling crowded and maintain his or her privacy (Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995). Furthermore, just like personal space, research on territoriality in humans was initiated by the findings in animals. However, while animals often mark their territories with physical indicators such as urine in a very instinctive way, Veitch and Arkkelin note that humans are more symbolic markers and perhaps do so as a result of cultural learning.

Interest in territoriality also stemmed from the architect's point of view. While designers realised that homes designed for individual and group activity, led to satisfied owners (Heimsath, 1977 in Baldassare, 1978), other researchers began to realise that well designed exteriors that fostered a sense of territoriality, were less likely to be burgled (Baldassare, 1975; Neuman, 1973, in Baldassare, 1975).

Research on territoriality has popularised the notion of dominance. (Esser, 1964 in Sundstrom & Altman, 1974). However Sundstrom and Altman (1974) comment on the inconsistent results that Esser (1964, 1969) has found in the past regarding the territoriality-dominance relationship. According to Essers initial findings, highly dominant group members expect to have and use large amounts of space. Furthermore, these members are found to have free access to any spatial area regardless of the owner. Based on this, Esser concluded that dominant group members would therefore need to display less territorial behaviour. Later research findings however, found a positive relationship between territoriality and dominance with dominant members exhibiting the most territorial behaviour over desirable areas.

Sundstrom and Altman (1974), mention that according to Altman and Haythorn (1967), territory behaviour varied with time. Hence Sundstrom and Altman

proposed that the dominance-territoriality relationship might also be unstable over time. Results from their observational study displayed this kind of relationship. In observing juvenile offenders at a state school, Sundstrom and Altman found that a positive dominance territoriality relationship did initially exist. Those that were the dominant members of a group sought out the most spacious and desirable spaces as their own. However on replacing the dominant members with new ones, a state of disruption occurred and the relationship between dominance and territoriality disappeared as space was spread out more evenly. Over time, territoriality behaviour seemed to return to normal for the more subordinate members of the group. However the new dominant members still struggled to find their place in the hierarchy. Hence Sundstrom and Altmans findings show the need to consider temporal issues when studying territorial dominance.

The study above may also have implications for work behaviour. Many organisations in the past, and even to an extent in the present define status with territory. Senior management, were given luxurious offices and their territory was distinctly symbolised. However the new work paradigm focuses on open plan environments and the systems concept. One should therefore consider the disruption that senior management now feel as their work territories become less private and more visible to those around them. If one relates this to the study above, it may be important to question whether more egalitarian working relationships will result from this re-negotiation of space.

Another point to consider is that as the meaning of work changes towards more teamwork and group activity, people find themselves in temporary unstable working conditions. This is as a result of group compositions constantly changing as new projects are undertaken (Robbins, 1996). It may therefore be the case, that employees will not be given the chance to become very territorial, as before they become dominant in a working relationship, teams and groups may have already changed.

Edney (1975) proposes that the territoriality experienced by humans is more than a simple territory-dominance relationship as is seen with animals. Instead, Edney proposes a relationship between territoriality and control, where dominance is one aspect of control. While dominance refers to active social behaviour, control encapsulates the influence that one has over other people, inanimate spaces and even ideas, all in both an active (initiating and offensive) and passive (resisting or defending) way.

Furthermore, Edney (1975) noted that many other researchers (Sommer, 1966; Goffman, 1961; Roos, 1968) had mentioned the relationship between territory and control. Edney based his study on previous research that stated that control is a psychological variable influenced by crowding, tolerance (Zlutnick & Altman, 1972) and interpersonal distance (Duke & Norwicki, 1972), because it allows the individual to handle the stress of interpersonal closeness. From this, Edney proposed that if territory provides control, people should tolerate more of a crowd and closer interpersonal distances on home ground than when not, that is, control may be related to a link between territory, crowding and interpersonal distance.

Based on the proposition above, Edney (1975) conducted a study of 160 male dormitory residents. When grouped in a dormitory room belonging to one of the students, visitors rated residents as feeling more at home, while residents rated the territory as more pleasant and private than did visitors. This supported the idea that control over an area required less personal space and led to less crowding for the resident.

The point made above, implies that people are able to interact more closely and tolerate more crowding when they feel a sense of control and security over what belongs to them. With regard to the working environment, this may mean that

teamwork can be accommodated if employees still feel as though they have some sense of control over their spatial environment.

Lyman and Scott (1967) note that in some instances, the occupant may extend territorial use to others who are not regarded as a threat. However, in the event of the visitor trying to monopolise or alter the territory in any way, the owner may respond in one of many ways. He or she may either become aggressive (turf defense), or place barriers between himself and the intruder (insulation). In the event of a group, a process to reaffirm the integrity of the group may occur. This is carried out with the intention of excluding the intruder (linguistic collusion).

Results from a questionnaire carried out by Wollman and Kelly (1994) with clerical staff across many organisations, showed that reactions to potential invasions occurred as a result of various factors. These included not wanting to be told how to do ones job by someone other than the supervisor; being sensitive to personal space intrusion; and negative reactions to others attempts to control behaviour in ones own territory. William and Kelly suggest that these are all expressions of an aversion to lack of control, related to the concept of territoriality and personal space. As a result, suggestions are made regarding the protocol of office workspaces. This includes interactional distance being optimum, supervision being left to the supervisor, and the importance of a sense of control.

Altman (1975, in Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995) describes three kinds of territories, that is, primary, secondary and public territories. Primary territories are owned exclusively by the occupant, for example the home, and are believed to represent an extension of the self with ones identity and self esteem being linked. Secondary territories are not exclusively owned by the person, however he or she does make a lot of use of it. Hence control is lower than over primary territories and intrusions are not actively defended. Public territories mean that everyone has a right to them, however people do have a tendency to mark chosen areas with personal belongings.

Relating the above to the working environment, one finds that as teamwork and open plan working environments are phased in, work territories are becoming more public. If the primary territory is likened to offices from the past, and is linked to self-identity and esteem (Altman 1975 in Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995), then one may question self-identity and esteem in employees, as territory becomes more public. This may reiterate the need for a balanced working environment between teamwork and individual work as employees slowly begin to find their sense of worth internally, instead of externally (Banner & Gagner, 1995).

Much of the research on territoriality has focused on territorial markers in public territories, especially when density increases. Becker (1973) conducted a study with 169 undergraduate university students. Subjects were asked whether they would sit at a table with a book in the corner, or a table scattered with books. Most subjects agreed that the books, in both cases, were left to protect the owner's place in his or her absence. Furthermore, most stated that they would not sit where the books were, but would prefer to sit at an empty table, either because those seats were available or because they did not want to feel crowded.

According to Becker (1973), the findings suggested that territorial markers affected personal space. Based on the comments made by Sommer (1966), Becker reiterates that the sanctity of the markers and the respondents desire to avoid confrontation, suggests that the important function of markers is to reduce hostility and act as a warning device. If one relates the walls that separate offices in bureaucratic working environments to markers, then one can say that they serve the purpose of effectively reducing conflict. As the new paradigm is becoming more acceptable though, managers are beginning to realise that there is more of a need for interaction and perhaps constructive criticism, which produces a more synergistic outcome. Hence, the removal of barriers between people can be seen to be positive.

Besides the fact that markers seem to represent absent owners, and elicit a fear of confrontation as mentioned above, research (Sommer, 1969, in Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995) has also looked at the type of territorial markers used, that is whether they are personal or not. Sommer investigated the effectiveness of various kinds of markers in a library, under different levels of density. Results found that any type of marker left on a table served to prevent people from sitting there, however, under conditions of high density, personal items were more effective than impersonal ones.

Similarly, Hoppe, Greene and Kenny, (1972) predicted that areas that had impersonal markers would be occupied before those with personal markers like clothes. Contrary to their predictions, they found that people entering a bar were more likely to sit at a table with a jacket on the chair rather than one with a beer on the table. Hoppe et al concluded that the reason for these findings might have been because people entering a bar expect that a waiter will take a glass away if a guest leaves. On the other hand, a jacket may have been forgotten.

Other research has concentrated on the concept of defensible space to account for territories that are less likely to be invaded than others (Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995). According to Bower, Dockett and Taylor (1983, in Veitch & Arkkelin, 1995), people interpreted territorial features like fences and "no entry" signs, to mean that the occupant has strong territorial attitudes and behaviours.

Both territorial markers and defensible space seemed to suggest a strong culture. Personal markers, fences and signs are cultural symbols that have been learnt. As people learn to respond more positively to groups and teamwork, perhaps new symbols such as open plan offices and mobile workstations will become part of a new culture and will be more easily accepted as determinants of space.

Schwartz (1968) however explains that boundaries define the self and hence a violation implies a violation of the self. With regard to Schwartz's comments on privacy and authority, one can mention here that authority figures generally have the power to violate privacy and hence the ability to destroy a sense of self. Schwartz notes that some agreement must be developed between the authority figure and the subordinate in order to maintain a sense of honour. With regard to the working environment it may be important to consider employees self-development, and that this may be linked to some sense of privacy.

The design of office space in many organisations driven by the new work paradigm has evolved from fully walled offices to more open plan and partitioned work spaces (Lieber, 1996). Schwartz (1968) emphasises that walls and partitions create a subtle sense of separateness as opposed to the separation symbolised by doors. Furthermore, windows are used to look out but not to look in. It allows the inhabitant to have the outside world at their visual disposal while still maintaining a sense of privacy. This perhaps suggests the need for partitions with large windows, a concept, which seems to be popular in many organisations.

2.3. Concluding points

The changing nature of work has resulted in organisational cultures that reinforce collaboration and teamwork, as well as a flatter structure. This has re-defined working environments to include more open plan dynamic spaces. However this change in environment has had implications for human spatial behaviour, with specific reference to privacy, territoriality and personal space. As workspaces become more open, employee privacy diminishes. Furthermore, a lack of personal space and territoriality in these environments means that the employee is less able to regulate or control privacy. This may result in conflict, increased stress or withdrawal behaviour.

However it is proposed that the conflicting argument for and against the open plan environment be resolved by making use of employees' perception of privacy

needs. Research has shown that privacy needs are lower when organisational culture and social norms support a collective environment. One's personality and the availability of resources also guide privacy needs. Furthermore, when employees are not in regular contact with each other, the need to display interpersonal distancing and dominant territorial behaviour is low.

It is therefore important to consider social and cultural views as well as logistical issues when designing an organisation's space. This requires an in-depth exploration of employees' experiences based on qualitative methodology.

University of Cape Town

3. AIMS OF THIS STUDY

The researcher has approached this research with the following aims in mind:

- 3.1. To explore employees' experience of privacy in an open plan working environment
- 3.2. To explore the use of territoriality and personal space as mechanisms that regulate privacy

University of Cape Town

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research approach

The nature of the research topic is to subjectively explore the experience of privacy within an open-plan working environment. Hence the methodology was based on the qualitative perspective. The qualitative paradigm allowed for the researcher to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the participants and their behaviour by focusing on the subjective meanings, definitions, and descriptions of specific cases (Neuman, 1994). Neuman suggests the qualitative approach as a way of capturing aspects of the social world that one would be unable to achieve quantitatively, for example the atmosphere of an environment. Furthermore, Jones (1988), states that human life is too complex to reduce to a few independent and dependent variables. This was evident in the individual employees' experiences of their environment. Jones (1998) emphasises that the intent of qualitative research is to understand the particular or the unique by focusing on individual motives and shared meanings.

