Media Evolution

Work is a four-letter word

A playbook for community-based workspaces

2021

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Colophon

About Media Evolution

Media Evolution started
in 2008 as a joint initiative
between the private sector,
the academy and the
public sector to promote
the conditions for growth
and innovation in the
media industries. Over
time, media has grown
to incorporate all sorts of
organisations dealing with
digital development and
today we are owned by
more than 350 members.

www.mediaevolution.se

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People are at the centre of everything that we do. As a non-profit member organisation that brings together innovative tech agencies: the creatives, the big corps, the makers, the academics, the strategists and the local municipalities and regions of southern Sweden, Media Evolution is ideally poised to imagine the workplace of tomorrow. Our economic constitution prompts us to reinvest profit back into our work for members, while our strong presence in Malmö combined with experience in bridging industries and interests, allows us to create unexpected meetings of minds.

A decade ago, we sought to build a space where we could facilitate these serendipitous meetings on a daily basis, face to face. Media Evolution City, a coworking space based in a historic industrial area, opened its doors in 2012 and currently houses around

500 people across two locations. It is a physical manifestation of our beliefs and knowledge, an ever-evolving mechanism continually affirming and debunking our assumptions of how people create and work.

We think it is time to put to paper some of the learnings we have amassed along the way. Our perspective and projects. How we build for the future. And, of course, how people are at the centre of what we do.

"Without work, all life goes rotten. But when work is soulless, life stifles and dies." – Albert Camus

"I don't like work—no man does—but I like what is in the work—the chance to find yourself. Your own reality—for yourself not for others what no other man can ever know." – Joseph Conrad

Work, what is it anyway? Wikipedia defines it as "a human activity that generates economic value in the form of goods or services. The human resource associated with performing work is called labour." Thus, a transaction of value—and in it a why. We work and perform services because they pay off economically and achieve predetermined goals. But what does work mean? How does Wikipedia even see this question?

We can divide work into the following three definitions:

1. Employment that provides sustenance that is often vital and sufficient to live life
2. A place of work
3. Employment that demands an effort

How does the definition of a workplace look? According to Wikipedia: A physical place where someone works.

So then, work in the sense of a job we do during the course of a day (or night) is a relatively straightforward concept. We go to a physical place of work and perform our labour to earn economic compensation and achieve goals that we or others have set.

Worktime
Once upon a time, we were paid for the number of hours we spent at, let's say, a machine in a factory. If we spent 8 hours at work, we were paid for 8 hours of work. The same went for sitting at a typewriter, serving customers at a store or diagnosing patients. The value of products and services was determined by supply and demand, but its price was based on production cost—in other words, the cost of raw material plus labour. In many ways, this practice remains. But as new products and services are created and adjacent professions and tools come to be, this equation becomes increasingly arbitrary. The profit on hours worked or the refinement of raw material does not necessarily add up the same way anymore.

If you require fewer hours to achieve the same goals, you can raise the expected profit or redistribute the surplus to new investments. What happens if we invest this increased effectiveness in developing new skills, health and flexibility for the employees, our greatest asset? Would it not give rise to increased productivity

and steadier output in both the long and short term? Could this eventually proffer new products, novel and unexpected modes of work and, by extension, perhaps the innovation we need to build a more sustainable society? We need to seek alternative ways of working, living and being to see the world in a new light.

It is high time to reconsider the punching clock and factory whistle—the compensation for hours worked. That work is measured by the hours you spend doing your work or at your workplace. Which hours of the day are considered work and which are not? How do we measure this? What if we focus on what we accomplish instead of how many hours it takes us? What would life look like then? What role do work hours and the workplace play when physical meetings between our employees and collaborators happen? How should these meetings look? What are we doing there? How often are we present? And last but not least: why? What is a workplace even?

The 8-hour workday and 5-day work week have a long history originating from the heydays of industrialism towards the mid 19th century when the basic assumption was that the ideal workday consisted of 8 hours of work, 8 hours of leisure and 8 hours of sleep. This evolution did not happen in the same way or at the same time everywhere.

In Sweden, the parliament adopted an 8-hour workday in 1919, reducing the workweek from 6 to 5 days in 1971. Much happened to productivity and growth between 1918 and 1971, which continued to increase from 1971 until today. Our working conditions have undergone major transformations and new professions with different prerequisites have been born along the way. Life conditions during this period were altered at a breakneck pace, with the life expectancy in Sweden today being ten years higher than in 1971. Why then have we not seen changes to our working hours since 1971, given that pro-

ductivity and growth have increased at an astonishing rate ever since? There are many explanations for this, but the likely reason is that the expectation of further growth simply has not enabled it. As a consequence, no one saw any point in restructuring our time. Now that we see clear incentives to increase wellbeing, development of new skills, measures of innovation—should we not consider fewer or shorter work days or at least an overhaul of what we do in the course of our workday?

