

The Psychology of Collaboration

Tuesday 16 August 2017, Herman Miller, 61 Aldwych, London WC2

Speaker: Bertie van Wyk, Insight programme manager, Herman Miller

Introduced by **James Rawdon-Mogg**, current President of CoreNet UK's Young Leaders group, this was a seriously compressed learning session. Designed to offer an overview of how collaboration can work for workers, it provided an insight into how different types of personalities can work successfully alongside each other.

Our speaker for the morning was **Bertie van Wyk** of Herman Miller, who lectures all over the world on workplace psychology. Asking us to admit to being either a 'morning' or an 'evening' person, he pointed up the need to arrange meeting times to suit the individuals concerned - morning people are usually running out of steam by 4.00pm while evening people only hit their stride from about 10.00am.



So, collaboration - what is it and how to create a great collaborative space? First of all it is necessary, he said, to uncover the difference between collaboration and interaction. Interaction is building trust, and trust is the cornerstone of collaboration. So first you need the interaction - which does not at all mean having a team united in purpose and personality. The results of Big 5 Ocean tests show that often opposites work to balance out each other, making a successful and long lasting team - heterogenous teams are known to perform better as an element of conflict can be a 'wonderful natural resource'. So any good team will include a mix of introverts and extroverts. And in building your team, what about Virtual Collaboration? Better, he said, to have at least one face to face meeting, preferably at the beginning, since face to face is man's communication natural system. Apparently one third to half of any workforce is likely to consist of introverts, which does not mean 'shy' people, rather those who respond better to an understood structure.



And how do we react to spaces? What part does environmental psychology play in our behaviours? Evolutionary psychology points out that while too much noise in an office is distracting, dead quiet is worse because in nature it means that we are in imminent danger of being killed. Other influencers are: daylight which plays a huge, often underestimated, role in productivity; air quality - the more natural the better; and movement is essential - even if it's just going to get a cup of coffee. Which leads on to meetings, dedicated or impromptu, and the need to get away from your own workstation, both from your and your colleagues point of view - stimulation versus distraction.

In conclusion Bertie noted that location is important, that space is never complete and that some element of constant change is good for us. And in the living office while seven out of ten activities are conducted with others (depending of course on how well we connect with others), the other three out of ten imply working on our own. For some people 'solitude is the air that they breathe', for others the opposite is true. The trick is to combine elements of both types to create successful collaborative teams.

Alison Sutherland