

Productive “I-I (Izakaya Bar and the Internet) Work Style”

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0. Abstract

Izakaya, the traditional Japanese-style bar, is popular among all generations for its inexpensive prices and friendly atmosphere. Japanese businesspeople take their colleagues and younger staff there after work to drink sake and talk about business much more intimately than they do in the office. In a sense, they are working, even in the bar. This notorious way of socialization called *nomunication*, which means “drinking communication” in Japanese, is disappearing because today’s younger businesspeople tend to regard it as out of date.

For the last sixteen months, we, the members of the Universal Design Research Committee of the Japan Facility Management Promotion Association (JFMA), have experienced a new style of work. Because we work late every night in the office, it is almost impossible for us to have regular meetings. Consequently, we began working through the Internet, which enables us to work whenever and wherever we have access to it. Using of the Internet can be helpful for this purpose, but it is not necessarily satisfactory overall. We are convinced that intimate face-to-face communication is needed to generate new ideas. We had meetings with alcohol at *izakaya* bars twice a month, which turned out to be a very effective way to brainstorm.

When we completed some projects in this manner with offsite meetings at *izakaya* bars, we realized that this work style was far more productive than working at the central office all the time. Old-fashioned *nomunication* has proven to be useful in the Internet age again. Particularly in knowledge work, these two extremely different kinds of workspaces, virtual spaces on the Internet to produce substantial outputs and physical spaces at *izakaya* bars to generate creative ideas, can be combined to take the place of the central office.

In this presentation, we will show the efficiency of the “I-I (*izakaya* bar and the Internet) work style” with a case study and discuss the possibility of this alternative work style.

1. What is the “I-I (*izakaya* bar and the Internet) work style”?

1-1. Creativity at the bar

Imagine that you hang around with your colleagues at a bar after work. What would you talk about? You may complain about your boss or company, but you may also recall having had exciting discussions about your business. For example, have you ever experienced a situation like below?

You are at a bar with your congenial co-workers, talking about a project you are currently working on. As you and your companions drink, the discussion becomes more lively and a

stream of new ideas flows forth. The discussion is heating up; there is no subject that is taboo. The bar's casual atmosphere combined with the alcohol makes your tongue smoother than when you are at a brainstorming session in a formal meeting room. You are very excited about having had this creative discussion on the way back to home. However, the next morning, you are brought back to the real world, and the ideas you came up the previous night are dismissed from your mind. You remember how exciting the discussion was, but you forget what its details were...

In fact, many novel ideas are generated at bars. For years, each of us has been involved in various projects outside of companies and experienced how effectively the combined use of the bar and the Internet works for creative work beyond organizations. In particular, as we have worked together at the JFMA Universal Design Research Committee, we have noticed that our work process in the committee can be introduced broadly as the "I-I work style" to those who seek an example of an innovative work style to meet the needs of the knowledge age. We will explain in more detail below.

1-2. Discovery of the I-I work style

The JFMA Universal Design Research Committee was established in February 2002 to conduct research that explores potentialities to apply universal design in the workplace. It consists of twelve voluntary members, aged from thirties to fifties, with various expertise in the wide range of fields, such as architecture, facility management, real estate, occupational health and safety, graphic design, publication, and comics. The members are very busy at work in their own organizations; in addition, one of them is participating from the United States. Therefore, the use of the Internet has been essential for us to develop our projects efficiently. As you may experience, the Internet enables a work group of diverse members to organize a project while communicating with each other regardless of the place and the time.

At first, we expected that face-to-face meetings would be the main means of our communication, which would be supplemented by the Internet. However, as we encountered difficulty in scheduling meetings that we could all attend, the main means of our communication gradually shifted online. We have observed that dozens of messages are e-mailed among us everyday as if we were "chatting" online. However, in spite of such close communication, we were concerned that having no face-to-face meetings for a while would lessen motivation and also make it difficult to ascertain what the other members were really thinking. Because our "knowledge" work strongly requires each of us to be creative, it is necessary to have places where we can develop ideas while confirming we are all thinking along the same line.

Meanwhile, it was customary for us to have socials at *izakaya* bars after meetings in conventional meeting rooms. Seeing that we were exchanging fertile ideas at the socials, we noticed that we could define the bar as our meeting place, rather than bothering ourselves to make reservations for conference rooms. We did not have a spare minute to care about the formality of a meeting; our priority was to do the best job within a designated period of time. In addition, it was fortunate that we were allowed to freely choose the most effective work style for ourselves because we did not have any restrictions placed on our project from organizations we officially worked for.

