IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE
OF LARGE-SCALE
INSTITUTIONS THROUGH
**WORKPLACE
DESIGN**

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Merritt Bucholz leads research and development in design methodology, building technology, and energy systems at Bucholz McEvoy Architects, which holds offices in Dublin and Berlin. Merritt has been a visiting professor at Harvard University, and has lectured at Princeton University, Cornell University, the School of Architecture at University College Dublin and Dublin Institute of Technology.He is currently the Professor of Architecture founding the new School of Architecture at the University of Limerick.

OVERVIEW

LARGE-SCALE ORGANISATIONS TYPICALLY CREATE WORKPLACES THAT STIFLE INNOVATION; DESIGN THINKING OFFERS A SOLUTION. MERRITT BUCHOLZ EXAMINES HOW HE AND HIS TEAM, IN DEVELOPING THE SAP APPHAUS, APPLIED DESIGN THINKING TO CREATE A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT THAT STIMULATES COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY.

"Design Thinking" is much discussed these days in connection with 'innovation' and 'enterprise'. It's about increasing collaboration, improving time-to-market in developing new products and technologies, amping up the pace of turning ideas into applications, and increasing the levels of innovation in problem-solving. One of the important areas where Design Thinking is starting to be applied more effectively is in helping large-scale institutions to innovate. Design Thinking contributes to increased flexibility in thought processes, better quality collaboration and improved interdisciplinary working on project-based workflows. As state institutions and major corporations look to Design Thinking as a means to create positive change the question is how they can leverage the configuration of their physical workplaces to support its implementation across the length and breadth of their organisations.

Large-scale organisations often house their employees in workplaces that are extraordinarily uninspiring, hemmed in by thinking that allows past experience and constraints to drive the future. Workplaces and workplace design represents a large investment for any company, therefore the configuration of the workplace and its performance as an enabler of flexibility, innovation, synergistic work practices, dynamic teamwork, and problem solving must be seen as a key issue. Rather than thinking of the workplace as simply the place where work happens, we believe that the workplace and its design can be thought of an instrument of innovation. Leadership teams periodically restructure their workplaces to *align* with changes that they have made within their organisations, but we think it is also possible to turn this idea on its head and change the workplace to *facilitate* changes that they want to make within their organisations.

WORKSPACE ENABLING CREATIVITY – THE APPHAUS AT SAP

In 2012 we designed a completely new type of workplace based on the principles of Design Thinking for SAP. Called "AppHaus" it is located on the SAP campus at Waterside in Dublin's CityWest business park. This is not only the first workplace within SAP driven by Design Thinking, it is also the first example within SAP in which a new type of office space serves as a permanent home for software development.

Working on a presentation at the AppHaus, staff can choose the type of environment they want to work in to support them in the work they are doing.

The AppHaus concept is about establishing a space that is creative all the time, by design. It exists as an alternative to the more typical situation where people have to leave their normal workstations and go to a special place to "be creative" or to innovate. In the AppHaus, innovation and creativity can happen anywhere at any time, and to facilitate this employees and teams, importantly, have the ability to design, shape and change their own spaces, on their own terms, quickly and easily as they deem it necessary.

The AppHaus marks an enormous departure from typical office floor plates which are permanent and laid out based on standardisation and hierarchy. Desks are moveable in the AppHaus, and everybody working there can position his/hers exactly where s/he wants to – if it doesn't line up or fit neatly within a box, even better. AppHaus teams are set up and (frequently) reconfigured to reflect their projects' (changing) natures, objectives, skill sets, and schedules. These teams can, at the drop of a hat, create enclosed, cell-like modules for small-group working or open, expanded spaces for broader group discussions or all-hands presentations.

Team meetings are convened anywhere anytime, getting everybody on the same page is just part of what the AppHaus enables.

Within the AppHaus environment, to enable fast, dynamic communications, people can map, draw, post or project, anywhere, anytime. Ideas and discussions that are drawn/written/ pinned/posted/projected onto the walls are left there for ideas to gestate, to develop and turn over again in people's minds.

ENABLING THE APPHAUS

The AppHaus concept is enabled by a plug-and-play system of network and power connections, by ergonomically designed desks that are comfortable and easily moveable, and by a free and open movement system that has no corridors or walkways. We have also purpose-designed a system of flexible moving panels, including white boards, translucent and solid panels – all with surfaces that can be easily written or projected on. In addition to its moveable infrastructure, the AppHaus also contains small meeting rooms – effectively micro-spaces in various

AppHaus staff can move their desks around, plug and play, without lifting the phone to facilities.

strategic locations where people can go and camp out, have private discussions or scream at each other away from, yet at the same time within the office space. While acoustically separated, these rooms are visually linked by having walls made of glass.

APPHAUS LESSONS LEARNED

The AppHaus experience has confirmed that creativity and innovation are not things that happen while people are sitting at desks, instead it happens when they can standing up to work, when they can move around and be stimulated, or when they can gather in small groups to discuss issues and new solutions. People need interaction to innovate, and to be able to play with the shaping of ideas over time, on walls, written and drawn, with their ideas remaining visible and accessible as triggers for further imagination. Finally it confirms that, rather than space being an enabler of organisational design, space is intrinsic to organisational design.

The response to the AppHaus design of the people working in it has been particularly interesting – they have made a YouTube video, and pushed for the principles and design to become established as a global precedent. Building on the principles established in Dublin, further AppHaus workplaces have now been developed in other SAP locations, including Palo Alto. Dublin innovated first, then Palo Alto followed, on design.

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