Taking the context of the situation into account, is a main feature of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers believe that meaning can only be given to social action and behaviour by taking the context in which it occurs into account (Neuman, 1994). Neuman stresses that disregarding the context would allow for social meaning to become distorted and would imply that all people experience events, situations and behaviour in exactly the same way.

Based on the above, qualitative research does not involve generalisation (Neuman, 1994). Furthermore, Neuman states that the research findings are used to help the group studied improve in a given way by taking into account the conclusions drawn. Results yielded for this specific organisation therefore formed a basis for change in a positive direction for all those concerned. In order to arrive at these results though, the correct research method had to be employed.

4.2. Research method

4.2.1. Focus groups

Focus groups were considered for various reasons. Giving participants the opportunity to voice their opinions meant that first hand in-depth holistic information would be received and clarified immediately. Secondly, focus groups are known to capitalise on group dynamics (Mahoney, 2004), otherwise known as the group effect by Carey (1994 in Morgan, 1996). This is based on the assumption that a group generates data and insights and that this would be unlikely to emerge without the interaction found in a group. Morgan believes that this occurs due to participants querying each other as well as explaining themselves. Furthermore, this provides information on the extent to which participants agree or disagree with each other. This assisted the researcher in developing a more in- depth understanding of the way in which a particular group of people interacted, and the meanings that they attached to the organisational environment.

According to Morgan and Krueger, (1993 as cited in Morgan), the strength of the focus group is not just in exploring what participants say, but in providing insights into the sources of complex behaviour and motivations. The need for a holistic database coupled with a fairly small number of employees and a limited space of time, meant that focus groups would be an ideal choice of methods.

While in-depth information was required, time constraints also meant that there was a need to use a standardised questioning guide. While this may have been inconsistent with the qualitative perspective (Morgan, 1996), the researcher was reminded of the need to base decisions on the research objectives and constraints (Hardings, 1987 in Henwood and Pidgeon, 1994). According to Morgan however, the advantage was that it allowed for comparison between groups. Furthermore, while the researcher guided the discussion, care was taken to use open-ended questions for maximum coverage of the topic.

It must however be noted that while the researcher followed a structured guide, there were times when further probing on a particular topic was necessary. The flexibility of this qualitative technique allowed for this. The guide was drawn up based on a wide literature review. This allowed the researcher to use past research as a guide in conjunction with trying to understand the subjective and unique experiences of participants.

The participants were grouped into five groups of eight, as is generally recommended (Morgan, 1996, Mahoney, 2004). Focus groups were held in the boardroom. In order to create a more casual and relaxed approach, the layout of the room was rearranged. Chairs were arranged in a circle with respondents within a comfortable proximity of each other. To ensure that all participants were comfortable and refreshed both at the beginning and during sessions, the researcher arranged for refreshments and snacks.

At the onset of the focus groups, the researcher introduced herself and explained the reason for being there and for requiring the participants' help. The researcher provided sufficient information regarding the nature of the research to ensure that the participants were comfortable with the process. The researcher explained that the research was based on their experiences of the open-plan working environment. The researcher further explained that the participants' thoughts on open plan environment were required with regard to issues of human spatial behaviour. This was defined as privacy, territoriality, personal space and crowding. These terms were later re-defined when participants were asked the questions related to them.

While not overly sensitive in nature, the participants indirectly commented on decisions taken by management. The use of a tape recorder therefore needed to be clarified, as well as the researcher's obligation to confidentiality. Participants were told that recording the discussion would ensure that no data was ignored or forgotten and that it would strengthen the research outcome. Furthermore,

participants were reassured that no one other than the researcher would listen to the recordings and that none of their names would be mentioned in the final report.

Furthermore, participants were reassured that there were no right or wrong answers and that all comments made a difference in providing a rich and in-depth understanding of the situation. The researcher was also faced with the challenge of encouraging the participants to contribute towards the discussion without forcing or pressurising them to do so. This was done unobtrusively without putting any participant on the spot and intuitively picking up on whether each participant was ready to contribute or not.

The need for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, meant that the researcher needed to initially focus on questions pertaining to the organisational context and culture. Once this was done, the researcher was able to delve into more specific areas of human spatial behaviour and more specifically, privacy.

If the growing trend is to understand the principle of 'form-follows-function' (Vischer, 1999), then it becomes imperative to understand specifically what it is that employees do, as well as to understand the relationships between them. Therefore, the information received in response to participants' job descriptions as well as the organisations culture, enabled the researcher to understand spatial requirements in context.

Asking participants' to describe their environment and to explain the reasoning behind it, was another question that added to the researcher's understanding of the context. The researcher needed to ensure that the data received was linked to the participants' own understanding of their environment. While the researcher had access to the environment in question, no assumptions were made around the participants' experience of the environment.

While literature around the open plan environment has alluded to teamwork, communication and cost reduction as being the driving force behind re-design, it is recommended that this is not done so at the expense of job satisfaction (Van der Voordt, 2003). The researcher therefore needed to understand both the reasoning behind this particular organisations choice of spatial design as well as participants' experience of it, so as to comment on the effectiveness of the design. Data received on the advantages and disadvantages of the open plan space therefore contributed to this argument.

The initial questions on job role, culture and spatial design gave participants the opportunity to feel comfortable within the group. The questions were designed around simple issues, so that participants could become comfortable with the process. This set the context for participants themselves to start thinking about their feelings around deeper issues such as privacy, territoriality and personal space.

The lack of privacy has become a recurring disadvantage in literature on open plan workspaces (Coolidge, 1999 & Van der Voordt, 2003). Furthermore, privacy is believed to be regulated by the controlling mechanisms of territoriality and personal space (Altman, 1968). However the fact that the nature of work is becoming more collaborative, especially in this occupation, meant that the researcher needed to understand whether privacy was still important to participants. Similarly, this changing nature of work as well as organisational structure, has meant that organisations are becoming less hierarchically defined (Coolidge, 1999). The researcher therefore needed to know how this particular group of participants felt about success and whether they defined this hierarchically. This question would therefore give an indication of whether the open plan space was positively or negatively experienced.

Towards the end of the focus groups, participants were asked how they would design the ideal environment. This was done to give the researcher an understanding of participants needs within an open plan environment and would also allow for consideration in future planning

The reader is referred to appendix A for a full overview of the questions asked during focus groups and appendix B for an example of the responses.

4.3 Anecdotal information and explanatory tools

While not considered as formal research methods in the study, these materials and occurrences were noted for the value that they added in understanding the employees and their experiences in context. The first was a brochure of the company, outlining their vision; objectives; culture; credentials; client care charter and services. This allowed the researcher to gain an overview of what the organisation did and helped to clear up discrepancies that occurred in focus groups. This was especially helpful due to the fact that employees took for granted that the researcher understood their jobs and hence were not as forthcoming when questioned about it.

Another important feature noticed, was a replication of the culture and values of the organisation that appeared in a huge frame on the wall in the entrance of the organisation. Culture was described as living a culture of excellence, individuality and success. The values emphasised were integrity, teamwork, accountability, commitment and quality. The researcher paid particular attention to this, as two of the questions on the focus group guidelines referred to culture. It also allowed for the researcher to reflect on and compare what was portrayed and displayed to what was known and believed.

Based on the fact that the research question included the environmental or spatial layout, the researcher also found that a floor plan of the building was very

useful. This allowed the researcher to understand how employees were divided, as well as the nature of their space.

Also of great help were organograms and employee lists stating location, titles and contract dates. This allowed for a bigger picture to be seen, that is, where this branch of the organisation fitted in within the greater organisation, as well as how long each employee had been exposed to the organisation.

Besides providing a valuable source of information in helping the researcher understand the participants' perspective, this type of information also aided in developing the sample.

4.4 Sample

The auditing organisation, whose branch was researched, comprised of offices throughout the country. This organisation provided auditing and business consulting services. The actual research however was done on the Centurion Branch in Gauteng.

The trainees that made up the sample for this study had a three-year contract with the organisation, which was affiliated to the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA). Based on the requirements of SAICA, the trainees were required to focus on three components, that is, accounting, consulting and auditing. Accounting was defined by systems administration and drawing up financial statements. Consulting meant assisting with project management, advising on taxation as well as enhancing and providing financial information for client decisions. Lastly the auditing component required the trainee to assist management in expressing an opinion on the fair presentation of clients' financial statements.

The reason for focusing on the auditing profession was based on the observation that auditing is becoming more of a team effort than an individualistic profession.

In the past, auditors focused on one aspect of an organisation, which was carried out at any time of the year. The recent trend however was to assign specific tasks to individuals but to work as a team to provide an end product or report, which encapsulates inter-dependent activities. The results produced by an auditor auditing the salaries department within an organisation would therefore be dependent on the results produced by the auditor auditing the same organisations bank account component or tax component. All these audits needed to be done simultaneously. This meant that there was a greater need for information sharing and hence teamwork.

The Centurion branch of the organisation studied consisted of nine directors, 26 managers, 39 trainee staff (who had been with the organisation for over a year), 16 administration staff and 12 new trainees that had been with the organisation for three months. While this brought the total headcount to a 102 staff members, the researcher was only interested in the trainees. According to Kelly and Frankel (2000), the logic of qualitative data implies purposive sampling, that is, information rich cases are selected that provide the greatest insight into the research question. In this case, the focus was on audit trainee staff that worked in the open plan work environment. Of these 51 trainees, 38 participated in focus groups

Trainees were divided according to their seniority and length of time that they had been in the organisation. This meant one group of audit trainees who had started three months ago, two groups of intermediate audit trainees and two groups of senior audit trainees. It was believed that the similarity in the groups would allow for greater synergy as each respondent would initiate a similar experience for others in that group (Morgan, 1996). Furthermore, respondents would be more likely to feel less intimidated by others who were in the same situation as them. The demographics of the participants were as follows:

TABLE 4.4.1: SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics	Number of participants
<i>Race</i>	
Black	8
White	10
Coloured	5
Indian	15
<i>Age range</i>	18 -25
<i>Tenure</i>	
Three months	12
Between one and two years	13
Between two and three years	13
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	27
Female	24

Once the researcher had completed the data collection phase, the data was analysed.

4.5. Data analysis

4.5.1. Method of data analysis

In line with the qualitative approach chosen above, the data was analysed using a qualitative method. The researcher felt that choosing a qualitative method of analysis would complete the objective of an in-depth and holistic understanding of the meaning that employees attached to their environments. As a result a

decision was taken to use the qualitative method of thematic analysis. (Analysing qualitative...2004).

It has been argued that there are probably as many ways of doing qualitative research analysis as there are researchers out there that do qualitative analysis (Analysing qualitative...2004). Furthermore, these authors believe that this is the way that it should be, as qualitative research is interpretive and subjective. While these authors agree that style is developed over time and comes with experience, they point out that one should not lose sight of the need to ensure a rigorous process. In analysing the data, the researcher therefore followed the basic guide of thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994), however creatively adapted the process to suit the needs of the researcher. This will be discussed below.

