

FENG SHUI TUNING FOR OFFICES

Peter Jordan¹

ABSTRACT

Offices are places where we spend a considerable part of our lives; it is therefore important to rethink office design.

Is it possible to create offices that are enriching environments that stimulate creativity?
Can office design lead to more joy and comfort at work?

- Yes, if an office's design reflects nature's magnificence and diversity instead of an atmosphere of economical standards which feel technical, restraining and stressful.
- Yes, if the design includes intelligent geometric forms and proportions instead of careless carved forms and strictly functional sizes and proportions.
- Yes, if the design and layout of tables are in harmony with basic human needs instead of contemporary work set-ups which force people to look for alternate means fulfilling their needs.

Can Feng Shui principles be used to facilitate the design of enriching office environments?

- Yes, if basic Feng Shui principles (backing, command, security), which are mainly identical to ergonomic knowledge, is taken care in the first place.
- Yes, if Yin Yang principle is used to foster powerful dynamics for ongoing processes on mental and physical levels.
- Yes, if the 5 Feng Shui elements are used to create incentives of the full circle of qualities representing wholeness instead of one-sidedness.

KEY WORDS

Office design, ergonomics, Feng Shui, spirituality, built environment, creativity, live quality at work, sacred geometry

INTRODUCTION

The time that people spend working in the office is a regular part of life that has impacts on people's health. The office is a working environment with many physical and psychological demands, challenges, and stresses which have a long-term effect on the

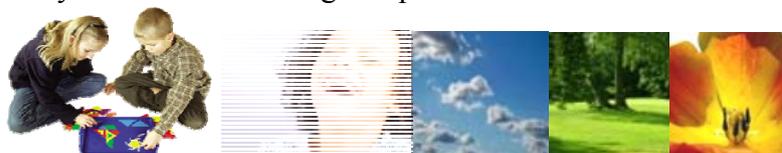
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person working in an office. These demands, challenges, and stresses in offices can cause psychological problems and physical ailments. A meticulous and holistic design of the working environment, however, can promote creativeness and significantly contribute to the wellbeing of body and mind. This design also promotes productivity and innovation.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is important for a healthy office and a healthy organization. Creative employees who contribute intuitively respond better and faster to challenges in their job and are therefore more successful. By contrast, employees who in a virtuously perfect manner act based only what they are told are less able to react to changes and ultimately fail in attempts to compete. Virtuosity is the opposite of creativity. There are other important factors beyond how thoroughly you have learned your job. Your authentic and self-generated expression is important. Only through such authentic expression, borne from your inner self, can other people be reached on a subtle level of human interconnection (social intelligence). This expression is required to get true feedback and to identify your present reality, and this is the precondition for effective intuition. Efficiency sometimes is different from productivity achieved only through completing specific tasks. Efficiency means “to hit the mark at the right time” which simply is intuition based on present reality – CREATIVITY!

To be creative means to create something in your own way. To behave creatively means to express oneself in a non-standard way. The opposite of creativity is virtuosity. Imagine a child playing with building blocks, having fun stacking the blocks. As one might expect, the child is doing this haphazardly. So before everything collapses some adult usually comes to help the child. What does the adult say to the young child having fun? “You are doing good, *but I’ll show you how to do this*”. Can you remember which of your behaviors result from what you have been told and which of your behaviors you learned and defined on your own? We all have to learn from others to some extent how to behave, but if you rely on others to perfect your performance, nurture your intelligence and develop your talents in life, you are virtually dead. Life is creativity. Creativity is like an idea, a spark which shows a divine space. Creativity is born from presence - being here and now. Creativity is stimulated through inspiration.