Workspace
The factory whistle made it clear when the workday commenced and concluded. A shopkeeper cannot help but serve customers when the doors open and people flock through them. When a doctor starts her or his day, there is little time to do anything aside from treating patients. But this is not the case for all professions, even for the above. Today, digital tools allow us to perform many tasks outside our normal working hours and physical workplace. Parts of factory work are now fully automated and are performed outside the factory floor. The shopkeeper can now serve the customers via a webshop and rather than working from a health centre or hospital, doctors can now meet patients online. This evolution has been going on for a while and has meant different leaps for different industries, sometimes shaking them to their very core. Nonetheless, it has done little to change our overall view on when, how and where we work.

Taking this reasoning one step further: The workplace is where we perform our work, where we create products and services for sale. Once upon a time, people usually worked in a specifically equipped place; a factory, farm, store, hospital or office. For some time, the production of products and services has been increasingly less bound

to physical locations. Hence, it does not rely on the worker's presence when the factory whistle rings or the store opens its doors for the day. Neither do we need a place to gather like we once did, as communication can happen digitally and physically. This isn't news to anyone.

What is new is that we operate outside the workplace to a much larger extent than before. More and more people perform their work outside of the office, store or hospital, in totally novel lines of business and on a scale that often renders our workplaces devoid of people. We work less alongside other people at a shared physical location, presumably because we do not need to in the same way as before and because the digital way of working is becoming more cost and time-efficient.

However, anyone who has worked alongside other people can testify to the irreplaceability of physical meetings in an increasingly digital world. Certain facets, qualities and tools are impossible to fully replace. Among the many valuable aspects is the unpredictability that occurs when people meet physically, especially when it's unplanned or unexpected. These types of encounters are irreplaceable.

Worklife
We work, therefore we are part of society. There's a sense that we are of use. Many can probably recognise that work not only preoccupies our thoughts and physical presence at the intervals of the factory whistle. We also bring it home and plan, find solutions, discuss issues with family and friends or vent about the day's events at the dinner table. We also spend a considerable amount of time in cars, buses or trains commuting to and from work. Is this not part of our work? Counting time that an employee works on the go is a mindset many workplaces have already adopted. Working from home in the

evening or weekend to compensate for leaving early now and then is a relatively normalised practice. For those who are able to and belong to business cultures that accept and allow it.

Why is leaving the office or closing the laptop when you have achieved your goals for the day less accepted? Trying to be as effective as you can to have time for contemplation, personal improvement, physical exercise or a little more time with your family, is not as approved of. Why is this so? We know that given time to pursue these activities, employees thrive and perform better in their jobs, short term and long term. We also know that society as a whole fares well when people are happy and healthy, costing us less and contributing to a more sustainable whole. Why have we not succeeded to focus more on this—helping people with the workplace as a starting point by putting together a functional life puzzle, feeling good physically and mentally, having the opportunity to develop in their work, etc.—is quite hard to fathom. Having the opportunity to do a load of laundry between digital meetings surely leads to less stress, making the puzzle a little more straightforward.

What if we introduce weekly contemplation, sharing of knowledge or physical activity to the workplace? Take collective and individual inspiration trips, participate in conferences, meet colleagues and peers within the same line of business, perform benchmarking locally and remotely, or take up education in the workplace? The list of possibilities can be made long, but the truth is that these life-enhancing activities are rarely prioritised in business. But what if we put them at the top of our agenda, prioritising them above all else to help people perform better in the short and long term? Why not dedicate a day each week to this—a take on the 4-day work week, complemented by a day of contemplation, physical activity, inspiration or development of a new skill?

Life and work
We believe that life and work—the individual and the professional identity, the workplace and the colleagues, the digital office and the physical meeting place—is a whole package that should be reimagined from the ground up. We need to reconsider the definitions and decide on a new order of priorities to adequately address contemporary and future needs and opportunities: the office, working hours, the definition of work itself and what goals the organisation sets. We should make room for varying cadence and a broad range of requirements in a diverse group of individuals and personalities.