4.5.2 Thematic analysis

The first step, as is the process with any qualitative data analysis, was to transcribe the data from the recording cassettes onto paper. This was done verbatim and included verbal gestures, like laughing, joking, and silence (Trellis, 1997). This provided another dimension to the researchers understanding of the phenomena, as the researcher was able to understand what was said in context.

The first step of thematic analysis involved organising ones data. The researcher sorted the items by frequency or omission otherwise known as coding. Items were then grouped into similar categories, patterns between them were identified, and the overall structure was then developed by linking the patterns to theory (LeCompte, 2000). Thematic analysis therefore allowed for a rich and insightful discussion, however it has often been criticised for its difficulty in demonstrating rigour (Barnard, 2004). This will be discussed at a later stage.

In order to understand this process better, LeCompte, Preissle, and Tesch (1993 in LeCompte 2000) used the analogy of a puzzle. They noted that analysis is like taking apart a puzzle and then reassembling it. By organising, the researcher

puts all similar pieces of the puzzle together. Through coding, the sky chunks for example are then assembled. In identifying patterns, the grass chunks are then linked to the sky chunks. The last step is then to tell the audience where the links are and more importantly what the entire picture means through a discussion.

Another important point mentioned by LeCompte (2000) is that before analysing the data, the researcher should be aware of his or her existing beliefs. LeCompte emphasises that one can do this by being aware of tacit and formative theories. While tacit theories refer to beliefs that informally guide behaviour, formative theories refer to beliefs based on theory and literature. These need to be made clear before the researcher begins. In this case, the researcher remained aware of previous theories as documented in the literature as well as of her own preferences with regard to the research question. The researcher therefore remained vigilant of guiding discussion based on outcomes of these theories above. This allowed for the respondents to actively construct their own meaning and for the researcher to engage with it.

The researcher made a point of organising data at the beginning of the analysis to ensure that it was easily accessible during analysis. Focus groups and interviews were transcribed and labeled on computer accordingly. Documents were also filed away and labeled for reference. In familiarising oneself with the data, the researcher read through the transcripts several times. Preliminary codes were jotted down for use during the coding phase. Examples of these were teamwork, noise, choice and privacy. In organising the data from focus groups and interviews, all transcripts were labeled (eg focus group 1) and printed on different coloured paper for easy recognition.

The researcher then edited the transcripts by separating thoughts or ideas into sentences or paragraphs. This was done merely by leaving a space in between them. For easy access and retrieval, each paragraph was numbered, allowing the researcher to refer back to the original source (Analysing qualitative data...,

2004). The transcripts were then cut up according to these codes and rearranged so that similar thoughts appeared together under one code. There were many times where new information would mean changing the code. An example of this was when the researcher changed the code of 'choice' to 'control'. Coding and recoding therefore occurred regularly. Using LeComptes (2000) analogy, the researcher had to ensure that a piece of the 'sea' was not mistaken for the 'sky.' An example of this in the study was ensuring that information falling under the code of 'teamwork' was distinguished from the information referring to 'group learning'

The researcher then began looking for themes amongst the codes. According to Lieninger, (1985, p 60 in Aronson 1994), "themes are identified by bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences which often are meaningless when viewed alone". An example in this study would be the codes of 'avoiding', 'early arrival' and 'adjusting' that were clumped together to form the theme of 'coping behaviour'. Similarly, the theme of 'disadvantages of the open plan' consisted of codes labeled as 'lack of privacy', 'lack of control', 'lack of territoriality' and 'distraction'. Furthermore, Love (1994) identifies themes based on repetition; non-verbal cues; historical explanations; explicit and implicit interpretations and serendipity, that is, behaviour that is different to what is expected.

The guidelines above were used to give the researcher a basic structure to work with. It allowed for themes from the literature to be identified, while at the same time provided flexibility for new themes to emerge. The process above was chosen in order to create a balance between going too in-depth and blindly coding based on literature. Codes were created in their own right and not forced under a heading found in the literature. When themes were created though, the researcher did make reference to the literature. Codes that fitted under these themes were grouped accordingly but those that didn't were grouped under new themes. While 'culture' was a theme adopted from the literature in this study,

'perception of the situation' was an emerging theme. This avoided a reduction in the content of the data, which allowed the researcher to see links to previous research as well as new links emerging.

Two things were kept in mind when themes were linked. The nature of qualitative research meant that respondents were unique and that they did not necessarily have to fit into already developed theoretical frameworks. Thus the researcher remained vigilant of forcing themes together that may not have necessarily fitted together. Secondly, while reference was made to literature, the researcher found it necessary to constantly be aware of the participants' unique situation. It was extremely important to build a discussion based on the situation in context.

While not adhering strictly to Miles and Huberman's (1994) data displays, the researcher did find it useful to diagrammatically represent the themes that formed the structure of the discussion. According to Miles and Huberman, it is easier for researchers to know what they know if they can display it visually. It is also easier to see where the missing pieces fit if one can see the proposed whole visually. Similarly, it becomes easier to see where a missing puzzle piece fits, the more towards completion the puzzle is. By placing the information into one diagram, the researcher was therefore able to see the links between the culture of the organisation and the disadvantages of the open plan environment for example.

4.6. Strengths and limitations of the methods

The first step in conducting research, besides identifying the research question, is the actual design of the research. While the researcher may be familiar with different approaches to research, it is suggested that there are three criteria that should be used when making this decision (Creswell, 2003). This includes matching the problem with the approach, taking the researchers personal experiences and preferences into account and consideration of the audience to which the research is directed.

The nature of the question in this study reflected a need to focus on shared meaning and to gain a holistic appreciation of the situation (Jones, Moore, and Snyder, 1998). Hence in matching the problem to the approach, it was believed that the cyclical path (Neuman, 1994) followed by qualitative research would be appropriate. This moving between theory and data and back again, would help the researcher gain insight into these subtleties and allow for pulling together divergent information in a more comprehensive manner. As a result, the researcher often found herself revisiting data.

As is also suggested by Neuman (1994), a qualitative approach would give the researcher the opportunity to view the participants in their environment with the assumption that the same event may have different meanings for different people in different cultures, backgrounds and environments. This became especially important based on the fact that the research question involved the environment. As expected, participants' views on the open plan environment differed and was influenced by cultural norms, and personal perceptions of the situation.

In terms of personal experiences, the researcher has found qualitative research much more rewarding, meaningful and comfortable by way of its interactive nature. While this has not solely determined the approach, this personal preference has influenced it.

The main critique of qualitative data is that there are no clear and set rules (Robson, 1993 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Ensuring that there is rigour in the process is therefore important (Analysing qualitative....2004). Lincoln and Guba (1985 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997) have identified four criteria – credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility refers to whether the subjects were correctly identified and described. In this case, the researcher focused on the participants that were directly involved in the open plan environment. A rich description of what these participants' jobs involved has also been outlined.

Transferability (Lincoln and Guba,1985 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997) refers to the fact that the findings can be applied to other settings, which are sufficiently similar. In this case, the organisation branch was described in detail and referred to a young developing organisation offering auditing and business consulting services. Trainees worked in a mobile environment, meaning that if they were not outsourced to clients, that they were based at the organisation in an open plan environment without any formal territory or privacy. While it was believed that many auditing organisations operated in this fashion, the individual complexities and subjectivity of a qualitative analysis rarely allows for generalising. Furthermore, in generalising, it is important to remember that the variables between working at the client and at the auditing organization in question may be different. Trainees mention that they cannot be demanding when working at the client organization because the client accommodates them on a temporary basis (*Focus group 3, p 4*). Nevertheless, taking the above into account, the description of the sample in this study allows for results to be applied to other settings with caution.

Dependability ensures that processes are systematic and well documented (Lincoln and Guba,1985 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997). This was done by including a step by step explanation of how the researcher went about collecting and analysing the data. Furthermore, deviations from the process were also documented together with reasons for doing so.

Lastly, confirmability (Lincoln and Guba,1985 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997) refers to the extent to which the research process has been described, allowing one to assess the findings that flow from the data. By explaining how information was coded and how themes were linked, the researcher was able to show that findings did flow from the data received. Furthermore, by giving examples of the themes that did emerge, the researcher was able to justify the findings and overall discussion.

Leininger (1994 in Hussey and Hussey, 1997) has added other criteria to this list by including saturation, understanding meaning in context and recurrent patterning. All three of these seem inter-related. By saturation, one would have to see recurring patterns. Saturation was reached as the researcher found that the same information began to be generated, as more focus groups were done. An example of this was the recurring point of a lack of resources. As a result, when conducting focus groups towards the end of the data collection process, the researcher followed the guide but paid special attention to points that may have been repeated but were unclear on the part of the researcher. This included probing around the previous office design and the reasons for changing it, which allowed for a greater understanding of the organisational culture. This may be termed another point of rigour as the researcher tried to establish respondent validity (Hussey and Hussey, 1997)

Another important issue to consider in ensuring rigour is reflexivity (Multerud, 2001). Multerud explains that a researcher's background and position will affect what he or she chooses to investigate, the methods used, the findings considered and the conclusions drawn. Given this certainty that the researcher will affect the research, Multerud argues that the focus of qualitative research should become a commitment to be reflexive. This means that during all steps of the research process, the subjectivity that the researcher introduces is assessed and documented. The result of this is not to account for unreliability, but rather to allow for the same phenomena to be challenged in different ways by different researchers.

The need to be reflexive starts from the very beginning of the research process (Multerud, 2001). This is because the researcher enters the research field with previous personal and academic experience, as well as pre-study beliefs. In this study, the researcher found that a lack of understanding of the auditing profession made it difficult to understand the exact work role of the participants.

The fact that this is a specialised occupation created a challenge for the researcher. This was also the first time that the researcher had formally attempted a qualitative research study. The process was therefore not based on experience, but rather on an academic understanding. With regard to the content of the study, the researcher also found that the literature review created preconceptions for certain findings and conclusions. Furthermore, personal values and ingrained social norms reinforced previous findings that hierarchical status is related to success and more luxurious and private workspaces. This may have influenced probing in this direction. Lastly, the researchers own personality and preference for a more private workspace may have also influenced findings.

Another limitation of the study was the fact that some participants were very quiet and unresponsive, which limited the nature of the data collected. Besides one or two unresponsive people in a group, one group consisted of people that *all* seemed to be introverted or unresponsive. Probing further in this group was therefore essential. The researcher also made a point of encouraging participants by reminding them of the need for a rich understanding of the issues raised. Furthermore, participants were reminded of the fact that their names would be kept confidential. However in this particular case, the data that was collected tended to be more descriptive and less insightful, than the researcher would have liked

Another limitation was the fact that the researcher did not include a separate pilot study but did adjust the questions based on the understanding and interpretation of the questions during the first focus group. While in most cases, the lack of a pilot study did not seem to affect participants' understanding of the questions, there were one or two cases when this did occur. People seemed to misinterpret questions even when the rest of the group understood them. This had the disadvantage of causing others to respond on the incorrect interpretation even if

they correctly interpreted the original question. A thorough pilot study in this regard would have been beneficial and added to the validity of the study.