INSPIRATION:

Inspiration is the key to a better performance. “To be fatigued is to be dis-spirited, but to be inspired is to be in spirit. To be egocentric is to be dis-spirited, but to be Self-centered in the right sense is to be inspired or in spirit.”²

Creativity needs inspiration, which we find in nature’s variety. Consequently, harmonious organic forms symbolize abundance, security and formative free space. Creative

² A course in miracles Chapter 4 § 1

development, imagination and strength of expression are made possible in nature. Unnecessary regularity and rigid forms, in structures and at the workplace, psychologically work against and inhibit the creative approach of the individual³. Moreover such unyielding expression is simply too banal for our mental abilities considering the biological diversity that has surrounded humans for millions of years. Consequently, a design which is reduced to straight lines may be interpreted as an affront to our real mental abilities. "By using round, or better said organic shapes, the visitor is more intensely connected with the nature surrounding him. With organic shapes, one communicates with deeper levels of nature."⁴ –



Figure 1: Nature is a place to feel free, to take a deep breath and to enjoy life.

Feng Shui uses cures which in an inspirational way attract attention. Where the attention is the life force Qi is attracted likewise. Consequently attractive enriched office rooms with an assortment of forms and colors provide more energy (Qi) than other functional less attractive rooms.

INTELLIGENT GEOMETRIC FORMS AND PROPORTIONS⁵:

Humans unconsciously recognize geometric relationships and thereby the higher order of shape. Organic forms stimulate and are esthetically pleasing. But organic forms can imply a higher intelligence by means of geometric forms, which have their roots in mathematics. For example, an ellipsis is a curve where the sum of the distances from any point on the curve's two center points is constant and a "Cassini curve" is a family of curves in which the loci of each curve satisfies the condition that the product of the distances to each focus point is exactly a constant. The lemniscates, (the horizontal eight, the symbol of infinity) is a special form of the "Cassini curve."

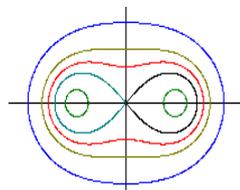


Figure 2

These forms are mathematically very complicated, but humans are unconsciously aware of such relationships⁶ and humans are content having discovered these forms'

³ In another context Friedensreich Hundertwasser claimed that straight lines should be forbidden in architecture. <http://www1.kunsthhauswien.com/deutsch/philosophie.htm>

⁴ Rudolf Steiner, *Toward a New Architectural Style*

⁵ Sacred geometry nowadays is a fashionable phrase for this too.

"intelligent" environment. Who can create complex geometry? Not animals, not plants and not stones. Only the highest spirit in the creation can do this. This ability is a divine gift. If you apply more effort in geometry people can feel it. Therefore it's particularly important, with regard to organic forms, that clearly formulated geometry is used to ensure the higher approach of intelligence at work.

The circle itself is the most perfect geometric shape, symbolizing the spiritual origin (heaven). The square, on the other hand, symbolizes matter (earth). Buildings and rooms are usually square or rectangular. In contrast room design and furniture can be round geometry and organic forms to represent the whole creation.

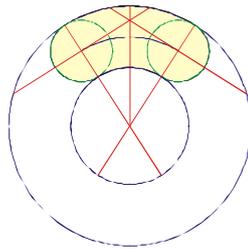


Figure 3 The circle itself is the most perfect geometric shape

- Linear shapes symbolize regulations, directions, limitations, shortage and the resulting power and authority.
- Round shapes symbolize diversity, abundance, infinite possibilities and freedom.
- Round shapes, based on a geometric relationship, symbolize a higher (intelligent) order within the biological diversity.

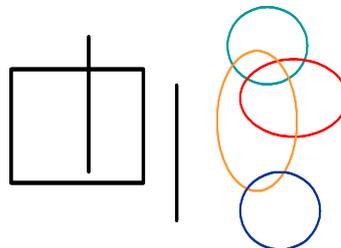


Figure 4 Linear shapes symbolize regulations / Round shapes symbolize diversity

YIN AND YANG THE DYNAMIC FORCE IN THE UNIVERSE

Yin and Yang is the basis of all Feng Shui teaching. In the trigrams and hexagrams, the polarity Ying Yang is more differentiated into finer qualities. The meanings and associations are described in the old Chinese book I Ging (Book of Metamorphoses). The Yin-Yang symbol itself, however, represents the dynamic of the eternal process of transformation (birth – growth – maturity – decay). Constant change (transformation) and movement is best displayed in the symbol. Therefore, Feng Shui does not deal with creating a rigid (and perhaps temporarily advantageous) situation but rather keeping things in a state of flux, in motion. The task is to achieve balance (harmony) and not one-sidedness (one-sidedness would lead to stagnation and sooner or later to a sudden tip-over). Yin Yang is the motor of development, the dynamic force in the universe.

