

the humorous workplace

The physical work environment full of
energy
or
how to spur collaboration in your offices

HYPE Innovation White Paper
by Jaspar Roos and Tim Woods



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Preface

In the past 12 months, we have been thinking, reflecting and jamming together on how we can enhance the future of innovation. One discovery that really struck us is that, within the innovation management profession, there is actually an absence of innovation in our working environment. So how can you improve that? How can you make your innovation team become more innovative by focusing on the physical environment?

We have been researching this topic over the last couple of years and visited offices all over the world. In addition, we have been talking to experts from relevant fields of expertise, like interior design, perfumery, psychology, facility management, and architecture.

In this special report, Chief Humor Officer and HYPE will explore the different benefits and functions the physical work environment can have and how you can apply this into your organization.

With the kindest regards,

Tim Woods (HYPE Innovation) and Jaspar Roos (Chief Humor Officer)

Introduction

A small imagination exercise

Imagine yourself in a beautiful office space. Yes, this might need some reframing, but nevertheless. Try it. A space you would be proud to show to your friends. The one that engages you, even inspires you to perform your best. If you want to meet up with colleagues, you can use the fun room, for high concentration work you enter a WI-FI free zone, in which you can get your deep thinking ready in the blink of an eye. If you want to tinker, you can write on the walls or just grab some fruits to recharge your batteries. You may think this land of honey and milk is only possible at the tech behemoths of these times, the Facebooks and Googles. Well, we want to challenge you to think differently. With your facility management and leadership team it is possible too and we will show you just how. So close your eyes for 10 seconds and imagine what it would be like...

Reality check!

Okay, wake up!

After opening your eyes again, some of you will realize your work area is somewhat dry, boring or maybe even sterile. Perhaps you don't really feel like jumping out of bed in the morning to go to your not quite so awesome work. Isn't that a pity? Don't we all need some inspiration to feel more

engaged in the work we're doing? 87% of employees worldwide feel disengaged and have a rather negative work experience in general (Gallup 2013). So what can we do to change this?

The key to success

Boosting both creative and focus-intensive performance, encouraging interaction; enhancing productivity; attracting and retaining staff; increasing flexibility; expressing the brand and supporting cultural change. This sounds like a fairytale, but it shouldn't have to be one. According to research the physical environment has a high impact on all of these organizational challenges (Meel et al., 2010). If you want to stimulate innovation and collaboration in the organization, it is important to get all the elements right. Within innovation management, we learn to look at processes, ideation techniques, people, and of course rewards. However, the place where innovation is supposed to take place is often overlooked.

But if not virtual, how can you collaborate and innovate in the best possible way? In nature, a fire is good for old trees to vanish and new life to flourish. Some companies take the same approach, abandoning old methods and jumping on to new trends. Yet, it is important to bear in mind that not everyone operates in the same way, or gets positive energy out of the same tasks. It doesn't really matter if you work in Amsterdam or Zanzibar. And it's okay if you work in an environment where focus is key. Think of contract signing, where you would want to have a clean

desk to complete those tasks. Or that you work in a place with relatively simple chores, like a call center. In those scenarios, creativity boosting environments are not always desirable. This means that the key to success is the creation of hybrid models. Some space should be designed for interaction, other space for focus. It is important that different tasks have their own specific environment.

Functions of physical environment

Stimulating Performance

Performance comes in different kinds of sizes and forms. Yet, creative performance is being perceived as one of the most important factors of organizational success. In today's fast changing markets, organizations literally scream for creativity and innovation. We all want, and actually we all need to get "out the box" just to survive, personally, but most of all, to let the organization we work in survive. And that is not strange at all, because due to the economic crisis, a lot of companies lot of companies are seeing rapid decline, and the number of bankruptcies keeps rising every year (Central Bureau of Statistics Netherlands, 2013).