The work style most suitable entailed a combination of the Internet used as the most efficient way to facilitate substantial work and the *izakaya* bar as a meeting place to bring creativity into full play in a comfortable manner. The use of the Internet allows us to work at home in a relaxed atmosphere: working on electronic documents while lying on the bed, listening to music, drinking beer, or sometime falling asleep, etc. Such a casual work style increases productivity, specifically when we are tackling planning and/or design work. Having *izakaya* meetings with a little alcohol makes thinking out of the box a bit

easier. We often see chain reactions of creativity; when a member brings up an idea, another member develops it, which is then further expanded by others.

It is important to jot down even the keywords of a discussion during an *izakaya* meeting so that you can recall the conversation. The next morning, based on notes, we e-mail a summary of the discussion to the members via a mailing list. The idea in your mind is logically organized when you can visualize it in sentences. Based on the e-mail communication, we develop the idea born at the bar and put it into practices. The Internet and the *izakaya* bar effectively complement each other – we named this pairing “the I-I work style.”

The I-I work style does not require conventional offices. Your workplace is the virtual space on the Internet and the bar. You do not need to pay for facility costs required to maintain conventional central offices other than the computer and the Internet access. Instead, you may expect some costs for beer and food at the bar.

1-3. Re-appreciation of Japanese traditional “*nomunication*”

The I-I work style is similar to *nomunication*, which was popular in Japan from the high-growth period of the 1960s to the 1980s. Then typical Japanese businesspeople, called *salarymen*, used to take their subordinates or co-workers to the *izakaya* bar and try to fill in hidden communication gaps with them by using the tongue-loosening power of alcohol. This convention contributed to facilitating smooth communication and strengthening relationships among Japanese *salaryman* communities across generations. While *nomunication* justified the Japanese tradition of the organizational order, it was a place where senior *salarymen* mentored younger co-workers by divulging some of tacit knowledge, including how they could dedicate themselves to a company. This kind of informal communication was important for the younger *salarymen* to be able to move up through the company.

Nomunication became an obsolete word in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Influenced by individualism, younger workers wanted to clearly separate work from private time. Meanwhile, the once-soaring Japanese economy began to stagnate, which meant that traditional business practices were no longer effective. In addition, while the younger generation was quickly adapting to new Internet technology, many members of the older generation lost their confidence in management because it was difficult for them to follow the rapid changes of technology. The traditional framework whereby tacit knowledge was passed down from the older to the younger collapsed; *nomunication* was even ridiculed by the younger generation.

However, today we have gained new appreciation for the role of *nomunication*. Its essence is still useful to complement formal meetings and facilitate shared knowledge through informal communication, especially in the knowledge age. Moreover, communication with a drink is not unique to Japan. In Western countries, it is also integrated into business scenes, such as the “power” lunch with a cocktail or glass of wine.

2. The I-I work style as an ultimate alternative workplace

2-1. Complementary relationship between the Internet and the *izakaya* workplace

Recently, creativity and knowledge management are regarded as important factors in determining corporate value. To increase creativity, it is not sufficient to concentrate on a job solely during office hours.

The evolution of the Internet has accelerated “anytime-anywhere” work styles. For management, the first concern is how employees can maximize their creativity and productivity, and the formality of a place or time to work is secondary. Employees who care only about the formality of work become less useful to organizations.

The workplace exists as means to create knowledge and increase business accomplishments. Interestingly, the initial ideas of most successful business projects often come from casual conversations in a train, during a walk, or at a restaurant. Many companies strive to intentionally create a space where the quality of such initial ideas can be improved for business success. However, unless the work style and process are reorganized, a mere physical change of workspaces does not successfully result in high-quality creative work. It is important to consider the work style and process first; what kind of workspaces can best accommodate the work style that maximizes our productivity? As a result, you may not need any special physical workspace.



Figure 1: The izakaya workplace and the Internet

In the case of our committee, the I-I work style works as follows:

- (1) The *izakaya* workplace (physical space) = The most effective work environment to produce the high-quality initial ideas at the planning stages of projects.
- (2) The Internet (virtual space) = The most efficient work environment to manage the bulk of the work at the implementation stages.

These two approaches require different competences. At planning stages, it is important to fully stimulate the brain and have conversations with others to flesh out ideas, regardless of how long you spend to come up with the ideas. On the other hand, implementation stages require data analysis and reorganization of the ideas with patience. We take these two approaches alternately.