"A system is a set of things—people, cells, molecules or whatever—interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time." – Donella H. Meadows

Mindsets are beliefs that shape how we make sense of and see the world. They influence how we think and feel about certain things, and in that, ourselves. More importantly, mindsets influence our actions, both in what we bring to the world and how we treat other people.

As custodians of a coworking space for big and small businesses, one is more than a mere property manager. The following are 13 principles that we have come to learn are crucial for creating and maintaining a considerate space for work.

Identify a raison d'être

In taking on the responsibility of providing a space for people to work, one needs a profound raison d'être, something that is much more than meeting basic requirements such as a table and a roof over your head.

Try to identify a reason for gathering people and dare to be specific about it. These days, a coworking space needs to be a continuation of public space, recognising the value of human interaction to inspire change, development and growth in businesses and society.

Therefore, identifying an inherent motivation is essential. [1] This becomes a guiding star, allowing you to better understand your role in the scheme of things. A deep local connection and know-how, as well as a position in the business community, affords the privilege of trust. Ingrained in your organisational identity should be a pioneering spirit enforced by a meticulously cultivated credibility. From a business point of view, this is the stuff dreams are made of, especially when approaching the people you want on board a project.

Bringing together an exhilarating mix of people under one roof, centred around the mission of; here you get what you can't get elsewhere because together we can achieve what we can't on our own. A community can be made up of vastly different people, but a shared spirit is essential.

The perspective should be one of collaboration. Weave a key belief into the very fabric of the coworking space: that of the importance of unexpected meetings. Believe in convergence, of people and of ideas. As we know, unexpected encounters lead to innovation and convergence. Following this logic, our mission is to facilitate as many agenda-free meetings as possible, with the potential of innovative repercussions beyond our imagination.

[1] "The more focused and particular a gathering is, the more narrowly it frames itself and the more passion it arouses"
– Priya Parker in *The Art of Gathering*

As the workplace and its significance morphs and shifts, a strong belief is that these spaces of convergence will become increasingly important in the foreseeable future.

Residents, not customers
The emphasis on truly getting to know the community stems from a profound belief in being part of it rather than standing on the outside looking in. This belief is one you should take into the most mundane aspects of your operation, as well as the most interesting.

Language is a strong ally in eliminating the distance between yourself and your dwellers. One way of doing this is by questioning the language [2] we use in a commercial setting. What if we replace the traditional term customer or tenant with the more inclusive resident? By using language consciously, one can avoid seeing the purpose of the space as merely ground for commercial transactions, elevating it to something more meaningful. This tool conjures a sense of inclusion and connectivity—being welcome and at ease.

Setting and pursuing a clear-cut task helps attract relevant and invested residents. Part of our work is bringing a sense of immediacy to the table every day, attracting new people and energies. While recognising the fluctuating and cyclical nature of our methods, spaces and tools help you plan with constant transformation in mind. It allows us to better prepare for the inevitable—that residents will come and go. To achieve convergence across the community, it can be helpful to keep balance in mind. Taking a democratic approach, all should be welcome and considered valuable contributors to the whole—big and small businesses, fields and mindsets.

Attracting creative minds from various disciplines is rarely a bad thing, as these are often community-driven individuals who value innovation processes and have

[2] "If tv shows have viewers, and cars have drivers, and books have readers, what word do architects use for the people who dwell in the buildings they make?" – Kevin Slavin in *Design As Participation*

experience with co-creation. If a type of resident is missing in the equation, something you notice by being present in the community, it is helpful to know that you can find them.

One way of doing this is by identifying and inviting them to join the party as residents. Another is by taking a different approach all together: an open door policy. By keeping the doors open to external parties passing through, one can consciously encourage people to dwell, socialise and work in the space, free of charge. This allows a new and potentially untapped segment to try on the experience and familiarise themselves with the possibilities available to the community.

Common areas such as the foyer, library, lounge or the adjacent café should feel attractive, open and welcoming to non-residents. Here, one should stress the value of hospitality in the form of food and drink. A bar, café or restaurant is a natural place to meet. In other words, their value for the community is immense. Connecting to the outside world: An outsider should come for the coffee or lunch and discover that, as if by magic, someone has built a coworking space around it.

Design as participation
In the planning of a space, invite future residents to co-create their workplace. This is design as participation. One objective is to consider their needs. Another is to augment the residents' emotional investment by demonstrating that they are heard and offer a valuable perspective, in this way forging a meaningful bond. Not only does this foster an initial sense of care in the resident, it inspires continued care for the maintenance of their common project and space.

Take into consideration the physical framework you are starting with, and the greater whole it is part of.