Because of the cry for creativity and innovation, several successful companies have already seen the advantages of a playful environment and embraced the concept of bringing out the creative, even childish side of things into the corporate world. However, other important tasks require focus and it's crucial to note that offices with different physical settings have different performance potentials (Ceylan, Dul & Aytac, 2008).

Therefore it's of great importance to have a closer look on a few different physical settings and components and their influence on performance.

Natural elements: Mood is one of the most used predictors for creative performance, and physical elements help influence mood.

One of the most important components to positively stimulate one's mood and therefore creativity is the presence of natural elements (Stone & English, 1998 ; Larsen, Adams, Deal, Kweon, & Tyler, 1998; Shibata & Suzuki, 2002). Natural elements are, for example, plants, trees, windows, wood, stone and so on.

Having a physical work environment with natural elements offers a range of great benefits. In addition to creative performance, people working in environments with wood are associated with professionalism, success, honesty, caring, and creativity (Ridoutt et al., 2002b). Also, natural elements can decrease stress and fatigue and can increase one's feeling of well-being (Bell, Greene, Fisher & Baum, 2001; R. Kaplan, 2001; Hartig, Bööck, Garvill, Olsson & Gärling, 1996). Though, for attention-focused performance tasks, a high amount of plants can hinder concentration and therefore decreases performance on these tasks (Larsen et al. 1998).

Colors: Another important component that can influence performance is color. Though previous research shows a lot of inconsistent results, a recent study explains exactly why and how cool colors (e.g., blue and green) can stimulate creative performance (Mehta & Zhu, 2009). As opposed to this, warm colors (e.g., red) enhance performance on detail-oriented tasks.

The different effects of these colors arise from the different associations

people link to them. Blue is often associated with openness, peace, and tranquility (ocean and the sky), whereas red is associated with danger and mistakes (stop signs, warnings, errors marked with a red pen). Mehta and Zhu (2009) show that because of these associations, red leads to an avoiding behavior, which makes people more alert and therefore enhances the performance for tasks that require attention. On the other hand, openness, peace, and tranquility are signs of a more benign environment related to innovative and creative problem solving strategies. This suggests blue for a more approach-oriented motivation, which makes people behave in a more explorative, risky manner and thus enhances creativity (Mehta & Zhu, 2009).

Playful elements: Organizations that successfully want to integrate innovative and creative performance should consider changing their physical work environment from formal towards playful (Kangas, 2010). This is because fun and playfulness also result in a good mood, which in turn brings creative performance to a higher level. Also, this change creates an environment where the creative processes of learning, innovating, and changing leads to enthusiastic participation and passionate commitment of the employees (Meyer, 2010). And don't we all want that?

Just have a look at Google: the most famous and trendsetting example

of an organization that embraces the idea that the physical environment influences creativity. Employees glide around the building on razor scooters and go down slides between floors. They design their own workspace with tinker toys and treadmills while drawing and writing on walls. Where some people would say despite, we know that thanks to all this playfulness, creative innovations are developed daily.