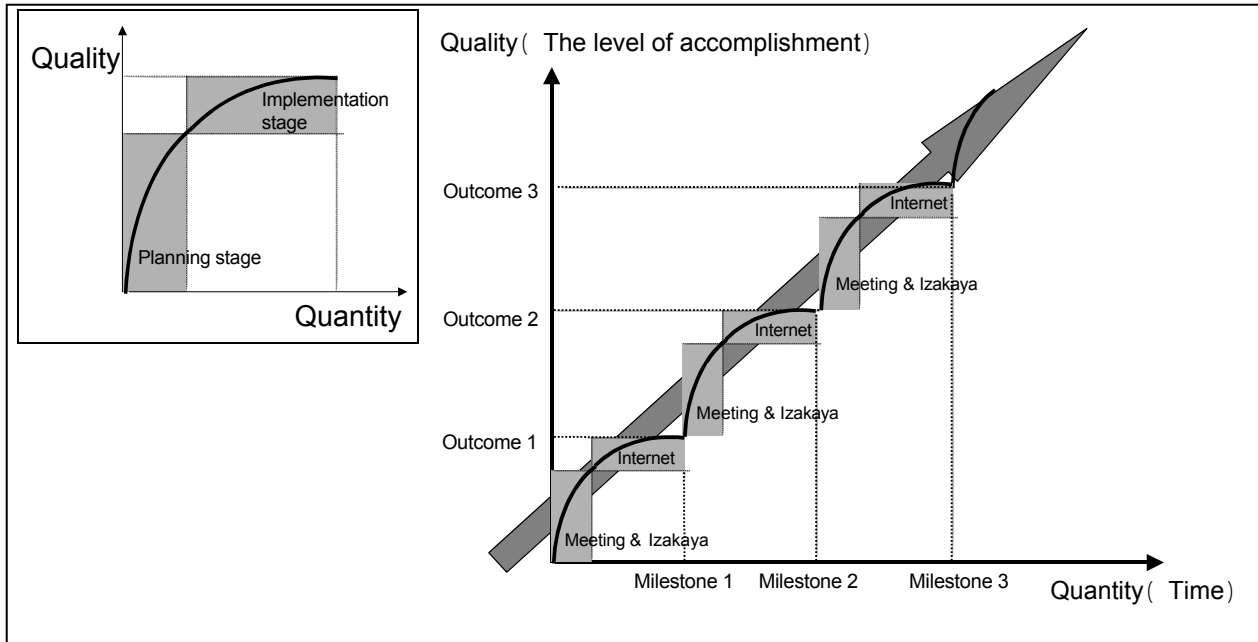


Figure 2: Alternate approaches to improve the quality and the quantity of work

2-2. Strengths and weaknesses of the *izakaya* workplace

The I-I work style is most effective for those with a high morale and self-motivation. Meanwhile, from the perspective of physiology, working at the bar affects humans by means of (1) environmental changes, (2) the influence of alcohol, and (3) low pressure of time management. In the *izakaya* workplace, functions of the left brain hemisphere, such as analyzing, abstracting, and organizing logic, are suppressed and those of the right hemisphere, such as synthesizing, comprehending, and intuiting, are activated. The following are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the *izakaya* workplace:

<Strengths>

- The change of environment refreshes your thoughts and makes it easier to come up with a new idea.
- The relaxed atmosphere of the bar facilitates flatter relationships, which allows you to have freer brainstorming without the hierarchies of position or age.
- Alcohol releases you from inhibition, which allows you to have free and relaxed thoughts.
- Alcohol also facilitates smooth communication with a new person and helps to avoid adverse conflicts with others.

<Weaknesses>

- Some people do not like the atmosphere of the bar or cannot drink.
- Uncontrollable or undesired situations may occur because of the influence of alcohol.
- There may be a risk of alcohol abuse or health problem if excessive drinking is continued.
- It is likely that you will be engaged in longer discussions because alcohol causes a diminished awareness of time.
- It is likely that you will maintain an illusion that you reach an agreement with others even though you do not discuss important things.
- It is easier to forget the content of discussions.

As shown in Figure 3, it is a very short period of time that our creativity and smooth communication are maximized (stimulated period). It is necessary to control the type and the amount of alcohol to lengthen the stimulated period and avoid the intoxicated period.

2-3. Comparison between the I-I work style and other workplaces

Figure 4 plots typical workplaces on a matrix. The horizontal axis shows the degree of physical interaction with others (from physically isolated to physically interactive) and the vertical axis indicates the formality of a work style (from formal to informal). As mentioned previously, at planning stages, creative ideas are often generated through interactive communication with others, so the work styles located in the area of “physically interactive” and “informal” will be most suitable for creative work. Many recent arguments have introduced workplaces like the Internet café, public spaces where you can work on the computer while drinking, as part of a new work style. However, we argue that a workplace should be optimized according to the nature of work. The I-I work style utilizes two workplaces differently: the *izakaya* workplace for creation of ideas and the Internet for realization of ideas.