Some participants also tended to speak very softly, fast, or unclearly and this resulted in muffled voices on tape. Some words were difficult to pick up at all. This was further hindered by the traffic from outside and the airconditioner at times. When possible, the airconditioner was switched off. While the researcher did manage to decipher most of the words, one could not be certain that every single word was correctly interpreted. Perhaps this was related to the cultural and language differences between some of the participants and the researcher, which made the accent and hence speech difficult to understand and interpret.

The tape recorder seemed to be threatening for one or two people, even though the issue of confidentiality was thoroughly discussed. The researcher felt that this was the case, based on the number of questions that those specific participants had asked on this issue beforehand. Should this have been the case, it seemed to greatly reduce the data collected from these individuals.

Another limitation was participants' assumption that the researcher knew or understood what they were describing, hence a less descriptive account of the situation. This meant probing on the part of the researcher which did to a certain extent improve this situation.

The approach taken and the tools used did however allow the researcher to discover interesting results. Some reiterated previous findings while others suggested a new and unique perspective. It is to these findings that the discussion will now turn.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Combining the results obtained with the actual discussion of the findings is often the case with qualitative research (Mahoney, 2004). The in-depth information that is received during data collection means that analysis already reveals very descriptive results. Combining both the results and discussion therefore prevents repetition and allows for a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the outcomes and trends that arise from the analysis.

The changing nature of work towards a more holistic systems perspective has emphasised an evolving culture that rewards teamwork, communication and collaboration. It has also meant that work environments have been redesigned to include more open plan spaces that support this (Coolidge, 1999; Lieber, 1996 & Wallace, 2000). It is expected that this growing trend should therefore apply to the auditing profession where compilation and assessment of client financial reports are based on inter-dependent business components, which require employees to work as teams.

5.1. A change in the physical working environment

The auditing organisation studied had made significant changes to their environment. This organisation initially consisted of shared offices for managers and directors and separate designated cubicles for trainee staff. The design was then changed to accommodate directors in their own private offices, managers in shared offices and trainees in a communal open plan design. While more senior staff were given more privacy, trainees had become more visible.

There were many reasons for this change in physical environment. As a result of being a young, developing and competitive organisation, the headcount had increased significantly over the years. This had resulted in inadequate space for trainee auditors. Besides having inadequate space, there was a greater need to monitor a larger workforce and ensure that the budget was maintained.

Furthermore, the fact that trainees were contracted out to clients on a regular basis left the organisation with the idea of restructuring the physical environment.

It seemed to make sense that a large communal open plan working environment would be able to service the irregular needs of a large number of employees arriving at different times during the week. *"It is also cheaper for the company. I can understand having it open, because as you said, most of us are not here"* (Focus group 1, p4).

This open plan environment situated immediately in front of shared managerial offices would also create the added benefit of allowing managers to monitor their staff. However staff did not take kindly to this reasoning and seemed to convey a sense of mistrust between management and themselves. *"They want to see what we are doing. They don't believe that we are capable enough to conduct your own time."* (Focus group 5, p 3).

However in order for the environmental design to be effective and accepted by employees, it has to be aligned to the organisational culture (Banner and Gagne, 1995). The open plan working environment would therefore be more suitable for an organisation that supported teamwork and collaboration as opposed to individuality. The culture of this particular organisation initially appears to be very contradictory. While a sign in the entrance describes the culture as 'encouraging individuality', it also makes reference to 'valuing teamwork'. Furthermore, while trainees describe managers as approachable by saying *"You can go up to any one of the managers and start talking to them. They are quite approachable"* (Focus group 1, p 3), they are also described as authoritative. *"Its really embarrassing when they come up to you and shout at you in front of everyone"* (focus group 4, p 5).

Upon further investigation, it was felt that the organisation did exhibit a dominant authoritative culture. While acknowledging the need to work as a team, it is

believed that this value was diluted by the stronger need to succeed individually. This was evident in the value attached to hierarchical status and authoritative management style. While trainees noted that an open environment was created for them, they also highlighted that directors who previously shared offices, now had their own private offices. This culture was also evident in the driving forces behind the decision to create an open plan environment for trainee staff, namely the need for space, the need to monitor trainees' performance, and lastly to control the budget. *"Its designed like this so that you can see who is working and who is playing"* (Focus group 4, p 2).

Trainees noted that the open plan design allowed for the organisation to keep up with market trend without analysing the real benefit in it. Trainee staff commented by saying *"We do a lot of work for bigger firms. They probably just noted the environments there and passed it on here."* (Focus group 2, p 10). This also seemed to be confirmed by the fact that staff used well known competitor organisations as a frame of reference. *"We compete with the important companies like Price Waterhouse and Deloitte and Touche."* (Focus group 3, p 3). In fact, the effective functioning of trainees in this environment was given little thought. This was evident in the lack of resources and poor planning of equipment.

It is therefore felt that an open plan environment with the main intention to encourage teamwork was not the case. It was believed that this inconsistency between the culture and reasoning behind the design might have contributed to some of the difficulty that trainees experienced in regulating privacy. This was evident in negative experiences of employees in this environment.

5.2. The psychological impact of the inability to regulate privacy

While the need to change the environment may have been driven by cost factors as well as the need to monitor a growing number of staff, trainees have noted

that this change did have an effect on human spatial behaviour. Altman's (1975 in Veitch and Arrkelin, 1995) comments on human spatial behaviour, reminds one that the individual is a system that regulates the amount of privacy that it experiences. Altman notes that the individual uses controlling mechanisms in the form of territoriality and personal space in order to regulate the desired amount of privacy. Change in this particular environment has left trainees with very little control over the regulation of privacy. Examples of this are explained below.

Unlike directors and managers who have offices, trainees were forced to cope without any territory or control over personal space. Trainees mentioned the advantage of directors' having their own offices, which allowed them the choice of whether they wanted to be alone or not. This was important as it prevented the employee from constantly having to maintain an appearance and having to be sociable, a stressful behaviour which becomes expected as one moves up the hierarchy.

The point made above is described by Newel (1995) as 'system maintenance'. While a director may have been given this choice, trainees were not. The need for this system maintenance and rejuvenation amongst trainee staff was however emphasised. *"I feel like I want my own things around. It may seem strange but sometimes, I can connect with my dog's photo. Whenever I am stressed, I look at that photo and I feel better. This morning, I was really in no mood to talk to anyone. If I had my own private space, I would lock myself in there for ten or fifteen minutes just to calm my nerves."* (Focus group 5, p 6).

As a result of no control over the regulation of privacy, trainees noted that they did experience a sense of being crowded. However this was significantly so on a Monday morning when all the staff come in to fill out time sheets, as well as the end of the year when most trainees are at the organisation. Trainees noted that there were not enough desks or chairs during this period, and that this created a feeling of being crowded. This lack of resources can be compared to Gifford's

(1987 in Kaya and Kripp, 1989) study, indicating that a lack of resources creates greater interaction, less interpersonal distance and a greater sense of feeling crowded. One employee commented on the fact that he had more smoke breaks during these periods, indicating a flight response as mentioned by Felipe and Somer (1964). However the fact that this only happened on a Monday morning meant that the effects of this on employee functioning and organisation effectiveness was minimal. *“There are times when I feel crowded, but that is only on a Monday morning when we are all here in the office” (Focus group 5, p 4).*

A resource problem that did affect the regulation of privacy over time, was the fact that the open plan environment only had two phones. Trainees noted that others could overhear conversations regarding personal matters and that emotion that had to be conveyed over the telephone had to be expressed in front of everyone. *“If you receive a call, giving you sad news, you have to express that emotion with everyone sitting there” (focus group 1, p5)* The lack of territorial resources in this case meant that privacy was invaded. One is also reminded of Kelvin's (1973) research on privacy and norms. According to Kelvin, there is a greater need for privacy when society dictates that the behaviour be expressed in private.

Related to the need to control ones interpersonal distancing, employees noted that they felt uncomfortable when people watched them working on the computer from behind. One trainee stated, *“When I highlighted something, they would look to see what I highlighted.” (Focus group 2, p 15)*. This lack of control over personal space, coupled with the perception that the behaviour should be conducted in private, resulted in stress and a violation of the self, a concept reiterated by Swartz (1968).

The open plan environment was also seen as disruptive for many trainees. The fact that some trainees had more experience than others, meant that they were often forced to help others at the risk of neglecting their own work. The open

space was therefore seen as contrary to the synergistic advantage that it typically represents. Furthermore as mentioned above, they felt forced to listen to comments made by others or even to their music. This reiterates the study conducted by Kupritz (1998), whereby acoustical distraction was a greater determinant of poor performance and increased errors amongst employees in an open plan environment, as opposed to visual distraction.

This experience above also emphasised the need for congruency with regard to values in an open plan environment as indicated by Little, Ulehla and Henderson, (1968). These authors note that one requires less privacy if the values of those around one are congruent. If one relates the concept to the given organisation with its diverse workforce and lack of territory, one can therefore understand the stress caused by being subjected to conflicting topics of discussion and tastes in music. *“Sometimes, you really have to concentrate on what you are doing because you can hear the other people talk quite loud. You can ask them nicely to keep quiet, but eventually they get fed up with you and it starts getting nasty.”* (Focus group 1, p9)

The lack of territoriality meant that trainees were not assigned desks or chairs and as a result had to make use of whatever furniture they could find on their arrival. This lack of territory revealed certain implications. Firstly, it created conflict amongst trainees as they competed for the most effective, comfortable and efficient resources. Employees noted that there were specific desks that were more efficiently situated, or that had better plug points, and that these were the most popular. *“There is one table that is set up quite nicely. The plugs are on the side of the table. That’s an ideal situation”* (Focus group1, p 8). Furthermore miscommunication about where one is sitting based on where they placed their files, were also trivial issues that has led to conflict, even to the point of that conflict becoming physical. *“One day I had an argument with someone over a place and it became physical”* (Focus group 5, p 2).

The last issue related to a lack of territoriality was the complaint of no storage facilities for personal belongings. This resulted in increased difficulty in regulating privacy as personal belongings and valuables were constantly exposed to others. Trainees had been told that they could place their belongings in communal lockers, which had no locks and defeated the security and privacy objective. This lack of storage facilities, which became almost impossible if the employee did not have a specific desk, meant that trainees were forced to take all their belongings with them should they have needed to leave the organisation for a while. This situation proved extremely inefficient. *“There is no place to store anything. If you want to store something, you must get up and go to your locker and put it in your locker. I don’t like it. I want my drawers here at my desk, with my books and handbooks.”* (Focus group 3, p2). This complaint highlighted the importance of basic requirements for work, mentioned by Kupritz, (1998)

An important theme that highlighted a mismatch between organisational culture and design, was a lack of respect in this environment. This contributed significantly to the difficulty in regulating privacy. Neither managers nor trainees themselves seemed to respect the privacy of those that worked in the open plan environment. This seemed to highlight hierarchical status. While there were a few managers who were described as mentors and used as references, most were seen as very autocratic. The example of being reprimanded in public also reiterates this point.