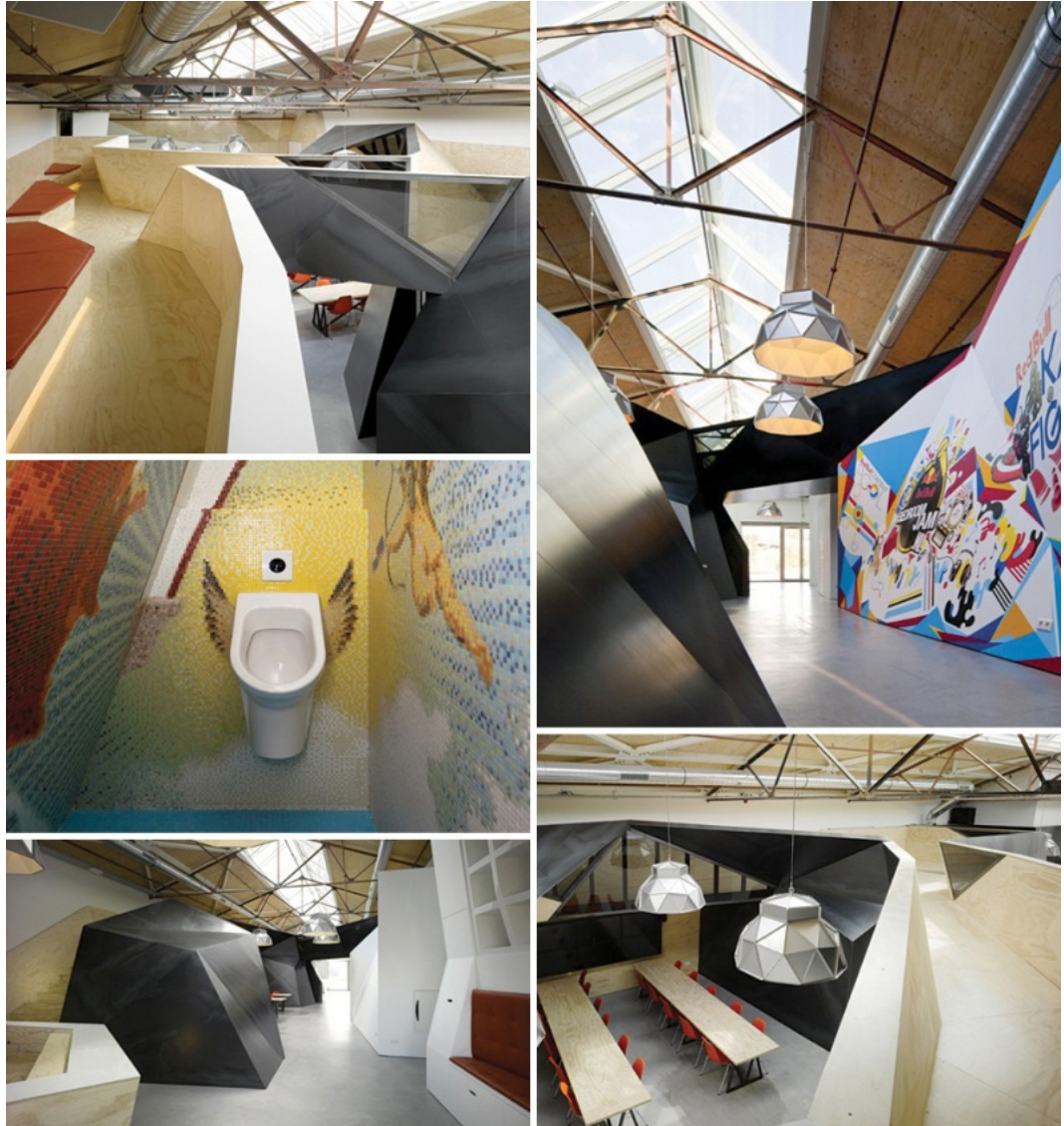
Images: Google Office Dublin

By having playful spaces with interactive features where you enable employees to be creative, you facilitate people to step out of their comfort zone and experiment with new perspectives. Dubos (1971) found that for people to reach their full potential and to stimulate them intellectually and emotionally, the environment should provide them with a wide variety of features and experiences. It is important that the workplace allows employees to think creatively, to question old assumptions, to respond effectively to the unexpected, and to engage all participants' talents in collaboration (Meyer, 2010).

Besides Google, there are many creative organizations that have chosen elements to stimulate creativity, such as the Rotterdam Innovation Dock. The building of this education and technology centre used to be an industrial hall, and the Dutch architecture firm Groosman Partners followed the concept "a city inside a hall". Another example is Red Bull's office in Amsterdam. Their theme is extreme sports, and they added color and other 'fun' elements to encourage a change of mindset from formal and strict to playful and free.



Image: Red Bull Head Quarter, Amsterdam



Images: Red Bull Headquarter, Amsterdam

Sounds & Scent: Apart from physical elements to lift up performance, non-physical elements like sounds, and even specific scents can bring performance and efficiency to the next level.

