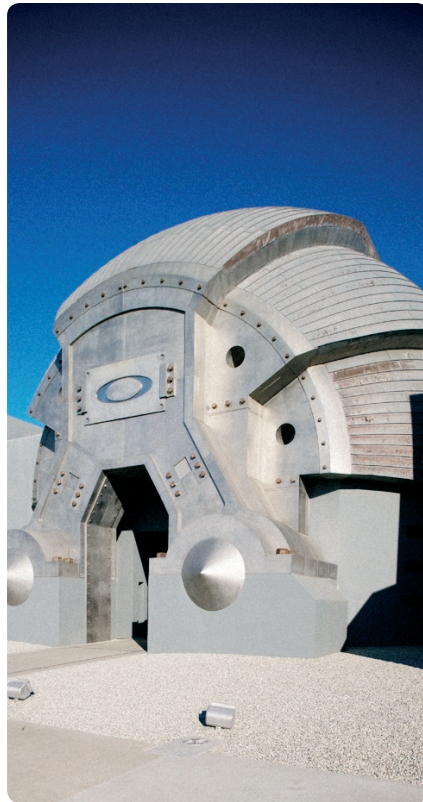


Quantify: Innovation

.....
*People received about
110 messages a day
during work last year.¹⁰*
.....



Room to Think

Innovation consultant
Kursty Groves offers
a practical guide to
transforming your office
space into a place that
wears its heart on the wall.

.....
WORDS BY *Kursty Groves*
PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Edward Denison*

“We shape our buildings; thereafter
they shape us.” WINSTON CHURCHILL

In an increasingly virtual
world, does the office space still have a
role to play in spurring innovation? Or
are lavish lobbies and designer desks
just distractions from real work?

It all boils down to what you want to
achieve. Is innovation for your business
about inventing the next big thing? Or
is it about creating a climate in which
people feel compelled to work together
to do their best every day? The bottom
line is this: intention leads; interior
design follows.

Take Procter & Gamble’s Clay
Street Project – a renovated brewery
in a rundown part of Cincinnati where

small groups spend 12 weeks focusing
on challenges in an environment that
encourages risk-taking and creative
thinking. The open ‘session spaces’ are
initially quite bare, allowing them to
grow and change with the project and
people. You won’t find any off-the-shelf
furniture here because there’s no room
for off-the-shelf thinking. Instead, there
are workstations made from recycled
sunflower seed husks, curtained-off
flexible meeting areas and ‘nap pod’
stations.

Don’t be fooled, though: P&G hasn’t
gone hippie. It maintains its more
staid headquarters just a few miles
away in downtown Cincinnati. These
different working environments set
different innovation agendas (radical ➡

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Oakley's California HQ;
Procter & Gamble's Clay
Street Project;

this page

Project; playful spaces at
LEGO HQ, Denmark.



breakthrough versus day-to-day collaboration), and are accompanied by different codes of conduct in order to make them work. Context is crucial: lava lamps and beanbags may work in one environment, but not in another.

Consider that environment

a conversation starter that develops a dialogue between a company and its employees. Oakley Inc., the sports performance eyewear manufacturer, provokes a bold conversation with its post-apocalyptic 'design bunker' HQ.

Dare to enter the cavernous lobby and you are confronted by B-52 ejector seats, bombproof lighting and fixing-bolts the size of your head. This conversation tells us that Oakley is a place for tough people who push the limits. It echoes the design ethos of the brand, speaking 'to the front row... because the people at the back won't get it anyway'.

When it comes to the conversation you start with your employees, remember to leave space for them to respond. Give them the opportunity to contribute to the growing dialogue around how the environment should look and provide

opportunities for them to change the space to suit their needs.

The innovation process itself requires many different modes of thinking. These thinking modes – stimulation, where the mind is inspired or a thought process is triggered; reflection, a period of uninterrupted focus; collaboration, where ideas are shared and built; and play, where experimentation occurs – reveal themselves in different types of work. The physical environment should support them all.

Beware blanket standardization; it can create a multitude of performance and engagement issues. A lack of privacy, no space to think and nowhere to call home are just a few of the common complaints. Decipher the appropriate profile of working activities that your people need to undertake to do their jobs well and you'll find that the spaces come alive with inspired – and productive – people.

What about the future of

investing in bricks and mortar? Many businesses are re-assessing their corporate property portfolio given changing workforce needs, but we'll still

be seeing the head office for some time yet – even if its role changes.

It's likely to morph from an institutional monolith, where a static workforce clocks in nine-to-five, to a learning and creation hub where a dynamic stream of people connect to the business, and each other, as the Na'vi connect to the Tree of Souls in James Cameron's *Avatar*. It will become a place where they can refuel with the spirit of the company.

Get that spirit right and you can create a place that resonates with the sound of people enjoying the work they do. LEGO's fun, playful spaces with larger-than-life play bricks and oversized chairs make you feel as if you're six again. T-Mobile's Creation Center in Seattle features a floor-to-ceiling display of spoof magazine covers showing colleagues' hobbies – it's both space divider and 'who's who' map.

What works for one company won't work for all. Take time to understand the essence of your culture and use it as inspiration to wear your heart on the walls. Whatever you do; do something, do it yourself, and involve your people in the process ☺