Similarly, there was also a constant reference to what the researcher terms a “parent-child” relationship. These trainees were treated like children and even admitted that because of it, they tended to act like children. Management did this by constantly suggesting that they needed to look over or monitor staff. Furthermore, childish rules are implemented almost like a desperate parent with a spoilt child. Trainees made reference to one particular incident when they were told that if they did not clean up the desks, they would be locked in the building (Focus group 4, p 7).

The behaviour above is highly contradictory to the changing nature of work as described by Coolidge (1999). While the trend is towards democratic working relationships symbolised by flatter organisational structures, this organisation is still to a large extent dominated by a hierarchical structure and autocratic relationships. This organisation therefore re-iterates Swartz' (1968) point that regulating privacy is hierarchically defined. The more senior an employee is, the greater the chance of a private workspace and the greater the opportunity to regulate privacy.

Related to a lack of respect was a lack of responsibility. Trainees made specific reference to their laptops and questioned who was responsible in the event of an accident. It was noted that employees walked around with coffee or tea and that in the event of that coffee spilling onto a laptop, the responsibility in an open environment would be diluted. An employee commented by saying, *"If it is my computer and she comes and she spills her water on it, who do I blame? Am I going to lose the seventeen or eighteen thousand that I spent buying it? Who is liable for it? Is it negligence on her side or negligence on my side? That is a major problem."* (Focus group 1, p 23). The lack of respect for others belongings had therefore left many trainees feeling uncomfortable about the lack of territory and inter-personal distance between them.

This lack of responsibility for ones actions was also evident in belongings being moved or stolen. There was almost disrespect for others belongings as a result of this 'diluted responsibility.' Trainees noted returning after a few minutes to find that their belongings had been moved or had gone missing. While Hoppe, Greene and Kenny (1972) noted that newcomers would rather occupy a space that had a personal marker as opposed to an impersonal marker, both seemed to apply in this environment. Neither personal nor work related markers seemed to discourage invaders. Furthermore, not having ones own space and the responsibility of looking after it, had also meant that this environment was

extremely untidy as was mentioned by many trainees. *“On Thursday, I decided to stay late to see what this place looks like afterwards, after half past four. The tables were so untidy.” (Focus group 1, p7)*

Based on the above, it was believed that the inconsistency between hierarchical organisational culture and the open plan design had left both management and trainees themselves displaying disrespect and irresponsibility in this environment. Furthermore, this had also made the regulation of privacy for trainees much more difficult.

It was however found that while trainees were not given their own offices or desks as control mechanisms to the regulation of privacy, they did make use of alternative coping mechanisms.

5.2.1 Coping mechanisms

On numerous occasions, trainees noted that they had to *“adjust to” (Focus group 2, 2003, p 10)* the environment as a result of not being able to change it. Trainees noted that they were constantly faced with new spatial situations, both in their own organization and also at the client organisations. While one may have got used to sitting in a certain spot, other employees sharing the same environment tended to interrupt this behaviour. As a result, there was a need to be able to adjust and re-adjust as frustrating as this may have been. *“ I may sit here for a few weeks, but if I come in one day and someone else is sitting there, I cannot tell him to move. I will just have to adjust to another spot” (Focus group 4, p 7).*

Related to the theme of adjustment, employees noted that one had to adopt the attitude that they could not change the situation and that there was a need to accept the environment as it was. They commented that a positive attitude was related to a successful individual and that it was up to the individual to make the

best of the situation. *“If you carry the right attitude, and try and adapt, then you will be successful.”* (Focus group 1, p 12)

With regard to territory, trainees acknowledged up front that this was not an option. It was as though they would not even consider it a possibility in order to avoid longing for it. They did however make use of another mechanism. While denying the fact that territoriality exists, they created an “informal territory” by sitting in the same place for as long as possible. This informal territory was reinforced by an informal understanding amongst trainees, that a certain person sat in a certain place. One trainee states that *“by working in the same place for weeks, all your files accumulate there and they even start transferring your calls there.”* (focus group 3, p 13). This continued until this behaviour was unsuspectingly interrupted by someone else who may have arrived earlier, in which case the trainee was forced to re-adjust. In this regard, control is limited by anchors spatial markers (Becker, 1973). It also highlights Altman and Haythorn’s (1967 in Sundstrom and Altman, 1974) comment on dominance varying over time. While trainees dominated a specific area for a certain amount of time, leaving the office to go to clients meant that space was once again more evenly distributed.

Linked to the theme of dominance was the coping mechanism, which the researcher refers to as the ‘survival of the fittest’. Trainees constantly noted having to come in extra early just so that they could secure a comfortable chair and efficiently positioned table. *“It can get extremely crowded in December. There aren’t many audits at that time and the office is basically full every single day. You try to come early, so that you can find a space and get a chair before anyone else gets here.”* (Focus group 2, p 12).

Trainees also seem to avoid coming in to the office and spend more time at the client than is required. In this environment, employees have some form of territory. This can be attributed to the need for system maintenance and ego

development as described by Newel (1994).” *I think that the only time that you can have that advantage is when you are working at the client. At the client, I have my own desk and my chair, and even if I go somewhere, I know that that is my space” (Focus group 4, p 3).*

Lastly, all employees noted that what helped in dealing with this type of environment was one’s personality. It was believed that the more extrovert one was, the more likely it was that one would be able to deal with the disadvantages of the open plan environment. Trainees noted that extroverts are stimulated by people around them, and that this is what exists in an open plan environment. While the introvert may prefer working alone, the extrovert enjoys the company of others and enjoys sharing successes with others. Trainees also noted that introverts may as a result, harbour a lot of frustration in this type of environment and that they were obviously people who required far more privacy. *“I think that if you are someone who gets on well with people, then an open plan environment is fine, but if you are someone who is shy, then you need an office that is your own.” (Focus group 2, p 18).* This may be linked to Williams (1971) comments that extroverts move aggressively towards an object of invasion while introverts move away.

Based on the results above, it appeared that in order to survive in this particular open plan environment with a limited amount of privacy, one would have to employ certain coping mechanisms. These have been identified as having an attitude that would allow him or her to adjust, the ability to create an informal territory, being an extrovert, ‘survival of the fittest’ mindset and unnecessarily avoiding the office when the situation became overbearing.

5.2.2. The regulation of privacy is related to perception

Altman’s (1972) description of privacy as a selective control focuses on the fact that people need to feel that they have control over the regulation of privacy. This means that at any given moment, should a person wish to avoid or invite

interaction, he or she should be free to do so. However the researcher has also found that the need for a certain degree of control over privacy, was related to trainees perception of the situation.

Working in an open plan environment surrounded by its disadvantages, employees seemed to find comfort in 'acknowledging a hierarchical process'. By this, the researcher refers to employees' acknowledgement and perception that as one moves up the organisational hierarchy, one will be entitled to a more private and territorial working space. As a result they made statements like the following: "*They were also clerks before they became what they are now. It is just the circle of life. Everybody has to go through it.*" (Focus group 5, p 5). Based on this acknowledgement, they were more accepting of the lack of control over privacy. This perception reiterates Zalesny and Farace's (1987) findings that employees attached symbolic meanings of status to environmental space. Employees in their study felt as though something significant had been taken away from them. The employees within this organization reinforced this sense of significance.

This argument is also relevant to employees' perception of success. The researcher felt that it would be important to consider employee's experience of success in order to understand the implications for space. This was based on the understanding that in the past, luxury space in the form of private offices and territory, defined success. (Swartz, 1968)

Employees meaning of success varied and was multi-dimensional. While most employees described success as something intrinsic, a few employees also described it as extrinsic. Intrinsic feelings of success lay in educational qualifications, learning something new on a regular basis either by yourself or from others and achieving the goals that one has set out to achieve. Extrinsic expressions of success included material wealth and luxury environments. As one trainee stated "*I would like to buy myself a nice Compressor, a nice house in*

Sandton with two Rotweillers for security.....and that would be success in my books” (Focus Group 5, p 9). The perception that success was defined extrinsically therefore meant that more control would be required in regulating privacy.

Many employees noted that success involved a balance in life between intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and that while it was important to feel intrinsically satisfied, money and material wealth were just as important. Success was a balance between material and non-material, as well as balance between family life and work life. Similarly, with regard to the environment, they felt that they needed a balance between public and private. This suggested a movement toward the new paradigm as stated by Banner and Gagner (1995), which focuses on a holistic life. *“It is about a balance in all aspects of life, that is, family life, work life, a career, social, sport, and to succeed in them all. It’s important to be successful in your career, your work life, and your family life. Its not just one area” (Focus group 5, p8).*

The need to regulate privacy in the instance above would be average. In line with their need for balance, employees noted the need for an environment that allowed them to be both public and private. This involved having an open space where each employee had his or her own temporary workspace. The workspace was described as a table with two or four divisions that extended high enough for the employee to look down and not be distracted, but low enough for the employee to look over when in need of assistance or companionship.

This was different to the old design where cubicles had higher partitions and blocked employees off from one another. Furthermore, while employees had their own designated cubicles before the open plan, the proposed design allows for a trainee to temporarily occupy a private partitioned table. Trainees would therefore share tables but experience more privacy created by partitions in the table. *“I think I would give the clerks desks, not a big one. Also open plan but*

maybe just put those dividers up, not all the way so that you are confined to your own space, but so that everyone has their own little territorial space” (Focus group 5, p 9).

Employees, more specifically trainees, noted that territoriality was still important to them. Many employees irrespective of level, felt that having their own territory would give them a location and hence a sense of belonging, a concept that can be likened to Newels (1968) ‘ego development’. Also having ones own space would allow him or her to add a personal touch to the environment. One employee notes *“Well I like my privacy. I want a desk of my own where I can leave all my things.” (Focus group 4, p 2).*

The need to regulate privacy was also influenced by the perception that the open plan environment was often disruptive and not professional. This may also be linked to the perception that hierarchical status is important. Trainees note that in an open plan environment, it was often noisy. Furthermore, many noted that the noise in the form of chatting was problematic when trainees were on the phone with clients. This had also meant a drop in standard with regard to customer service over time. *“We are not dealing with fish and chips. We deal with CFOs and CEOs of national government departments, so you have to make the environment a certain caliber, and have some professionalism about yourself” (Focus group 4, p 4).* Furthermore this contradicted the mission of the organisation to establish long relationships with clients based on service excellence and a high professional standard.

The perception that teamwork, interaction and group learning has positive implications had also influenced the trainees and had contributed to a certain degree of acceptance over the environment and the lack of privacy. Trainees noted that working together allowed them to make a joint effort. They emphasised helping each other and discussing relevant issues. *“Talking about*

teamwork.. this environment is all about teamwork. If you don't have teamwork, you cant survive- so that's just the way it goes." (focus group 1, p 4)

Linked to teamwork above was 'group learning'. Trainees noted that they learnt a lot from being in an open plan environment. This may have been due to the proximity of colleagues. Trainees noted that if one person could not help, the chances of another colleague overhearing and therefore helping, was high. Similarly, overhearing other trainees' difficulties and the solutions linked to this allowed trainees to attempt similar problems on their own. *"I think that the open plan is more interactive, because we can talk to each other as well as share information."* (Focus group 2, p 4).

