Innovation Spaces

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Description

Against the perception of offices as stifling at best and soul-killing at worst, modern companies and firms have sought to reinvent the place of work. Factors such as an “innovate or die” economy, purpose- or mission-driven cultures, dissolving work-life boundaries, and the intense competition for talent have raised the stakes. The workplace is no longer the place you go to do work. It’s the place you go to change the world. Workplaces are now expected to be the crucibles of innovation and market advantage, not just in elite skunkworks and research labs, but everywhere, all of the time.

The design of workplaces has become less about efficiency and productivity in the Taylorist sense and more about fostering the ineffable characteristics of market revolutionaries and “disruptors.” The tech sector has become emblematic of the new workplace, but increasingly, this thinking transcends market sectors, as companies fight to attract and retain the best talent. Meanwhile, the best talent searches continually for their next gig and their criteria transcends pay, benefits, and experience to include autonomy, purpose, and clear alignment of lifestyle and personal values.

New rules have evolved for these spaces. Our goal in this project and in this course is to interrogate and elucidate these rules -- to prove or disprove them based on evidence and observation. We will continually question assumptions about the role of physical space, seeking to describe, understand, and prove the role physical space plays in the behaviors of people engaged in their work.

Architects and planners have traditionally relied on experience, intuition, creativity, and accepted conventions in the planning and design of spaces. Research, however, provides the tools to drive design choices with evidence weighed against measurable and observable outcomes.

Additionally, the tools to gather and analyze data have been democratized. Open source software and computational tools, open-data initiatives, rapidly deployable and ubiquitous sensor networks have made truly data-driven, research-driven approach to the design of physical space more accessible now than ever.

This studio will adopt such an approach to the design of an "Innovation Hub,” a public or quasi-public space designed to facilitate interaction, collaboration, and the free exchange of ideas among its users.

We will begin by asking some broad questions about how people collaborate, how they interact in space, and what kind of spaces facilitate this interaction. We will form a set of hypotheses that articulate key spatial factors and their impact on behavior. We will then validate these hypotheses using data. The final synthesis of this data and information will be a set of guidelines and prototypical designs based upon the validation of our hypotheses about people, knowledge exchange, and space.