⁶ Rudolf Steiner, Toward a New Architectural Style.

“Dynamic” means agile, energetic, suspenseful, and power through motion. Dynamics is a requirement for transformation, metamorphosis, assimilation, evolution, and continual competitiveness for a company. We distinguish three kinds of Yin / Yang dynamics in offices:

- The dynamic of business factors such as equipment, products, and expertise. Modern offices are quickly changing places. A design set-up made today may be obsolete a few weeks later. Consequently design and furnishing components should be very flexible and easy to rearrange.
- The dynamic achieved through bodily movement to increase vitality and communication. In most offices we need this constant motion to keep the business profitable. E.g. planning is Yin and communication is Yang. Planning usually is done seated and communication while standing. Bodily activity also maintains flexibility in mind. Consequently workplaces with the option to work stand-up (e.g. with motor driven stand-up desks) are more healthier and more profitable.
- The dynamic in the office through soft curved furniture. Business needs interaction between groups. Consequently office design and furniture arrangements should enable easy natural movement from one part of an office to another, favorably through naturally curved pathways according to Feng Shui’s Qi-flow recommendations – and without sharp edges in the pathway which would cause danger of injury.



Figure 5

FENG SHUI ELEMENTS AND COLORS

In Feng Shui the concept of the 5 Elements is well known. This concept is usually used to foster or control certain energies (of people, rooms, buildings and lands). But mainly this concept represents a full circle of qualities – a more versatile life circle than the Yin Yang circle. Each element represents different qualities like for instance: spring, summer, autumn, winter; or joy, love, proud, sorrow, forgiveness, abundance, attachment and detachment. If all elements are represented in a room you feel complete. If some are missing you feel strengthened according to the qualities represented by the present elements, but you miss the lacking qualities and on the whole feel incomplete. Often fashionable interior designs have a tendency to be one-sided. Feng Shui may function as a corrective instrument by ensuring that all elements in color and form are represented to stimulate all of life’s qualities. How a designer uses the proportions and combination each element in the interior design will determine whether a design is good.



Figure 6 Feng Shui 5 Elements as colors

SECURITY AND PRIVACY ARE PRECONDITIONS FOR CREATIVITY AND TRUE COMMUNICATION

- Security through backing = back coverage
- Security through protection = shield in front
- Security through command = overview of space
- Personal territory = privacy

In Feng Shui basic courses the principle of a good backing and the powerful command position is taught. The principle applied in an office is really simple. Up front: All you need and all your ancestors looked for is a secure place to live. Just as your ancestors in a dangerous environment once looked for a good backing, so do you unconsciously do the same. Therefore a secure workplace is a precondition for any further development and exposure of your qualities at work. The preference for privacy is slightly more sophisticated. Privacy is more than security, and it implies a secured space for your individuality. If you lack security and privacy at your workplace (e.g. through bad furniture design and office planning) you unconsciously establish alternate security domains around your workplace through your behavior. Some of these behaviors are aggressive, deviant, elusive, threatening, antisocial, defensive, incommunicative, arrogant, and reserved. This behavior is not helpful in an organization and it in fact stifles efficiency and competitiveness. These behaviors may cause long term harm to the individual. On the contrary, a secure ergonomic workplace environment can foster open communication and social intelligence for new ideas and better competitiveness while at the same time providing more quality of life at work.