Besides teamwork and group learning, trainees noted that an open plan allowed them to interact freely with one another. As a result of no specific seating arrangements, trainees did not necessarily sit next to the same people everyday. This forced them to get to know each other and was linked to a stronger work team. Linked to interaction, was the advantage of visibility as opposed to isolation. Trainees commented on the advantage of being visible, which allowed for a greater opportunity to get to know the people around them. One was also guaranteed the advantage of always being aware of certain issues within the team.

Furthermore, visibility allowed for a greater chance of being helped by managers when experiencing difficulty at work. *"All the clerks are in an open area, so if you have a problem, you can just 'ring a bell' and somebody will help you, so basically the environment is quite good.* (Focus group 2, p 5). All of the points above emphasised the advantage of the open plan layout in general (Coolidge, 1998; Rosen and Berger, 1993; Lieber, 1996 & Wallace, 2000). It is also believed that while the organisation may not have driven a culture of teamwork, that employees were starting to perceive the advantages of it through the creation of the open plan environment. This awareness may allow for the gradual evolution

of culture to one that strongly supports teamwork and a flatter organisational structure.

The argument above also distinguishes between the impact of the open plan environment at the individual, group, and organizational level. While the open plan creates psychological stress and conflict for the individual, it creates psychological synergy for the group. The positive impact of the open plan can therefore be determined by the value attached to individual and teamwork in this organisation. Furthermore, based on the movement towards more teamwork in the auditing profession and in this particular organisation, it can be argued that the open plan office environment is valued for the effectiveness that it brings at the organizational level.

University of Cape Town

6. CONCLUSION

The changing nature of work towards more synergistic teamwork has translated into more open plan working environments. The auditing profession was believed to benefit from this type of environment, as the nature of the work was very collaborative. This spatial design however, is believed to have an impact on privacy, which is normally regulated by territoriality and personal space. It is also believed that in order to be effective, the open plan environment must complement the organisational culture. An organisation that supports teamwork and a flatter structure was therefore more likely to enjoy working in an open plan environment.

The qualitative approach used to explore the experience of privacy in this environment proved very beneficial. Focus groups allowed the researcher to collect in-depth data relating to the employees behaviour and values, as well as data relating to the organizations' culture. Results revealed that while teamwork was required, that the open plan working environment was inconsistent with the dominant hierarchical and authoritative culture of the organization. This resulted in difficulty amongst trainees in regulating privacy, as controlling mechanisms of territoriality and personal space had decreased.

Trainees experienced this difficulty in regulating privacy in a few significant ways. They tended to experience a violation of the self through decreased personal space. This resulted in a lack of identity development and emotional maintenance. The trainees also experienced the open plan as very disruptive. This was due to the high level of acoustical distraction and the need to constantly re-adjust to work areas. The lack of basic resources such as telephones and storage facilities had also affected the ability to regulate privacy and had led to conflict amongst employees, as they invaded each others personal space. Lastly, it was found that the inconsistency between culture and environmental design had resulted in a lack of responsibility and respect amongst both trainees and management.

The difficulty in regulating privacy resulted in trainees employing coping mechanisms. These involved adjusting and re-adjusting to a new work area as well as avoiding coming in to the office. Another coping mechanism involved 'survival of the fittest' where coming in early meant securing the best resources. Lastly, as extraverts were believed to enjoy and tolerate the company of others, personality was also considered a coping mechanism.

An interesting finding was that trainees' perception of success; territoriality; professionalism; teamwork and the hierarchical process determined the need to control and regulate privacy. Based on this, it was found that trainees valued territoriality and the hierarchical status linked to it. Associated with this was the need to convey a professional image to clients. However trainees also seemed to value the advantages of teamwork and group learning, given their lack of experience. The team environment was also more acceptable based on trainees' expectation that they would earn the reward of a more private environment as their status increased. With this in mind, the open plan environment was welcomed for the synergy that it created at group level and the cost efficiency that it represented at the organizational level.

Although trainees envisaged a private environment in the future, it was acknowledged that the open plan environment was their reality at present. It was therefore necessary to address this environment with regard to the difficulty in regulating privacy. Trainees have suggested having an adequate number of tables within the open space, taking into consideration that not all trainees would be in the office at the same time. Furthermore it was suggested that these tables have partitions, allowing for a balance between public and private domains. These would not be as private as the previous cubicles, but more private than the existing open space. It was believed that this would help in reducing the acoustical distraction as well as the feeling of being violated.

However it is believed that only as the organizational culture evolves into one that is more egalitarian, will those who sit in the open plan environment command the respect from management and their colleagues. Furthermore, as culture evolves and management sees the advantage of a balance between public and private, it is believed that coping mechanisms will become less necessary.

The organisational spatial environments as well as human spatial behaviour within organizational settings are relatively unexplored fields of research. Based on the findings of this research, it is believed that there is a need for future research to concentrate on the link between an evolving culture and the appropriate spatial designs. Furthermore, this research has also implied that certain types of distractions reduce productivity. Future research is therefore also guided towards the nature of distractions in an open plan environment. As organizational culture evolves into one that is less hierarchical and cost efficient, it also becomes important for organizations to determine the minimum requirements for spatial design that will allow the employee to function effectively, while maintaining a sufficient amount of privacy. This could include basic resources such as telephones and storage facilities. Also related to culture, is the need to investigate in more depth, the relationship between respect and privacy in an open plan environment.

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University of Cape Town

APPENDIX A – FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

University of Cape Town

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

FEBRUARY: 2003

CONDUCTED BY: KARISSA LACHMAN

EXPLANATION:

My research is based on how you experience the open plan working environment. I am specifically interested how the open plan work environment affects human spatial behaviour, that is, privacy, personal space, territoriality and crowding.

NOTE:

I will be using a tape recorder during our focus groups. This will allow me to remember everything that will be discussed today and will add to my hand written notes. Please note however that whatever we discuss here today is strictly confidential in the sense that no names will be revealed in my research, so please feel free to say whatever is on your mind regarding the issue.

There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in what each of you have to say.

At the same time, please do not feel pressurized to say something. Rather, feel free to contribute whenever you like.

I do however urge you to remember that all of you will be helping me in obtaining a rich understanding of this topic, so please do not feel afraid to explore your feelings and contribute to the discussion, and interact with one another. The results of the research may be beneficial to us all.

The focus group will last for +/- an hour and a half.

Note that the questions are very broad so please elaborate on your answers

Are there any questions before we begin?

1. Could you tell me about the type of work that you do and the role that you play in this organization?
2. Culture refers to “a system of shared meaning ” or “ the way in which things are done around here”. This may include characteristics such as risk taking and innovation, attention to detail, stability of the organisation and the method of appraisal.
 - Based on this definition of culture, how would you describe the culture of this organization

Culture also includes the relationships between people in the organisation. This may include management-employee relationships, employee-employee relationships, teamwork versus individual work, competitiveness amongst employees, and empowerment of individuals and groups.

- How would you describe the relationship between people in this organisation?
3. The working environments of today may be designed to include offices, open plan divisions, common areas etc.
Could you describe the way in which your working environment is spatially designed, that is, the layout of the working environment and why it is designed like this
 4. How has this physical environment personally affected you both positively and negatively?
 5. This organisation as well as many of your clients have working environments that are spatially designed in a certain way. In your experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of these spatial designs?

6. How do you feel about having privacy in your working environment?
7. Territoriality is a means by which people demarcate their working or living areas or define what belongs to them. Is there any way in which you have tried to exert some sense of territoriality in the working environment?
8. How does this make you feel as an individual?
9. Do you ever experience a sense of feeling crowded and how do you deal with this?
10. How do you personally define success?
11. How does the organisation define a successful employee?
12. How does each persons working environment in this organization influence their success?
13. How do you think each persons space defines their success in this organization.
14. Does the physical layout of your organisation allow you to effectively carry out teamwork and individual work? And please explain your response
15. How do you think personality affects the way in which you experience the physical environment?
16. If you could design the layout of your working environment so that you could perform your work to the best of your ability, how would you design it?

APPENDIX B – EXAMPLE OF FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTION

University of Cape Town

FOCUS GROUP 1

FEBRUARY: 2003

CONDUCTED BY: KARISSA LACHMAN

EXPLANATION:

My research is based on how you experience the open-plan working environment. I am specifically interested how the open plan work environment affects human spatial behaviour, that is, privacy, personal space, territoriality and crowding

NOTE:

I will be using a tape recorder during our focus groups. This will allow me to remember everything that will be discussed today and will add to my hand written notes. Please note however that whatever we discuss here today is strictly confidential in the sense that no names will be revealed in my research, so please feel free to say whatever is on your mind regarding the issue.

There are no right or wrong answers. I am interested in what each of you have to say.

At the same time, please do not feel pressurized to say something. Rather, feel free to contribute whenever you like.

I do however urge you to remember that all of you will be helping me in obtaining a rich understanding of this topic, so please do not feel afraid to explore your feelings and contribute to the discussion, and interact with one another. The results of the research may be beneficial to us all.

The focus group will last for +/- an hour and a half.

Note that the questions are very broad so please elaborate on your answers

Are there any questions before we begin?

1. Could you tell me about the type of work that you do and the role that you play in this organization?

I am seconded out to another company to do the internal audit and I come back here for meetings.

We have just started. This is our third month. We have had an induction, spent some time in the office and we are only really starting now. It is trial and error at this point

We do audit work, that is, accounting – we also go out to clients.

This is the first week that we have been out to a client. It is a first time experience.

It is hard to say what our roles are. We don't have roles per se. We react to what the client wants. My appointment last week with the client was cancelled, so I sat in the office for a hour and a half, until someone said to me, Ok do this... so a role (laugh)... I don't have a role.

I think the role that we are supposed to be playing here is that we are trainee accountants. We are supposed to use company's like this to get practical experience and develop ourselves by working for them.

2. Culture refers to “a system of shared meaning ” or “ the way in which things are done around here”. This may include characteristics such as risk taking and innovation, attention to detail, stability of the organisation and the method of appraisal.

➤ Based on this definition of culture, how would you describe the culture of this organization?

That's a tough one. I haven't had a chance to make that assumption yet. Last week was a week of training, and we are trying to find our feet as to where we are going.

I think it is a bit too early to say what the culture is because we actually haven't experienced it.

I feel that there is a lot of interaction, right down from the bottom to the partners up there – they are very approachable. They also throw you in the deep end, but if you need the support, they are there. Nobody turns you down. I am very happy at the moment. There are a couple of things that I still don't understand, but I think that I can only do that in time.

Culture also includes the relationships between people in the organisation. This may include management-employee relationships, employee-employee relationships, teamwork versus individual work, competitiveness amongst employees, and empowerment of individuals and groups.

➤ How would you describe the relationship between people in this organisation?

From what I can see now, the interaction, the relationships, the delegation of work and communication seems to be progressing well. So as it stands, I don't have any complaints.

You do get that family feeling which I haven't experienced in other organizations. I know that I can walk into a manager's office and say what I want to say and it will be taken into consideration. That is nice to know when you are starting at the bottom of the ladder.

I also feel like I can talk to any one of the managers – you can go to their offices and talk to them. This is also good for employer-employee relationships. You can go up to anyone of the managers and start talking to them. They are quite approachable.