Make an effort to understand the neighbourhood and the people who are based there.

What does the demographic composition of the area look like? Is it a diverse neighbourhood or mostly homogenous? How is the flow of foot traffic and access to public transport? What is the culture like in the area? How and where does it manifest itself in the everyday? Which needs does the area meet and neglect? Which services are unavailable?

Take a broad point of view to understand the big picture. Narrow down what is relevant to keep in mind when building a coworking space. Should you cater to the neighborhood or disrupt the current order of things? What do you have to offer? What can you do to encourage convergence between the residents and the local community? How can you welcome your neighbours to contribute to and partake in the daily life at the building?

Keep these answers and your research in mind when composing the space. A well-considered coworking space enables more engagement, unexpected meetings and synergies both within and outside the resident community.

Build the community together
By reinforcing the idea that people are residents rather than clients, one emphasises a shared accountability for the community's wellbeing and development of its members. Being a resident of a country or society comes with rights, but also responsibilities.

The coworking space is a community we shape and share together. One should aspire to nurture this sense of belonging and participation. As we invite conversation and feedback, as we listen and respond, we enforce

the idea that a community is built on collaboration. Recognising the residents as crucial to the existence of the place fosters an emotional investment in them. [3]

As with any diverse group of people across fields, interests and worldviews, the residents' opinions and ideas might be vastly different. Nonetheless, the community provides an opportunity to find common ground on the basis that we share a set of not only values but ideas, knowledge and customers. Emotional connectivity is grounded in our common contribution to a whole. In our daily work as caretakers, we often have the privilege of witnessing convergence as it happens, resulting in the creation of knowledge between residents. This aspect holds an equally universal appeal, attracting new residents seeking fertile ground.

At the centre of the coworking space should be a sense of mutual freedom and flexibility; after all, these are the conditions for its very being. The level of commitment varies with each resident. Some are short term, dipping in and out on a flexible-desk contract, while others commit to the long-term, bringing a large team with a significant impact on the community as a whole. Although contractual obligations are part of the official agreement between the administration and the resident, you should not communicate them as a set of rules.

A favourable approach is to greet and show potential residents around for a more effective and visceral way of communicating the mindset and values of a community. In other words: show people how we like to do things around here. They might not see themselves in it, but then again, it might not be the right space for them. By practically demonstrating the way things are, rather than a rigid set of rules, you create a fluid, non-coded code of conduct in flux, much like the community itself.

[3] "I think that great new ideas, although articulated by indviduals are always generated by communities. I see it as the waste that we make of that possibility of cooperative intelligence. You hear a lot of talk about geniuses —Picasso, Rembrant, Shostakovich, whatever. When you look at any of those artists you find that they drew from a very active flourishing cultural scene. A genius is actually sat in the middle of something that I call scenius. Scenius is the creative intelligence of a community." – Brian Eno, lecture 2016 at Museum of Transitory Art.

[4] In her 2016 talk at The Conference ethnographer Tricia Wang spoke about empathy as the practice of perspective shifting: "this involves skills like listening to understand, asking questions to uncover the unknown instead of asking questions about what we already know, identifying things that are difficult to measure not just making decisions on data sets that we already have, and asking who else do we have to invite to the table instead of just working the default majority".

Keep a hospitality mindset
Maintaining a coworking space should be firmly grounded in hospitality. Merriam Webster defines hospitality as "hospitable treatment, reception, or disposition", all essential to maintaining a community-centred business.

But, what is good hospitality? It is the act of listening to and seeing the guest, anticipating their needs and tending to them. It is the act of meeting people eye-to-eye where they are, as they are. It is the act of welcoming and that of creating a welcoming atmosphere. Inherently, it is an act of openness, compassion and generosity towards the guest, as well as the stranger. It is a people-centred task, with care as its main objective.

As we provide a service to our residents, it is crucial to understand that hospitality is at the core of every good service experience. Hospitality is closely linked to empathy, [4] and ultimately, it is an act of care. Presence is also inherent and you should strive to put this at the forefront of your business. Maintaining a strong and visible presence in the space is central, being available and welcoming to one's residents and guests.

Care inspires care. Being part of a hospitable environment tends to bring out the best in the people. As the residents cultivate the workplace together over time, the extension of care becomes a robust instrument of coherence and kindness in the community.

The square as a hub for convergence
The square is a phenomenon we refer to as the beating heart of a community. It attracts residents and ignites convergence. When designing a coworking space, the square should be a top priority. Think of it this way: any society needs a square with an infrastructural role, a place all

roads lead to, a crossroads of sorts. The same goes for a coworking space.