“Tell me and I’ll forget

Show and I’ll understand

Smell or hear and I’ll remember”

For example, classical music, or the buzzy sounds of a coffee bar can stimulate out of the box thinking and encourage focused thinking. Moreover, diffusion of lemon scents let office workers make 54% less mistakes than normal. During meetings and brainstorming, fresh lemon fragrances keep people’s mind on the job and activates energetic debates. Both lemon and jasmine scents can spur cognitive performance. Even lavender scents during breaks can exponentially increase performance, bring peace to tight muscles and lower our heart rate. Furthermore, scents of peppermint can boost typing speed as well as accuracy and there are also connections between cinnamon-vanilla scents and creative performance. So in general, scents can energize, focus, relax, and sharpen employees.

Enhancing productivity

The physical work environment should match the activities that need to be carried out in that space. So different tasks require different workspaces (Kahler Slater, 2010). This means that it should be designed in a way that it for example stimulates the spontaneous exchange of ideas as well as individual thinking and attention-demanding tasks.

Tasks that require full concentration call for a relatively distraction-free environment. Here, people are not disturbed by chatting colleagues or telephone calls. Interactive and creative processes, on the other hand, may work well in open environments with high ceilings filled with fun elements and are buzzing with activity. For teamwork where interaction as well as medium level of concentration is required, half-enclosed spaces are best, close to windows for some natural views but not around busy walkways to avoid distraction.

The “new” work environment consists of open workplaces in combination with meeting rooms and focus spaces (Blok et al., 2009). These types of environments require employees to choose the most appropriate work environment for their work task. According to the research conducted by Blok et al. (2009), task-facilitating office environments lead to a significant increase in communication and collaboration and a decrease in distraction.

Increasing flexibility

A flexible office design also allows you to modify your space as your company and staff evolves (Goodell, 2010). Moreover, flexible office spaces are the most productive ones. Offices of the same size with flexible functionality are not tied to a corporate hierarchy, which means less frustration and office movement when employees change positions. Universal spaces also support hoteling for employees who aren't frequently on site (sales staff, virtual employees, part-timers, etc.) (Goodell, 2010).

Moreover, open spaces can be used for multiple purposes such as meetings, conferences, brainstorming etc. This provides a higher occupancy of the space and therefore less space is needed which saves money!

Encouraging interaction

When people come to the office, they need a place to interact. Sometimes in large group rooms, sometimes in small room environments such as war rooms. A war room environment is used as a place to get stuff done. It's a temporary project space where decisions need to be taken. Unlike creative spaces where ceilings should be high up to spur creativity, war rooms benefit if they give a boxed feeling. People want to get out of there when they're finished. This will enhance the action process.

But there are different options for creating interaction. For example the phenomenon which The New York Times calls the ‘water cooler effect’: having a chat with colleagues while getting water from the water cooler or a nice cup of coffee at the machine. At IBM they are convinced of the positive effects of the water cooler phenomenon. They state that the water cooler effect leads to incidental discussions and helps making informal links between teams and departments. This has enabled them to create ideas and sustain their success (IBM, 2012).

Besides having a chat at the coffee corner, you can also use other human needs to intensify interaction. For example, people need places to charge their electronic devices. When you create central charger stations, this will keep social interaction flowing.





But why is social interaction so important? A recent study conducted by Nature has shown that social interaction between employees has a positive effect on employee productivity. According to this study, employees who chat with each other in between tasks get more work done than people who sit behind their desk all day. The person in the study with the most contacts was 60% more productive than the person communicating the least (Whitfield, 2008). Also, social interaction makes sure employees acquire more knowledge and make better use of resources.

Social interaction at work does not only lead to more productive employees, but also to happier employees who are healthier and therefore live longer (Shirom, Toker, & Alkaly, 2011). Because of social interaction, hormones get released which makes people feel happier. Social interaction increases the employees' ability to learn as well. When the environment provides only little support for interaction, people tend to be less productive and pay less attention. Shirom, Toker, and Alkaly (2011) state that a very formal environment does not contribute to the health of employees. Therefore, an environment with fun elements that encourages communication between co-workers is good for the wellbeing of both the employees and the organization as a whole.