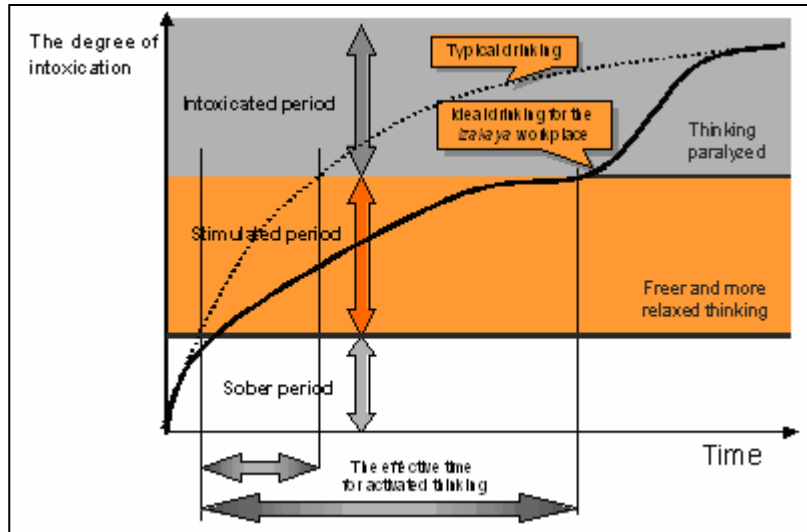


Figure 3: Influence of alcohol on thoughts

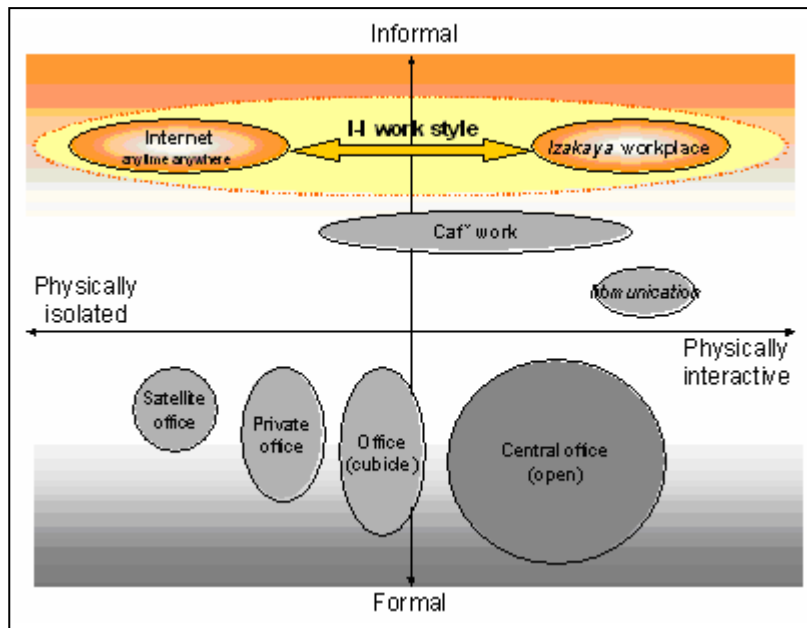


Figure 4: Comparison of workplaces

Many existing offices often have surplus spaces because they provide office area that can accommodate the maximum number of employees at a peak hour. John Worthington (2003, May 15), a co-founder of DEGW, suggested that the most cost-efficient way to manage office spaces is according to the following three categories: (1) core space, which is always needed, (2) flexible space, which can be adapted to fluctuations in space demands, and (3) on-demand space, which is provided as needed. The I-I work style requires only the on-demand space, so it costs virtually nothing; no facility cost is necessary, and only the anticipated budget is for beer and access to the Internet. (See Figure 5 and Table 1.)

