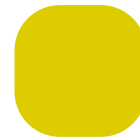


Unleashing Hidden

Creativity



Does
Place
Matter?



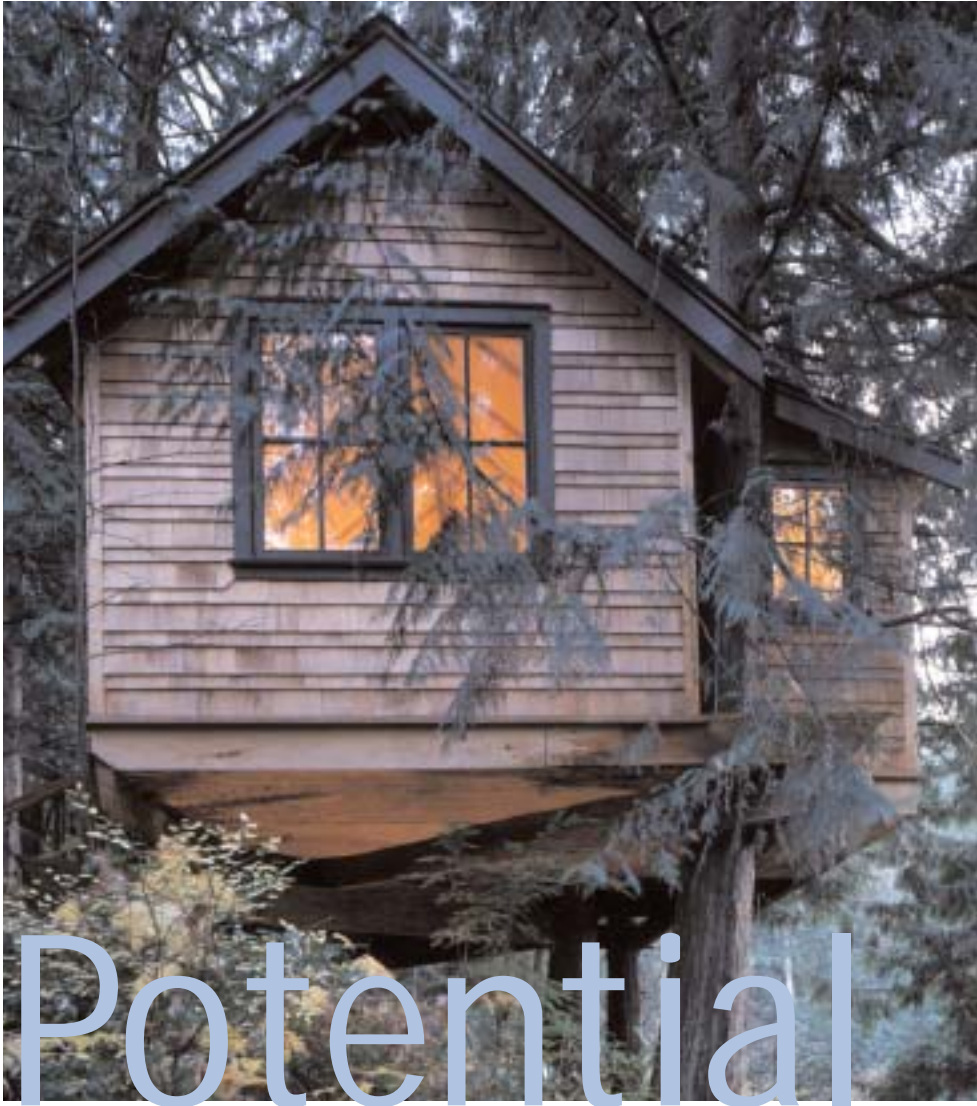
Some of the biggest ideas come to light in the smallest room in the house. People report solving problems while showering, shaving, putting on makeup, drying their hair or brushing their teeth. So if business leaders are looking for more innovation from employees, should they forego new offices in favor of really fancy bathrooms?

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Unleashing Hidden Creativity, continued

Other people come up with creative solutions to tough issues while they are in motion – swimming, running, golfing, bicycling, skating or hiking. Should we abandon the traditional headquarters building in favor of a large

indoor/outdoor recreational area to boost creativity? Others say they get their best ideas while they are operating or occupying a moving object – plane, train, boat, car, bus, or the subway (yes, the subway).



Potential

How can companies tap into the creative potential of their people? And what barriers need to be removed?



...take risks
and challenge
the status
quo...

Perhaps we should commute or travel most of the day and just forget about getting to our destination, yes?