Attracting and retaining staff

Comfortable and attractive surroundings can make employees feel valued by management and can play an important role in attracting and retaining staff (Meel et al., 2010). The fact that the management provides them with different spaces for their different tasks, makes them feel appreciated and welcome. Moreover, the freedom to work wherever and whenever tends to be a highly valued aspect by employees. Some people prefer to work in enclosed spaces where they have privacy, where others like to work in coffee bars or in a library (Meel et al., 2010).

In addition, research has found a very strong relationship between having fun at work and organizational citizenship behaviors such as being loyal to the company and showing pride in the organization (Keen, 2008). In other words, you can gain some huge benefits, just by designing your office space.

Expressing the brand

The physical environment can also be used to convey a particular message or identity, working as a three-dimensional business card to the rest of the world (Meel et al., 2010). Thanks to innovators like Google and Pixar, space is now recognized as one of the most powerful vehicles for communicating a brand.

Understanding what is important to the organization will allow you to design your workplace to reflect what you want to achieve. A brand that wants to be known as innovative and fun can choose an office concept that expresses these values through funky brainstorm rooms and fun elements in the environment. Communicating a strong brand attracts the best talent across multiple disciplines and helps employees develop an affiliation with the company and the work culture (Morrison, 2013).

Supporting cultural change

Office design can be a powerful tool in the process of cultural change (Meel et al., 2010). Since buildings and their interior designs are always present and highly visible, they have a big impact on the way people experience the workplace. Moreover, it influences their mood and therefore also their creativity. Changing the physical environment by itself does not change a culture, but it definitely causes people to get out of their comfort zone and rethink their old ways of working.

For example, putting people from different functions and ranks in one room has more impact than simply stating that the organization should be less hierarchical. Likewise, adding fun and playful elements to your office will do a lot more than simply stating that the organization should foster creativity and playfulness more. Don't you agree?

Case examples

Case 1: Dialogues House

As you can see, the Dialogues House, founded by Paul Iske, is a good example of how a conservative organization like a bank can change its physical environment. There is room for interaction, like the forum where speakers are being invited to inspire each other by talks, interventions, etc. There are open spaces as well as small cubicles and project rooms for focused work. The Dialogues House used to be the dealing room of ABN AMRO Bank, one of the leading financial institutions in the world at the time of the launch in 2007. People working in this space focused on the creation of a next generation bank.



Images: Dialogues House, Amsterdam

Note: the team of Chief Humor Officer has been implementing the belief system, living, co-creating and working in this space since its launch. A lot of our thinking and experience with changing physical environments has arisen from here.

Case 2: Skype offices



Image: The Wall of Better, Skype HQ, London

When Skype was acquired by Microsoft, they decided to rent this beautiful environment as their home base in London. As with many tech offices, this place promotes creativity. What we like best is the local flavor. At central points, the interior designers devised connectivity or dialogue facilities, from a pool table near the stairs to local boards around the coffee area. This ensures a vibrating culture of exchange.

What we liked a lot was the “Wall of Better” – a place where colleagues can share fixes and improvements on work. These are whiteboards integrated in a large graphical image on a wall in the open office space. Skype encourages their employees to share their boldest and most brilliant ideas on this wall. This not only involves them in the improvement of the organization as a whole, but also clearly shows how much they are valued.