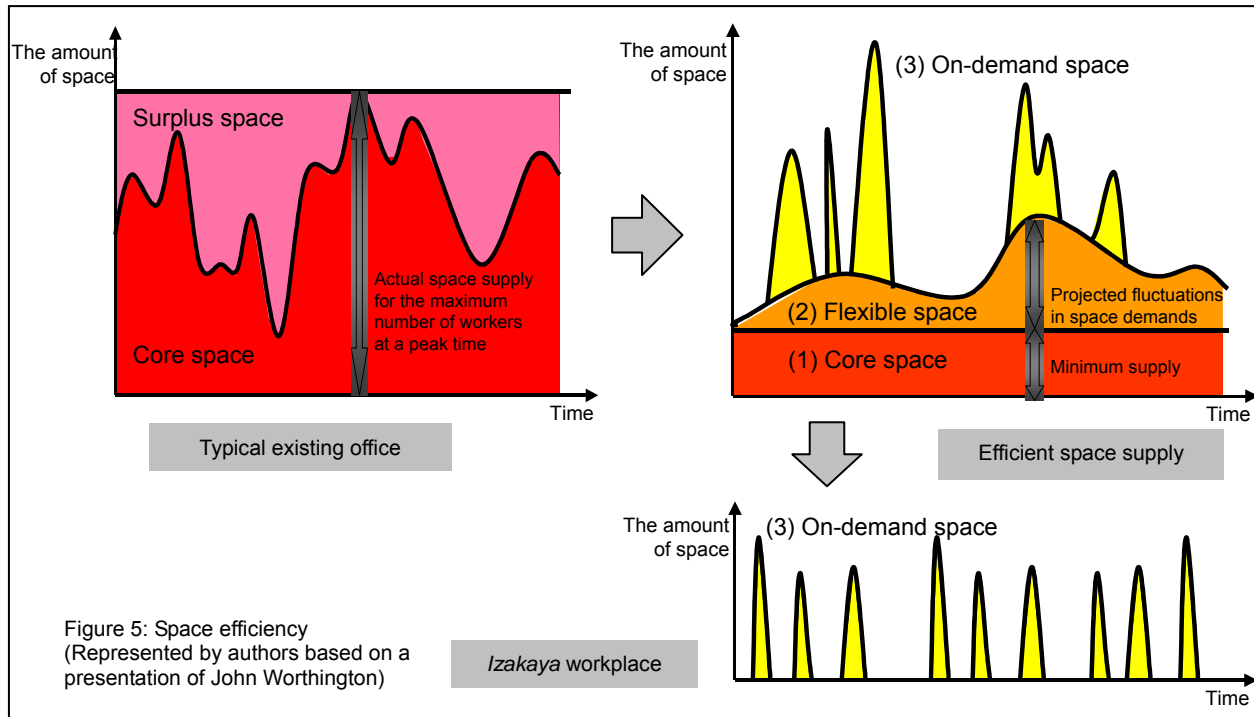


Table 1: Comparison of workplaces regarding creativity and costs

Workplace	Productivity (Creative work)	Productivity (Routine)	Occupancy costs on company	Worker's quality of work life
Central office	Δ	Δ	Δ	Δ
Satellite office	Δ	Suitable	Cost-efficient	Possible
Virtual workplace (w/ Internet)	Δ	Suitable	Most cost-efficient	Most possible
Internet + office	Δ	Suitable	Cost-efficient	Possible
Internet	Δ	Best suitable	Most cost-efficient	Most possible
Reduced office	Δ	Δ	Cost-efficient	Δ
Internet + <i>izakaya</i> workplace	Best suitable	Best suitable	Most cost-efficient	Most possible
Internet	Δ	Best suitable	Most cost-efficient	Most possible
<i>Izakaya</i> workplace	Best suitable	X	Most cost-efficient	Most possible

3. Analysis of our activities

For the last sixteen months, we have done presentations at three conferences, one paper for proceedings, several articles for journals, a couple of surveys and interviews, and seminars, and are working on a research report and guidelines. To accomplish these outcomes, we held eighteen meetings (mainly the combination of a two-hour meeting in a conference room with a two-hour *izakaya* session); two of them were overnight lodging with an eight-hour meeting and a three-hour *izakaya* workplace. We have also exchanged approximately 1,650 e-mail messages – about 100 e-mail messages a month – to develop our projects as a team.