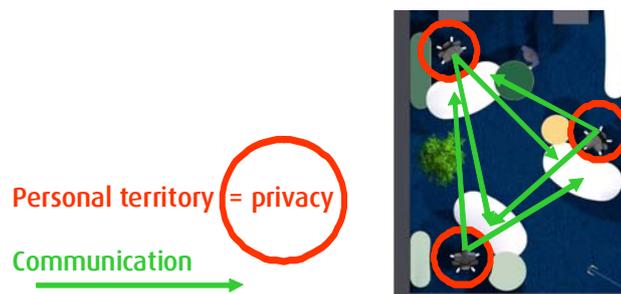


Figure 7 Privacy and communication

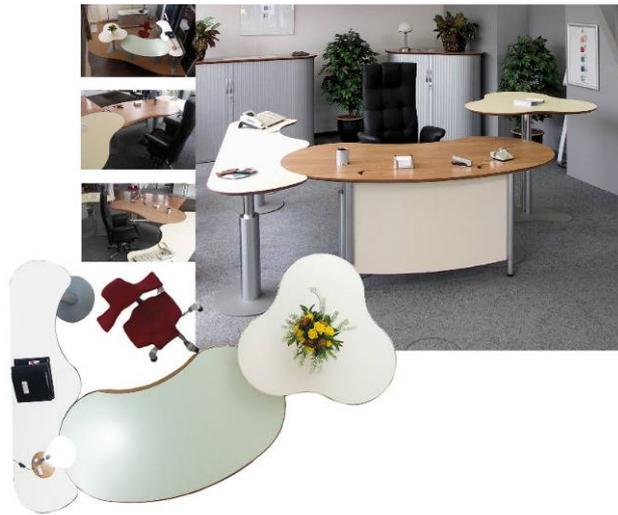


Figure 8 A Vital-Office desk set-up

CONCLUSIONS

Rather than presenting a static "to do list" of ergonomics and Feng Shui guidelines, we should look to the fundamental principles and correlations. This enables us to facilitate greater potential in an organization through individual office planning and interior design.

Feng Shui can be used in many different ways. Besides the basic principles we discussed Feng Shui offers more complex Systems e.g. Flying stars, which can be used in addition but never without first taking care of the basics. One has to define the job which should be done. The intention determines the outcome.

Our aim is to create a living office space. We bring together ergonomic office planning and furniture design, modern Baubiologie and a traditional way of performance-enhancing interior design and decoration according to Feng Shui.

Our intention is:

- for each individual to achieve happiness and
- for each organization to achieve effectiveness.

“More important than what we do is how we do it. It makes a difference! Good design is dedicated by the nature being of the subject and interacts with both, the rational and emotional qualities of human. The challenge today is of holistic nature: Acceptance instead of arrogance, integration instead of polarization. In office design we must learn to cultivate both - the rational and emotional qualities while sharing competence and knowledge in order to design and furnish offices.” (Peter Jordan)



Figure 9: sample planning

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I am glad to share my insights of design principles which for me are worth working for. I would like to thank in advance all architects and designers who may find some inspiration which lead to a more lively office design.

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BIOGRAPHY:

Peter Jordan is the founder of Vital-Office, an umbrella world for a unique and holistic way of designing office environments.

His business led him to ergonomics already in the early 1980's when he started producing adjustable computer furniture. In 1989 he was the first in Germany to design anthropometric rounded desk systems. In 2000 he developed the first authentic Feng Shui office system to be endorsed by many Feng Shui masters. In the business world he is recognized as an experienced specialist in ergonomics, a professional creative planner of office environments, and a diligent designer of office furniture.

Personally he has made his own spiritual journey and learned about Feng Shui, Geomancy, Sacred Geometry, Shamanism, Buddhism and Spirituality. His aim is to show a way to facilitate creativity. Creativity is the joy of live - an authentic expression like a child's - and last not least spiritual "live" itself. To be authentic - creative – is to experience joy and love.

He has lectured on “Vital-Office Ergonomics and Feng Shui” in Germany since 2006. Many Feng Shui consultants, architects, facility managers and office dealer already participated in the seminars in Germany. On the subject of “Office Optimization: Ergonomics and Feng Shui,” he regularly speaks at several conferences and other events. In 2007 he was a speaker at the International Congress of Facility Management in Frankfurt, at the international Feng Shui conference in Budapest, and at the Conscious Design conference held in New Jersey in the United States.



Figure 10: Peter Jordan