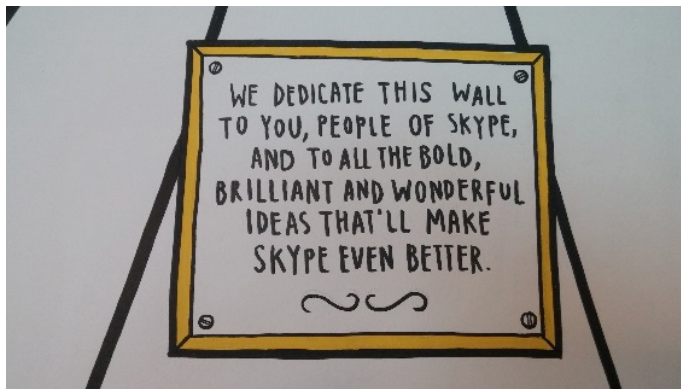


Image: detail of The Wall of Better, Skype HQ, London

Another excellent concept we found is the inclusion of city elements in the design. In this case, we are clearly reminded that we are in London. That's what stuck us remarkable: making sure it is not a place in a different city with a different beat, like Düsseldorf, Germany, or Dublin, Ireland. Every city and every country has its own flair. It's a great idea to use that in your own culture as well.



Images: inclusion of the city into the design

Case 3: Kameha Grand Hotel

Every now and then you see hotels that just get it. Take the Kameha Grand. This is a huge 5 star hotel in Bonn, the former capital of (West) Germany. For some of the rooms, they have taken themes and accommodation to a whole new level. For example, look at the room below. A room dedicated to sports. From basketball bins in the bathrooms to a foosball table in the living room, this scenery certainly provides ample opportunities to become a creative team.



*Images: Kameha Grand,
Bonn*



Does your strategy meet culture for breakfast in the office?

We have shown you the different functions of the physical environment at the workplace and highlighted some of the research we have done over the last couple of years. The next step for your organization is to check if your physical work environment matches your company's strategy, values, and culture. Usually, we see several items to consider:

1. Categorize the time spent at work:

- high focus work for those who need not to be distracted
- group work for meetings and other group activities
- leisure and interim time for coffee, tea, or time spent at restrooms
- quick update tasks, like landing spaces for quick emailing or printing
- project work, i.e., teams that want to keep their stuff in the room to come back the following morning

2. Calculate or do an educated guess on the division of these categories in your organization.

3. Create a floor plan that includes all the components. It does not have to be all funny, inspirational or humorous. We focus on the right levers for the right rooms and work types.

This would mean:

- Open space for people to collaborate
- Landing space to check email and make phone calls
- Creative rooms, colorful and with high ceilings, where people can leave their stuff when they are in a two-day brainstorm session
- Personal meeting rooms for catching up and 1-on-1 conversations
- War rooms, for project teams to work on implementations with a deadline. These kind of rooms have usually lower ceilings and less distraction, to keep the focus on the subject matter
- High focus spaces for detailed jobs or highly sensitive activities, like finance, legal and bean counting

Usually, the space you will have is not big enough. We understand that. However, much is possible if you rethink your working process before you start the design.