Table 2: The activity logs of the JFMA Universal Design Research Committee

Period			Meeting @ Izakaya	Meeting @ workplace	E-mail communication	Outcomes	
Year	Month	Day	Meeting	Izakaya	# of e-mail messages	Presentations	Papers etc.
2002	Jan	20-26	29mt#0		0		
		27-2			9		2 Purpose of JFMA-UC
	Feb	3-9	7mt#1		1		
		10-16			7		
		17-23	18mt#2		16		
	Mar	24-2			17		
		3-9	4mt#3		16		
		10-16			42		
	Apr	17-23			16		
		24-30			24		
		31-3	1mt#4		19		
	May	7-13			23		
		14-20			18		
		21-27	22mt#5		32		
		28-4			6		
		5-11			26		
	Jun	12-18			17		
		19-25			12		
		26-1			14		
		2-8	8-9 lodge		57		
		9-15			66		
	Jul	16-22	20mt#6		35		
		23-29			21		
		30-5	4 tour		30		
	Aug	7-13			52		
		14-20	19mt#7		43		
		21-27			46		
		28-3			40		1 summary for LB-Int'l Conf.
	Sep	4-10	5 summer party		16		
		11-17			21		
		18-24			17		
25-31		31mt#8		23			
Oct	1-7			29			
	8-14			5			
	15-21			23			
	22-28			3			
Nov	29-5			21		3 paper for UD Int'l Conf.	
	6-12			12			
	13-19			11			
	20-26	27-28 lodge		16			
Dec	17-2			34			
	3-9			30			
	10-16			43		15 paper for WWW/J2003	
	17-23			22		Interview (IBM) Interview (NTT)	
2003	24-30	1mt#9		22		1-UD Int'l Conf.	
	1-7			23			
	8-14			6			
	15-21			26			
Jan	22-28			43			
	29-4			2			
	5-11			46			
	12-18	16 party, 18mt-#10		13			
Feb	19-25			43		Questionnaire survey	
	26-1			3			
	2-8	8mt-L#11		22			
	9-15			46			
Mar	16-22	22mt-L#12		46			
	23-1			53		24 Nikkei UD, 23 WFM	
	2-8			33		1 paper for WWW2003	
	9-15			18			
Apr	16-22	20mt#13		13		20 WWW/J2003	
	23-29			36			
	30-5			27			
	6-12			20			
	13-19			57		19 paper for AU2003	
	20-26	26mt-L#14		37			

Table 2 is an analysis of our activities for fourteen months from February 2002 to April 2003. It clearly shows the pattern of our work style; you can see: (1) *izakaya* workplaces and meetings enhanced e-mail communication and (2) outcomes then followed the peaks of e-mail communication. In addition to the combined use of the Internet and the *izakaya* workplace, it was an effective way for us to set clear goals to produce visible outcomes, such as presentations at conferences, to keep us productive.



<August 2002 *Izakaya* workplace at Kanda Mimasuya>



<April 2003 *Izakaya* workplace at Hacchobori Utsukubo>

Figure 6: The photographs of our *izakaya* workplace

4. A survey regarding workers' perception of the I-I work style

In May 2003, to explore the potential of the I-I work style, we conducted a questionnaire survey regarding perception of Japanese knowledge workers about the I-I work style, as well as e-mail interviews with workers who were in charge of business planning. We received 121 responses to the questionnaire, as well as 33 responses to the e-mail interviews. Following is a brief analysis of the survey. (See Appendix A for more details.)

A. Regarding the *izakaya* workplace

- Interestingly, a very small number of the respondents (15 out of 121) did not prefer to talk about business at the bar.
- 94 respondents answered they had come up with a business idea while drinking at a bar. 76 respondents experienced the idea had resulted in actual business.
- More than half of the respondents (70) cited that they had happen to forget an idea which had come up at a bar.
- About one half of the respondents (52) experienced failing to bring up a new idea at a bar.
- The most cited number of meeting attendees most likely to produce an idea was "three to five people."
- The respondents were likely to perceive that the proportion of men to women among a party would not affect the ease of creativity at the bar but it would be preferable to have members of a variety of generations, positions, and business backgrounds.
- The respondents were also likely to perceive that the appropriate level of noise and lighting should be maintained to facilitate discussion of a business idea.

B. Regarding work styles

- About half of the respondents (59) answered that more than 50% of their jobs could be done outside of offices using only the Internet.

- The respondents were most concerned about the issue of personal communication if they worked outside of offices.
- About half of the respondents (59) thought that remote work using the Internet could be complemented with communication at a bar.
- 52 respondents expressed their interest in trying the I-I work style. 30 respondents said they did not want to.
- The top three occupations the respondents frequently cited the I-I work style would work for were: planning, design, and research and development.

From this survey, we found out that more workers than we had expected had experienced coming up with a business idea at the bar and bring it to fruition. Although some of the respondents showed their concern about business morals, many of them indicated they were interested in trying the I-I work style if it could be applied to their work to improve their creativity and productivity. Meanwhile, we should understand that some people preferred to keep work separate from enjoyable time at the bar, and some people do not like to drink (or cannot). It is necessary to arrange the way of the I-I work style appropriate for each situation.