The answer to the above question is probably not. But whatever you call it – creative problem-solving, innovation, ingenuity – business leaders want more of it! How can companies tap into the creative potential of their people? And what barriers need to be removed?

“The ‘we’ve always done it this way’ mentality is one of the biggest obstacles to innovation,” warns Julie Anixter of *tompeterscompany!*, an educational consulting firm. The firm’s research demonstrates that an *organizational context* that encourages people to take risks and challenge the status quo is one of the most important qualities of highly innovative companies.

Changing the *physical context* – where place, activity and time of day are inextricably linked – may be the best way to begin transforming the organizational context.

Unleashing Hidden Creativity, continued



Freedom

The physical context is important because it provides “stimulus for whole-brain thinking, both linear and non-linear,” according to Ron Crossland, vice chairman, tompeterscompany!

He points out that conversation is one of the most diverse forms of stimulus. Providing a forum for talking to, listening to and sometimes just being around other people is one of the most important roles of the corporate workplace.

Gail Taylor, co-founder of MGTaylor Corporation, leads workshops with groups to bring out their creative genius and is very sensitive to the physical setting. She cautions, “I hate chairs that don’t move, walls that don’t invite, spaces that deaden my senses and buildings that are authoritarian and sterile, rather than collaborative and inclusive.” Rethinking the physical context of work to unleash creativity begins by recognizing that knowledge work happens

everywhere, all the time. Valuable, work-related thinking cannot be confined to a 9-to-5, Monday-through-Friday work schedule. Ask people where they get their best ideas, and they will rarely give just one answer. Tom Ehrenfeld, journalist and author of the *Startup Garden: How Growing a Business Grows You*, says, “While I do my best manual labor of the mind sitting at my desk typing, I save my brainstorming for walking my dog.” There is great variety in the places, activities and times of day that people report being at their most creative: a confined space vs. wide open place, alone vs. with others, talking vs. listening, relaxed vs. energized, urban vs. pastoral landscape, familiar vs. unexplored, morning vs. evening. One solution cannot be prescribed for all. When people have the freedom to make smart choices about where, when and how to work, it liberates them to look at all business issues from a new perspective.

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Paul Mabray, co-founder of Red Tricycle (brand analysts for the wine and spirits industry), capitalizes on the fact that new ideas can come to mind during everyday household tasks, in conversations and outside of traditional work hours. Once a month, he organizes a dinner at co-founder Richard Borquist’s house in Carmel, Calif. that half of the 22 staff members attend along with two or three outsiders. The entire group participates in the planning, preparing, cooking, eating and clean-up phases of the event. “We naturally talk about business problems through the process as well as personal thoughts on life in general. These dinners often take us in a new direction,” says Mabray.

How could your company leverage non-traditional physical context to boost innovation?

Imagine the effect that building a treehouse together could have on a product development team, for instance. The process may generate new linkages by transporting participants back to their childhood days when there were few limits on creative energy. The final result, a treehouse, would give workers a novel refuge for solo work or group interaction where they could literally view the issues from a totally different vantage point. It would certainly give new meaning to the concept of a corporate retreat.

Unleashing Hidden Creativity, continued

While it's true that creative thinking can happen anywhere and anytime, it's also a fact that most people spend a good deal of time in the office.

Consider for a moment that innovation is a creative process. Sometimes we simply need to be alone; during this quiet time, we reflect, analyze and concentrate our thoughts. Other times we desire companionship and the opportunity to bounce ideas back and forth. It's through this act of "bouncing" that a good thought is often transformed into an even better one. In fact, according to a recent Steelcase Workplace Report, over 67 percent of respondents indicated that talking with others was their most valuable source of information when seeking support for new ideas.

So how can we make a work environment that invites and encourages both solitary and collaborative creative thinking?

Here are a couple of ideas to consider:

1 Create spaces that emit tranquility. These spaces create opportunities to simply "be." Perhaps it's a comfortable lounge chair and ottoman tucked away in a hidden sunlit corner, or a shaded bench overlooking a pond on a corporate campus. Plants, art, music, dimmers on light switches, outside views, closed doors and even the sound of water can help encourage tranquility.

2 Create spaces that stimulate. These spaces encourage informal interaction, conversation and socializing. Picture people talking, laughing, scribbling ideas on white boards and sharing conversations over a cup of coffee. It's an easy place where colleagues are nearby and accessible for the feedback we so often desire.

Providing a range of spaces invites people to consider how they work and how the space surrounding them contributes to their creative process.

Inviting Work Environments

For more on the Steelcase Workplace Report go to www.steelcase.com and look under Tools and Insights for the Hot House Seminar Findings.