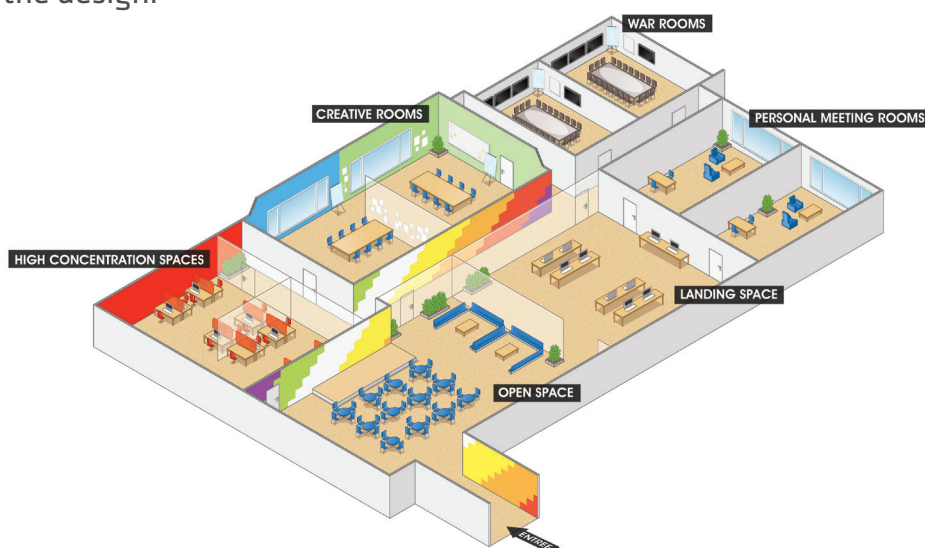


Image: Concept floor plan of startup Edmonton, Canada

Probably you will need expertise to embed creativity and innovation enhancers in the organization. Just be careful before you directly hire a fancy design agency. For the record: we love design. Humor driven innovation builds upon design thinking. However...it is important to know that some designers have a tendency to strive for perfection. This also affects office surroundings: all perfect, spotless, and flexible. Everywhere in the world the same. But then you might ask, is an environment where people work always clean and sterile? Take a look at some decorating or design magazines and you will see that the pictures look perfect and there is no paper laying around, no mess but most of all: no people.



Image: a typical element in interior design magazines is the absence of humans

Yet, the human factor is the most important factor in our eyes. We believe that design is important, but the human factor is always dominant. It is all about creating an environment that encourages people to work efficiently and productively, adding fun and playful elements and representing your organizational culture while letting your employees feel at home. Make sure that everybody knows that it is okay to move things around, to throw paper airplanes and let them lie on the floor for a while, to pop confetti and so on. So when designing your physical environment, start with the most important asset: your employees. Most likely, they will start to use the environment in a different way. Do not waste too much time on design or building policies right after the refurbishment, but wait a couple of weeks and let the employees who actually work there draw something up.



Image: confetti floor

Hands-on tips and tricks

After years of executing make-overs and researching the effects, we believe we can rightfully call ourselves "office pimpers". However, changing culture takes time. Make sure to start a dialogue on the newly changed workplace. Here are our best tips for you:

1. Leave room for those employees that do not like too much playfulness. Forcing them is not a viable option.
2. Ask your employees about their ideas and opinions. After all, they are the ones who will have to work in the new environment. Let them demonstrate their ideas by building a miniature office. Organize workshops and brainstorming sessions or excursions with users to other projects to inspire them.
3. Match the design with your company's strategy, values, and organizational culture. Consider the core of your business. Is it technology? Is it creativity? Or maybe design? The office layout should also compliment the work style of the company. If daily activities ask for a lot of team work, be sure to design enough space for this.
4. Involve facility management and make an agreement with them. For example exchange approval to use the windows as white boards to cleaning them yourselves.
5. Communicate the processes clearly. It creates awareness and

engagement among employees, which is essential. Moreover, it helps avoid confusion and misleading expectations.

6. Involve your employees during the process. Not only let them bring in ideas in the beginning, but also show them the process and let them help out. And by employees we mean ALL employees, not just the managers.
7. Create a separate playground, specially designed for employees to relax, play, and not think about work in a direct way.
8. Create a slide alongside a stairway. It increases employee's speed and therefore productivity. And it is fun.
9. Buy an office-pet as company mascot. Entitle one or two colleagues as Chief Animal Officer to make sure the pet is well taken care of. If anybody is allergic, just buy a robo-fish or paint a fish on the wall.
10. Be courageous! Resistance will occur, like it occurs in any other change process. Even though clear communication might help to decrease this resistance, you will still need to take this into account when planning the implementation process.
11. And the best we saved for last ;): **just hire Chief Humor Officer!**

Conclusion

Are you excited to take on your physical work environment and to create a humorous workplace? You don't have to close your eyes and imagine it any more. You can make it reality and just see how engaged your employees are going to feel! We have shown that it can stimulate creative or attention-requiring performance, enhance communication and productivity, attract and retain staff, increase flexibility, express the brand, and help change organizational culture.