Talking about teamwork.. This environment is all about teamwork. If you don't have teamwork, you cant survive- so that's just the way it goes.

I think that people are not lost in the system. You can identify with people all the time. You know what is happening with everyone around you. In a big organisation, you can get lost in the system.

3. The working environments of today may be designed to include offices, open plan divisions, common areas etc. Could you describe the way in which your working environment is spatially designed, that is, the layout of the working environment and why it is designed like this?

At my client, there is an open area, but we have cubicles. It is not fully opened like it is here, so I have my space.

I don't think that all that can be said can be positive. Last week, we were experiencing problems with some laptops. The plugs don't fit into the wall plug, so people couldn't get connected. We have tried to work around it, and have spoken to the IT guys. So we do have some hiccups, but it is not that bad. If you think about it, most of us are not in the office a lot of the time. We may have a maximum of six to eight in the office at any time, so I understand management's concerns about setting up all the terminals.

There is also the problem of privacy. You have very little privacy. That means that if I have to make a phone call, then, I have to share that

space with someone else, and actually have to speak in front of him or her. I don't think that that is right.

If you receive a call, giving you sad news, you have to express that emotion with that person sitting there.

I just don't like open planning. I know that companies have all researched this and explained why it is a good thing to do, but if I have my own company one-day, I would never have open planning. I think that a person needs a concentration space. I know that I love to talk. I have been talking to everybody upstairs.

I think that to a certain extent, if you do have an open plan and you have your cubicle up to a certain height, then you feel that you have your own space. You feel your privacy. There also needs to be sound absorbing material. Where I worked previously, the person next to me couldn't be heard that well, so they did have their privacy. Just having that enclosure is better than open space. I prefer it that way.

If you leave something on the table today, like a piece of paper, and it is not your space, then tomorrow when you come in, it may not be there. Even worse, it may be an important document. There comes a time in your working career when you will forget something. I am sure that I am going to do it. With your own little space, you can leave your stuff on the desk and you don't have to carry everything everywhere. We have got little lockers, but we try and keep those lockers for our clients. If a client needs a document, I do not have to go through all my other things to get it.

The other problem is that you can't leave anything valuable on the desk, like a wallet or a cell-phone or a watch. Each time you want to go

somewhere, you have to pack up everything. We also have the problem of cell-phones getting stolen. We just need one draw so that we can lock our things up.

From a management point of view, I think that it is much better. You can walk past and know for instance that "X" is not here today. The manager can then enquire about where he is.

Can we touch on why management has structured the environment the way that they have?

To save money

Mmm- I think that there is some type of psychological reasoning behind it. It is also cheaper for the company. I can understand having it open, because as you said, most of us are not here, but I think that the idea about the half way cubicle is a good one

What you are hearing here today is an individual groups feelings. Someone else before us may have come up with the plan. We don't know the reason behind it, but it can work. We just need to be able to use the facilities. I mean there are plugs, but we cannot use them. Someone told me that if you change your plug on your computer, you lose the guarantee on it.

Yes, you do.

The other thing that I thought of is that if you have an office and you come in and close the door, you wont know what is happening around you. You wont even know if someone has met with an accident.

4. How has this physical environment personally affected you both positively and negatively?

On Thursday, I decided to stay late to see what this place looks like after half past four. The tables were so untidy. People use the tables and leave them untidy. If someone else comes along to use the table, they have to clean it themselves before working.

Well on a positive note, you don't get to be with the same people all the time. Today you may be sitting at your desk and someone new might come and sit near you. You start communicating with different people, whereas if you have a fixed spot, then you will just be communicating with the same four people that you normally sit with

5. This organisation as well as many of your clients has working environments that are spatially designed in a certain way. In your experience, what are the advantages and disadvantages of these spatial designs?

At the client, I have my cubicle, I have my computer, and I have my lock up draws. I am quite happy with the set up there. You can communicate with other people, without losing focus. I think that with an open plan, you may tend to chat a bit more, but with the spatial design at the client, you have your own space, which allows you to focus on your work.

I am at forensic auditing now and three of us work at one table. There isn't a lot of space.

Could you describe the open plan set up here? What is the actual set up?

We have a big open space and within that space, we have oval tables that seat four people at a time. There is a pole running through the

middle of the table where the cables run through. The plugs however are right underneath the table, so you have to go on your knees to plug in your computer.

It is very bad planning

The laptops are also not rubberised underneath and are very unsteady on the table. If you kick the cable and the cable does not come out of the computer, you can easily pull the whole computer off the table.

There is one table that is set up quite nicely. The plugs are on the side of the table. That's an ideal situation. You can just come in and plug in your computer on the side. However, because the plug is on one side, all four trainees have to run their cables across the table or underneath the table to plug in. They are nice tables though and very spacious as well. It would be nice to have plugs on both sides. This would mean that cables are out of the way and people can't trip over them. It's a very nice table

That's why everybody wants to sit at that table.

Actually, nobody 'really' wants to sit there because there is no air-con there

6. How do you feel about having privacy in your working environment?

Sometimes, you really have to concentrate on what you are doing because you can hear the other people talk quite loud. You can ask them nicely to keep quiet, but eventually they get fed up with you and it starts getting nasty.

Also you may get up and walk away but when you come back, there may be a stack of papers left on the desk you were working at. You then have to walk around and find out whom it belongs to.

The cubicle that I have at the client has quite a bit of privacy

7. Territoriality is a means by which people demarcate their working or living areas or define what belongs to them. Is there any way in which you have tried to exert some sense of territoriality in the working environment?

I found a table that I think just suits me. If I am working and I think of something funny, I can look up and share it. However everybody else tends to like that table too. If you are not in early, somebody else takes that table in the corner. I like that table because my back is facing everybody, so I can look up and say something when I need to and then get back down to work. On Friday, I sat at another table and I was laughing more than I should have been laughing. There were a lot of funny things going on around me. I like people with a sense of humour, but I prefer that other table so that I can do my work. Unfortunately it's a 'who gets there first' situation.

I think that territoriality is just a habit. You come to work and you sit at a particular desk and you get used to sitting at that desk. If you walk in three days later and someone else is sitting there, you have to get used to another place all over again. Maybe you should just try and accept the environment and just work around it. That's what I try to do. Naturally, if you come in and your table is taken, then you may feel miserable, but it doesn't take much to go and get settled somewhere else.

To a certain extent, people like to have their own space you know that when you get there, that it is yours. You get comfortable in your spot, and I think that people generally prefer it that way.

I get frustrated but you just have to accept it.

The telephone is a major problem. There is a spot that I like to sit at but the phone is there and I have to play secretary to everybody. We should have more lines for the same number, or maybe one or two extensions. At the moment, we have to answer the phone for everybody. The reason I sit there is because the airconditioner is there. You could sit further away, it is hot in the office. If you choose to sit somewhere else then you have to put up with heat.

I think that we haven't all been in the office at the same time. Eventually, at some point we may all be working here at the same time. At that point, it is going to be messy. As you can see, with a few of us here, there are problems. There needs to be some changes.

Definitely. There were only eight of us here last week, but there could be up to thirty or forty people here. It could really be a problem.

The guys at IT did put in plug adapters, allowing you to use three or four plugs at once. However within a couple of months, the second one has gone missing. One of the clerks may have taken them. I think we should get the plugs structured properly on the wall or on the table so that we don't need the adapters. We are spending money on buying adapters, whereas you could spend money on changing the plugs on the wall.

It is an issue that has to be addressed, taking into consideration that we have to work with our laptops, Furthermore it is very difficult for the

ladies with skirts and high heels to bend underneath the tables... shame (laugh).

I took the adapter. I have a designated spot and my plug doesn't fit into the ...

It was not given to you

Mr. Adam gave it to me.

But you can't really exert territoriality. I may be here for one week and then gone for the next week. I may be comfortable here for one week, but then by Friday, I am told that I have to go to a client. If I come back three weeks later, I can't expect others not to sit in my place for three weeks. It's just the nature of the work.

But even if I am here for two weeks in the month and someone else is here for the other two weeks, we will both feel the same about one specific place. I will feel that it is mine and he will feel that it is his. You can't have territoriality.

8. How does this make you feel as an individual?

I think it is an ideal thing. We spend most of the time with the client. Even if I was assigned a certain table, I will not be in the office for 90% of the time, unless my appointment was cancelled. However the senior personnel have their offices and they spend almost all their time there, except for short assignments. I therefore think that it is an ideal thing that we have this situation. It just needs to be improved by having things like plugs at convenient places so that you can work without being interrupted.

It's not that bad. We just need improvements on this.

It's a few things - the telephone and the plugs.

9. Do you ever experience a sense of feeling crowded and how do you deal with this?

There are about eight to ten of us upstairs in that big open space. It would be a problem if all forty of us were there, but the chances of us all being there is slim.

10. How do you personally define success?

Living through the day (laugh).

Achieving what you set out to achieve

Achieving your own goals

I think it could also be about coming out on top of a failure or a setback, or getting back on track after a distraction. In a way, it is like managing your failures.

For me, it is about setting myself goals and achieving that goal. It may be something important to me, or it may just be trying to understand how to do a bank recon. I will tell myself that by the end of today, I need to know this. To me that is success. I have come a step closer in knowing what I need to know in the grand scheme of things. Success is also having not figured it out yesterday and being determined to figure it out today. That can also be success.

11. How does the organisation define a successful employee?

I think that they would like you to perform well when doing your work. They want you to be successful in what you are doing. I think that they also want us to succeed academically. They place a lot of emphasis on your academics. I think that they want you to have a balanced type of life, which to a certain extent may be difficult to do. I think they try to look at your social life, your work life, and your academic life – but obviously, balance is different for different people.

I agree with what he is saying. I think that they are looking for the right person with the right attitude and that's what they are working towards. It is all about your attitude towards your studies and towards your work. If you carry the right attitude, and try and adapt, then you will be successful.

Can you elaborate on that?

If you come in here and think that everything is going to be done for you, then you are coming in with the wrong attitude. You have to work for it. If you know what you are working for, then I think that you will reach your goals.

Also, you should not keep nagging about the negatives around you. Rather, you should work around it. I think that management wants you to focus on the positive.

I think that in any organisation, you are going to have negatives. It is not a perfect world, so you obviously have to make sure that you try to overlook those things or try and adapt to the situation.

12. How does each person's working environment in this organization influence their success?

Like we said earlier, this business is about teamwork. You have to have all the players in the game cooperating, and that will lead to success.

Like she said, she likes to chat and she tends to lose track of things, but if you have your separate cubicle, you are more focused and you reach your successes.

I get excited over little things. If my results balance and if you are sitting across from me, I am going to say to you "Hey I balanced" But it is just my own little conversation going on inside my head (Laugh)

I think that it is really important to have teamwork, because people, especially those senior to us can show us what to do.

I think that what I enjoy the most about being here is that the managers have experienced what we are going through. They may also still be studying and they also have families. Most may have forgotten how hard it is being an article clerk, but there is one guy that I find I can identify with. When he walked into our induction, he knew exactly what we were going through. That's the nice thing. Sometimes you may feel that you don't want to open that book and read. I know that some of them have kids and that they are able to do it. I don't have kids, so that's a good thing. Most of them are also on that journey and it gives you that extra boost when you are feeling down.

