Chapter 1 Introduction

Today, the picture of the workplace has changed dramatically with corporate downsizing and computer technology development. According to the Steelcase (1995) "Workplace Performance Overview", people are working in new ways that includes some of the following features:

- The flow of information and the speed of every task has been increased by the application of computers and technology.
- More and more individual work is being replaced by group or team activity, and people work in cross-functional areas where interaction and integration flourish.
- The traditional connections between work and the location of the work have blurred. People shift from their desks to team spaces, to resource centers, to media posts, to conference rooms, and even to their individual homes.

These trends have implications for new workplace requirements. The rapid growth of group work or team activity is a major challenge for interior designers. On average, the ratio of individual work to collaborative work is about 65% to 35% today, and some believe it may soon be equal. However, office space design has not adapted to the trend, with 85% of office spaces designated as personal work spaces and leaving only 15% as conferencing or team work spaces (Barnes, Nicholson & Simko, 1996). The main reason for the low ratio of team work space is that in the traditional office space planning, space is often allocated and equipped based on status. In spite of the new workplace requirements, square footages are assigned for the private and solitary efforts in large quantities with only a small amount left for conferencing. Thus, the consideration of the increased demand for group work without looking at the personal workspace in a new way will inevitably result in the increase of overall space needs which indicates more cost (Barnes, Nicholson & Simko, 1996).

Furthermore, the new work patterns are not only reflected in the replacement of individual work by group work, but also reflected in the change of the concept of conferencing. Traditionally, conferences are almost exclusively reserved for holding formal

meetings, imparting information, planning schedules, assigning tasks or presenting results (Barnes, Nicholson & Simko, 1996). As such, these tasks are usually held in conference rooms. These conference rooms are mostly static spaces with a large conference table in the middle and chairs around the table. However, things are different today. According to Diane Barnes (1996), President of Wilkhahn Inc., a conference "can take place anywhere, at any time, with any number of people, who may be in physical proximity, connected electronically, or both at once" (p. 222). The aim of conferencing is to gather to consult together, to work together, to discuss (as opposed to merely impart) information, and to collaborate on an effort. People can be assembled or rearranged by drawing together individuals from different departments, disciplines, and levels of the corporate hierarchy (as opposed to the old hierarchy nature of conferencing). Thus, conference spaces designed for the traditional approach of conferencing also need to be reconsidered with the new work patterns and workplace interactions in mind.

In brief, the present workplace space design can not be achieved by just adding some group work spaces to the conventional space planning layout. Rather, this new issue needs a new way of thinking about workplace space design.

In responding to the new work patterns and workplace interactions, some interior designers are beginning to look for new design concepts. One workplace space design concept that has emerged is derived from the city planning theory, called "workplace neighborhood", and has recently been practiced by several designers. The first interior design projects utilizing the "workplace neighborhood" were industrial makeovers which had to deal with transforming large volume industrial spaces that were uniform and dull into office environments (Shirley & Brunner, 1996). Other early applications of this concept were corporations who wanted to reflect their corporate culture through the image of their office environment (Anaya, 1996). According to Becker and Steele (1995), a workplace neighborhood will not only "foster informal communication across disciplines, but also create working relationship through increased trust and greater tolerance for

diversity in work styles and personal styles" (p.75). Thus, the potential for the application of workplace neighborhood concept is worthy of further exploration.

The Advanced Communication and Information Technology Center (ACITC) at Virgnia Tech will provide facilities including high-tech classrooms, information technology research labs, student study areas, and offices for Educational Technology staff. These Educational Technology employees are presently located in the Old Security Building on campus. They conduct the faculty development workshops and help faculty develop courses and use multimedia facilities. During their work process, they engage in many group activities and make extensive use of new computer technology. Thus, the ACITC Educational Technology office area possesses the features representing the general workplace tendency today.

The purpose of this project was to design a workplace neighborhood space prototype for the ACITC Educational Technology office area. The space prototype would not only meet the work requirements of the present Educational Technology employees, but also meet the Educational Technology employees' future needs. It would be a work environment conducive to team efforts and encourage different levels of informal interactions among the workers. Also, it could be a workplace neighborhood space model for future reference.