However, there is no one-size-fits-all solution for office design. It can be counterproductive to design an ultra-modern work environment if the organization as a whole has a rather conservative mindset. You need to have a clear understanding of your objectives, and adjust your design to fit them.

If you want to start experimenting with this or want to start a dialogue on the topic, do not hesitate to give us a wink. Chief Humor Officer helps organizations with these struggles and design challenges. Bring back the fun!

About humor driven innovation

Organizational culture is a set of shared mental assumptions and values that guide interpretation and action in organizations by defining appropriate behavior for various situations. It is seen as an important source of competitive advantage by multiple scholars. Since culture is a resource that is difficult to imitate, it has the potential to provide an organization with a long-term advantage over their competitors. People are still the most important asset in most industries. In an era of collaboration beyond any differences – geographies, class, etc. people get together with a sense of purpose rather than with a sense of function. This paradigm shift requires organizations to redesign themselves to best leverage the human factor.

So we see the emergence of an innovation culture that focuses on a very human element. Humor-driven innovation is about creating an organizational culture that embraces innovation with a smile. It is about accelerating openness to new ideas, stimulating risk-taking, a focus on achieving results and support from management.

The main attributes for humor-driven innovation are as follows:

- Humor varies across culture and personality. Unlike humor, products are culturally neutral because they derive from a data-driven and design approach. This cultural independence brings an ease of product scalability known only to big companies. In the online world, on the other hand, scalability is not an issue, but in order to stand out in the crowd you need to connect to local cultures. This, on its part, creates copycatting behavior and continuous attacks on the business profit.
- Provocations. Provocations are deliberately unreasonable ideas that would be immediately vetoed by those who are not in the process. In our research, we have seen adding humor makes people think more in provocations and become unreasonable in a positive way;
- Alternative approach. Like with provocations, the techniques used within humor-driven innovation build upon the existing frameworks of open innovation, but adds alternative approaches like copycatting, exploring organizational taboos to accelerate innovation;
- Realization that there is no perfect end state. It is about continuous progress; With humor, especially the group processes are important for the creation of an innovation culture. From our earlier research, we find that the process brings light and airiness in any organizational culture.



About CHO and the authors

Chief Humor Officer is a research and advisory organization that stimulates leadership, transformation, and innovation within organizations by using humor, fun, and play. We introduce humor driven innovation through lectures, workshops, and humorous interventions. We can contribute to long-term processes or just help out during a one-time-event.

A selection of our humorous workshops:

- Introduction to Humor Driven Innovation
- Pimp Your Innovation Culture
- Copycatting
- Vitality via Humor
- Leadership by Inspiration
- Laughter Training
- Breaking through Innovation: Looking at Taboos
- Lego Serious Play
- Redesigning the Office
- Trend Spotting; Graffiti tour



Jaspar Roos

- Chief Inspiration Officer CHO
- Writer (i.e. Dutch Financial Times), speaker, and innovation expert
- Partner at XL Family, an international incubator and accelerator



Ragna van Damme

- Chief Laughter Officer CHO
- Social- and Labour & Organizational Psychologist
- Laughter trainer



Jeske Eenink

- Chief Human Officer CHO
- Research on innovative work behavior of employees
- Laughter trainer



Anne Twilt

- Sales CHO
- Research on humor within teams

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About HYPE Innovation

HYPE Innovation is a global leader in full-lifecycle innovation management software. HYPE's powerful platform allows organizations to engage thousands of employees in idea generation and collaborative problem solving. We help you focus on measurable business outcomes that can be tracked through to execution. Companies work with HYPE for our flexible products, our deep expertise in innovation management, and our long history of success with some of the largest organizations in the world. Our client community includes global companies such as GE, P&G, Bombardier, DHL, Roche, Nokia, Daimler, Airbus, General Mills, Saudi Aramco, Bechtel, Clorox, Deutsche Telekom, and many more.

Visit our website at **www.hypeinnovation.com** to learn how HYPE enables companies to transform their best assets – employees, customers, partners, and suppliers – into dynamic and engaged innovation communities.

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