5. Conclusion

The I-I work style is not a very new idea. We have drunk with co-workers or friends many times, talked a lot about our interests ranging from private to business, and sometimes come up with excellent ideas. Some of the ideas have resulted in real projects. In particular, when we work on projects with colleagues outside of a company, having a business talk at a bar seems very efficient and effective. Many of you must also have the similar experience. As we realized the *izakaya* workplace could complement the weaknesses of non-office work with the Internet, we came to believe that we could separately manage two different functions that the typical central office has – the one for efficient work and the other for creative work – in different ways. However, we should note that we have presented the *izakaya* workplace as an example that has worked best for us. You may want to look for your own workplace that maximizes your creativity.

The existence of the traditional central office has been changing dramatically; non-territorial office, small office and home office (SOHO), tele-commuting, tele-work center, and virtual office are all increasing. However, We doubt that these new workplaces are completely free from the traditional notion of the office. We are still likely to consider a physical space first and then ask employees to adapt themselves to the physical space. We have to rethink the meaning of our workplace from the perspective of the work itself to find a new work style most suitable for each of us. The scope of facility management has expanded from facilities to business infrastructure. The existing new work styles, including the I-I work style, have reflected this change and will continue to evolve. The workplace of the future will be defined by the nature of work and work styles to enhance productivity and creativity. We hope this paper will give you an idea about how to reorganize your work style to improve the quality of your work life.

Reference:

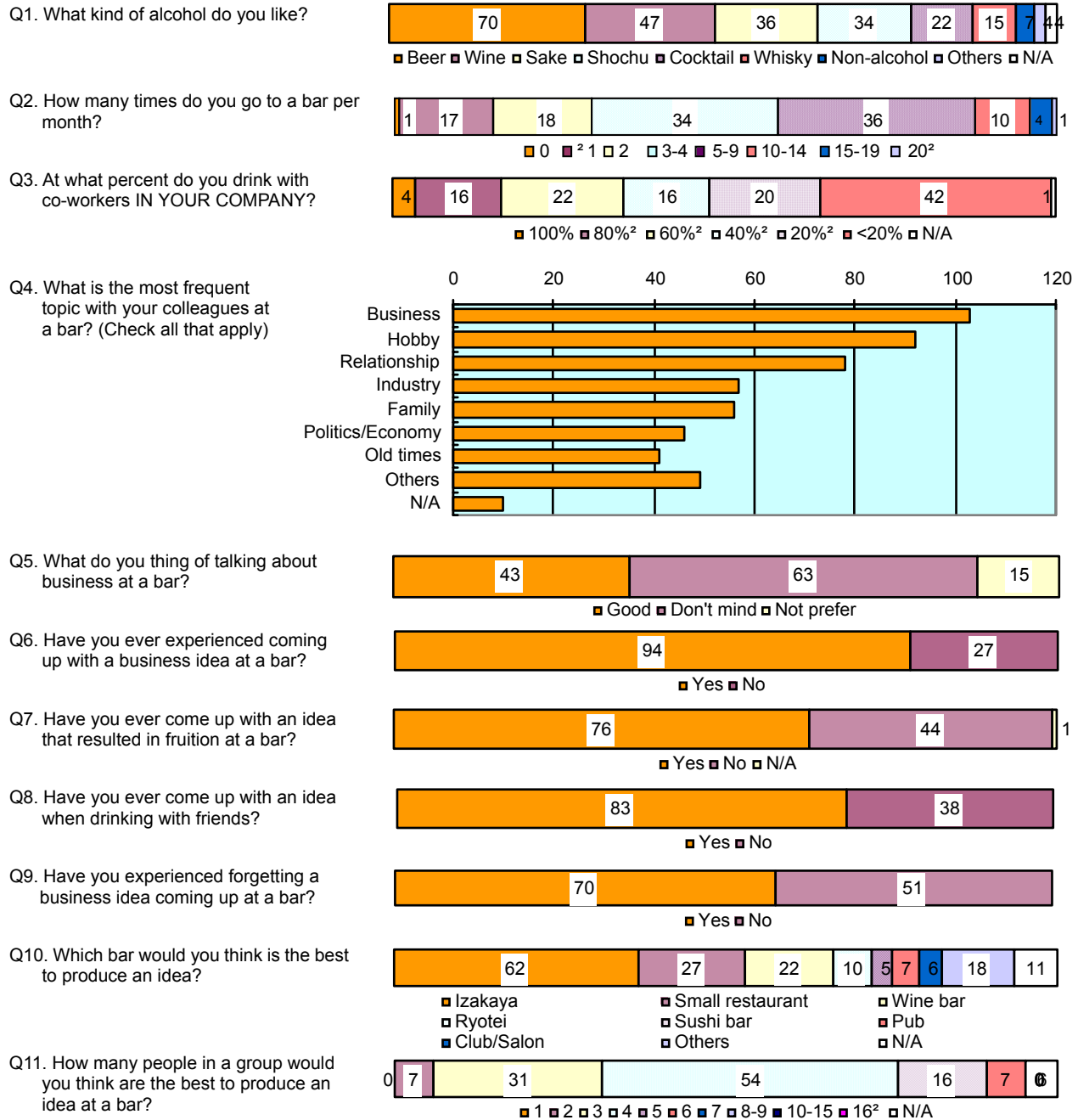
Worthington, J. (2003, May 15). *Quality and procurement in a changing world of work*. Presentation at TWN2003, Netherlands.