How does the working layout influence that inspiration?

You realise that you can make it up there. When you are at this level, you think that its will take forever to become a manager, but then you realise that your manager is also doing his CTA and you realise that you could also be a manager in the next two or three years. It is part of your interaction.

Sometimes you just get a certain caliber of people out there. The manager that I am referring to is doing the same thing that we are doing. The inspiration and confidence it gives you makes you feel that you can do it. All of us here are trying to get our CTA. We can look to each other for support.

13. How do you think each person's space defines their success in this organization?

Well you can close your door and do what you want to do. Managers have the option of closing their doors and getting done what they need to get done. They also have their support staff around them to assist. So the higher you climb in the organisation, the more help you have from the junior clerks and the intermediate clerks so that you can achieve whatever it is that you have to achieve.

However if you have your own office, you close the door on teamwork and interaction and open door policy.

However if you desperately need to get something done, you have the option of closing the door and doing your work. In the open plan, you have noise coming at you from all directions. Also, you have to answer the phone all the time if you are close enough to it.

There is a responsibility that comes with being a manager. And when it comes down to that 'crunch' of you needing that peace and quiet for a half an hour, then you can close the door and get the work done. I just think that having your own space as a manager is great....

Partners have their own offices. You could fit about eighteen trainees in these offices. Managers also have offices but they share offices. We are out there in the general office. However is something for you to work towards. You may say to yourself "I want to be there" and then you ask yourself, what you need to do to get there. You have to try to drive yourself much harder and be much more focused to try to get there. Your next step may be to try to get into an office big enough for you to park your BMW. If you want that then you have to work for it. So it gives you a path to follow.

Not necessarily. I don't mean to gloat about where I am working now, but in that environment, the chief financial officer sits in a cubicle as well. There are also other CA's there - the training manager and the financial control manager, however they all have the same cubicle as I have. I am a clerk and they are in a few cubicles down the passage. I think that to a certain extent, it is a solution. You have your space, yet you still get on with everybody else. You sort of have your own space when you need it. You can also talk to the person next to you if they have some time. If they are busy, you find yourself back in your own space again.

Like we said earlier, the partners are very approachable here, even though they have their big offices. My personal opinion is that if I had to be a CA and if I had to sit in a common office, I would decline the job. It is my individual opinion.. I don't want to be in a general office. Everybody has to go through it. They were clerks themselves and they

earned their position. They worked for it and it is something that we can see ourselves working towards. It is all about the individual person and what he makes of it.

I am trying to see the link between spatial design and productivity. In your situation, the CFO sits in a cubicle like you and in our company, the partners and managers sit in their own offices. How is it that they can be productive there and we can be productive here as well? I am trying to figure out where that link is.

I think that it is the nature of work that they are doing. I think that it is very difficult to tell, because we know a lot about this company, but their company and their work strategy could be suitable for that kind of set up. I have noticed that when I go into our manager's offices, they have many files and documentation around them. If they had to use a small cubicle, it would not be suitable or adaptable for their work.

I think that there is a difference because of work that I am doing. It involves just me and my senior. I sit in a cubicle, but I have been delegated work to do. I don't really need to interact with anybody, because it doesn't require teamwork. I can cope the whole day without talking to anybody if I wanted to. Basically, I get the information from everybody that I need, come back to my desk and do my work. The only person I need to interact with is perhaps my senior now and again, but most of the time, I can do my work on my own.

It is about what different companies do. However, if you are the CFO sitting in a cubicle next to us, and a guy from.... lets say Standard Bank comes in and says, "I am interested in you guys doing our audit and I am giving you a budget of five million." Are you going to get up and give him your desk so that he can sit down and have a cup of tea? You

can't do that. You need to look at the image of the company. We deal with big companies like Deloitte, and PWC, so we have to look at the image.

That's why we go out to the client.

Yes, but we have to get the job first.

Yes, but can't you have a separate boardroom or office when you entertain?

*If you have eighteen partners and six of the clients come through. Are you going to share the boardroom as well, like the general office?
(sarcastic tone)*

No, you time your visits.

You also get people walking in looking for the organisation.

I suppose it also depends on the size of the organisation. There are approximately thirty people where I work – thirty highly qualified people, including support staff. Out of that thirty people, there must be about eight CAs, so it is a very focused organisation. They are obviously all on the same level. They do however have their boardrooms for clients coming in. If the CFO of another company comes in, he will go to the boardroom. He will not come into our area. There are four boardrooms for meetings. I have never seen clients or anybody else come into our area.

Every company is different. Some require teamwork and some don't. It just depends on what the company does. The layout will be based on what the company does.

I agree with you. I mean some people will say that you are defined by the car that you drive, other people by the size of your bank account. How you look at it is an individual thing

14. Does the physical layout of your organisation allow you to effectively carry out teamwork and individual work? And please explain your response

I think that we mentioned it earlier on. We are working together in one place. You are never on your own. It is almost like you are achieving a certain goal, but making a joint effort.

15. How do you think personality affects the way in which you experience the physical environment?

I think that personality counts a lot. If I see someone across the room and I have the urge to say something, I say it, not to the point where it becomes distracting, but I guess it is just the way that I work. If I get excited that I can balance my books, and if I look over and I see you looking at me, I am going to tell you that I balanced. To somebody else it is not a big deal. They may just keep going with what they are doing, however this is my personality. Little things excite me. I am trying to figure out how to react with others. I know that I can't sit with those two guys because they have a sense of humour. That can be distracting for me and I am trying to avoid management thinking that I am not working.

If you are a shy reserved person and you don't like people around you, then the open plan is going to have a negative effect on you. If you are

an extrovert, and you like people, as well as talking, then it will have a positive effect on you.

When I have work to do, I like to stay focused. I don't like to be distracted or talk too much. I don't like to lose my focus, as I tend to become slack if I do. So once I am focused, I just like to keep going and get the work done. Once the work is done, then you have time to chat. So I think that it makes sense to have cubicles

I am a very quiet person. I sit there and I don't talk much.

16. If you could design the layout of your working environment so that you could perform your work to the best of your ability, how would you design it?

I would like my own desk, comfortable chairs and ashtrays. (laugh)

We are not allowed to smoke at our desks, so we have to get up every half an hour to go and smoke outside. When we are here, it is fine, because we just walk out onto the balcony. If we were in a company though, you have to go out of the building.

I would change the phone situation. I had to make a personal call to UNISA the other day and everybody in the office knew what I was talking about. I don't have anything to hide but it is a personal issue and I don't need them to know everything.

I have been in a similar environment like this previously. There were different audit rooms and if you are working for a partner, you tended to sit closer to where that partner was. We had little cubicles and the phone had a huge extension. It could therefore be moved anybody's desk. So that for us was fine. It was not like you were just getting one

person to answer it all the time. And it was nice because if you wanted to work, you could just put it up on the board in front of you.

Maybe from a manager's perspective, they may feel that the trainees are not working. It seems like whenever the phone rings upstairs, that it is always for one particular lady. However it was her client. It is not like we don't need phones because we do interact with our clients regularly. That lady spoke to her client the whole of last week. Everytime the phone rang, it was for her and it was her client. The difficulty was that the phone was not at her desk and she had to stand there at the phone with her books all over trying to explain something. Also, the phone was right by the airconditioner. So from a management perspective, I don't understand why there isn't one phone on each desk.

Also, it is so hot up there and the person that comes to answer the phone puts the airconditioner off.

I am not sure if they think that we really don't need the phones. When the phone rang for this particular lady, she was on the phone for about fifteen to twenty minutes and the airconditioner went off everytime the phone rang. I mean there are still other people sitting there that needed to be taken into consideration. I don't know what the financial position is on the part of the managers, but do they really know what we are going through with those two phones.

I guess that you also have to consider that some individuals may abuse the phone.

However you still have to call through reception, so I do think that they can monitor personal usage. I am just concerned about clients phoning through.

You can block calls going out. That is also an option with telcom

I am sure that they can work around it. I just don't know how

The layout is fine for me. I don't mind how the desks are. However as you know, the legs of the tables are crossed and they could just be extended up over the table. You would then have your cubicle. The powerpoints need to be moved away from the bottom of the legs and brought down to the side or to the walls. However, with the plugs on the walls it will be a bit difficult because people keep moving around the tables and they would trip over it. The second thing is the cabling. You could neaten it up and do it properly so that everybody can use it. Also, we need comfortable chairs and a phone for each table. Four people sit at the table. If you want to make a private call, have one phone that is separate. Never give that extension to the client because those are personal calls. Then if you want to, that line can be monitored by the switchboard.

We also need drawers – only one with a key so that we can lock it. Because we are not allowed putting our personal stuff into the pigeonholes, all our stationary and other belongings must be left on our desks.

If I use a parker pen for example, I feel that I have to constantly hide it after using it. There will however come a time when I myself wont be able to find it because I would have hid it away so safely

There was actually a time when I had to phone my own cell phone so that I could find it on my desk. There were a lot of papers that I was using at that time. If I had a draw, I could have just put it in the draw.

Whatever has been said here, I have lived, I have experienced it. Most of you have not been up there as long as I have. Soon you will lose your calm. You will know what we are talking about.

Also, if she spills her water on my computer, ... whom do I blame? Am I going to lose the seventeen or eighteen thousand that I spent on it? Who is liable for it? It is negligence on her side, or negligence on my side? That is a major problem

Yes I saw that the other day. Someone was drinking coffee over someone else's computer and I thought 'please don't drop it.'

If I drink water, I will make sure that I leave it away from the computer. If I go outside, I make sure that the water is aside. But you never know. We don't have those computers that lift up. Ours sits flush, so the chances of them being damaged are greater.

The other day, someone tripped over the cable and there was coffee dripping on my laptop. Lucky it didn't go in.

We should have a tea station where you have your tea and you are not allowed to bring your tea back to your desk. All of us have laptops and an accident can be an accident.

If you drop it on your own machine, you are liable. When he drops it on my machine, then who is liable? That comes back to the point that we share tables.

So what's the solution.

Well those cables are the solution. If you have those cables coming through so that they slot into your computer and then can be released again for someone else to use...it may be better.

Can't the phone plugs be made to retract so that you could pull it out to attach it to your computer? Once you are done, it could slide back in. It is probably a cost factor?

I just want to know who is liable.

It's frightening because we all had to pay for these computers. I saw it on Friday and I didn't want to say anything. I saw someone standing over the computer and I thought to myself – 'wow! I wonder what would happen if she just misses her mouth by mistake.' It can happen. It's possible. Its an accident but...

The security is also a problem for me. Anyone can just walk in here or walk out.

However, not all of us have keys, so if you arrive early, at lets say seven-o clock, then you have to wait until someone with a key comes. They should give us security cards or something that we can swipe. This will give us all access.

Once someone left a laptop on a desk and it got stolen. The security guys didn't pick up anything, because people are just walking up and down and nobody is keeping track of what you are doing

If you had a draw, you pit you valuables into the draw and lock it up. This would be handy if you are going to another department or to lunch.

We have no lock up space, so you have to carry everything around with you or take the chance of not being able to find your phone afterwards.

University of Cape Town