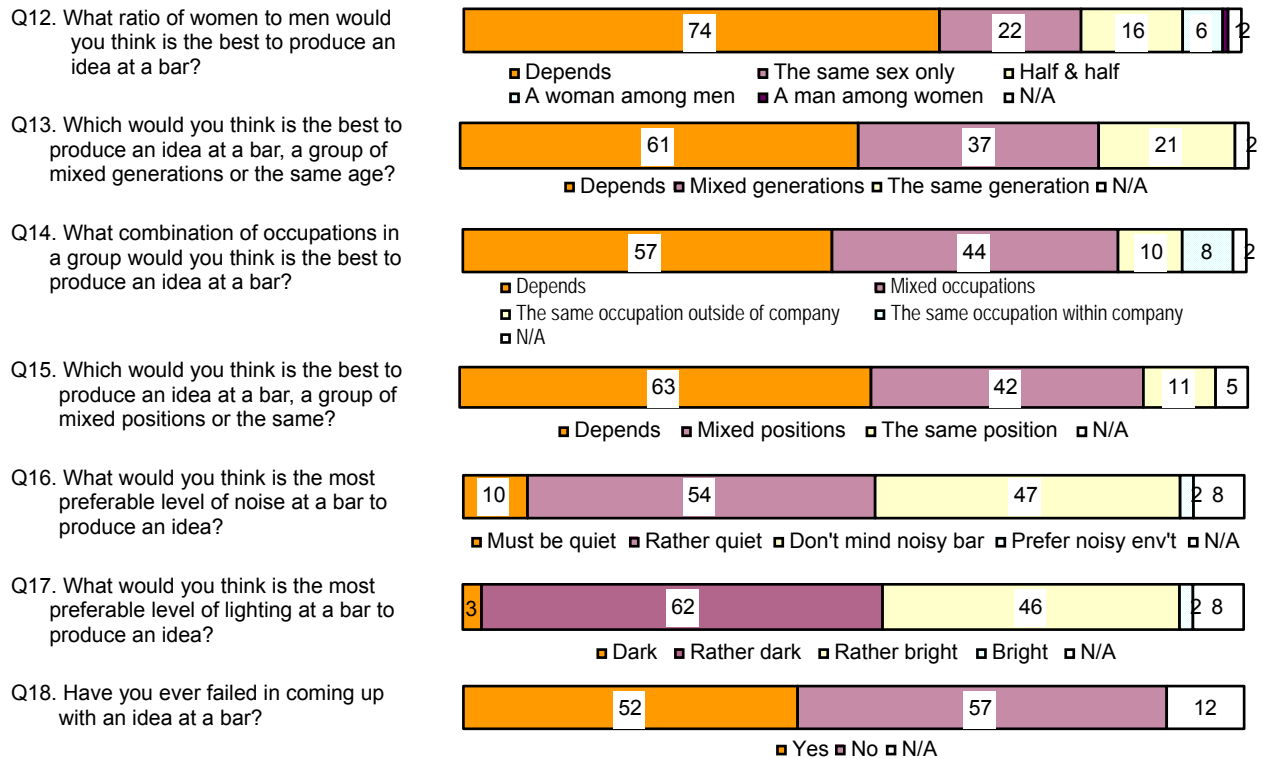
<Appendix A: Workers' perception of the I-I work style: A survey result>

In the following questions, "bars" include all types of restaurants that offer alcohol, such as izakaya, wine bar, shot bar, sushi bar, pub, small restaurant, Japanese-style "ryotei" restaurant, club, and salon.

- Valid responses: 121
- The proportion of men to women: 7 (men) to 3 (women)
- Age distribution: 20s (8); 30s (53); 40s (34); 50s (19); 60s (6); No answer (1)
- Industry distribution: Services (81); Manufacturing (21); Government, education, institution (17); No answer (2)

A. Regarding bars and the *izakaya* workplace (Unit: number unless noted)





B. Regarding work styles