Keep in mind that the square is not a marketplace. There are already so few places we can meet indoors without buying anything. It should not be motivated by the exchange of commercial products or services, but instead by what the residents can do, individually and together. Its purpose is that of interpersonal and cross-organisational exchange; of ideas and knowledge.

Extending the metaphor, a successful square is never empty. It serves no function without people. Similarly, your square needs to constantly attract people. One way of achieving optimal function is to make the space welcoming, neat and open to all. This means both residents and outsiders should feel welcome to use the space. Another is to 'stir the pot'. Attracting people to the square through curation and events reinforces the impression that the square is a place to experience.

A front desk rather than a reception
Identifying your intrinsic motivation is essential and so is finding the right people to carry out your mission—to live by your values alongside you. Finding the right caretakers for the task facilitates the maintenance of cadence and energy, one that people come and stay for.

Putting these key players at the front of the business allows you to see people in their day-to-day life. Being in touch with residents consistently also enables you to personally guide and directly respond to feedback and requests. The caretakers are the faces of the business. Place these at the heart of the building and set a purposefully low threshold of contact to emphasise their approachability and presence. This should make connecting with residents easy and intuitive and, in turn, make the residents feel seen.

A front desk rather than a reception is one of many ways to manifest this belief physically. Create a rotating roster among staff, top to bottom so all staff members can spend time there. This means everyone stays up-to-date with essential information and keeps in regular face-to-face contact with the residents.

This non-hierarchical approach reinforces a notion of entity, one community united by a common purpose. Ask the residents what they want and implement what is possible. Simply asking can have an immense effect on trust within the community. Being a consequent leader ensures a bon marriage.

An omnipresence also facilitates the constant harvesting of information that allows you to continually improve your service and, at the same time, break the barriers that surely arise when hundreds of people work under one roof. You can directly inquire about what they want to see more or less of, considering their personal experience. Embracing a service mindset is valuable as it enhances the sense of hospitality, thereby bolstering the service experience.

Organise an everlasting party
An inevitable reality of your work is that keeping up a dynamic and vibrant coworking space requires presence. Omnipresence. One becomes the constant stirrer of pots, listening, observing, making sure that things happen. In so many ways, it is your main objective.

Insight is not only valuable ad hoc but also aids foresight. As many residents only spend part of their workday or week at the coworking space, one can program happenings and events that lure them into the office even when they don't have to be. As an organisation, you gain credibility and identity as progressive leaders of the everlasting party [5] that is a coworking space.

[5] "We need the workplace because it is a club, a dating agency, a forum, a colloquium, a congregation, a perpetual if too-sober party." – Jonathan Meades in *Meades 160* in Building Magazine.

The everlasting party is the goal itself. Presence and foresight help you keep the party going. Take the resident's perspective, asking: in order to see myself here, who and what needs to be present? Delivering dynamic and forward-thinking curation with an element of surprise allows you to earn people's trust as they follow your lead and leap into new ideas and knowledge. Make sure that things happen, but do not stir when it happens. Emphasise connection and exchange between residents, remaining in the periphery rather than putting yourself at the centre of events. A good guest knows when to leave.

Exercise fingerspitzengefühl
The physical framework of a coworking space is one of its main assets, obviously. Putting together a successful space is a question of both design and mindset. A workplace should be functional yet beautiful. An inspired leader considers aesthetic and tactile aspects of spatial design seriously. A detail-oriented point of view helps one assemble a space that exceeds the basic, yet superficial need for a desk and four walls. Exercising fingerspitzengefühl should result in a continually arresting and relevant coworking space, attractive to both existing and prospective residents.

This fingerspitzengefühl is not necessarily one you possess yourself. It is rarely the case that an organisation has the full scope of understanding of architecture, construction and design required to create compelling spaces in-house. Consult the experts. Bringing on board architects and designers adds richness to the spatial framework, which is, after all, the physical manifestation of an ideology, a method, and of course, the playground where day-to-day activity takes place.

Prioritise flexibility, but not without constants
A coworking space is in constant transformation. Design for and welcome it. We subscribe to the viewpoints of American writer and thinker Stewart Brand, who proposed the pace layer model as a way of understanding that different parts or layers of a place or civilization change at different paces. Heavily influenced by architect Frank Duffy and his concept of a building's shearing layers, Brand describes a spectre of layers ranging from fastest to slowest changing: Fashion, Commerce, Infrastructure, Governance, Culture, Nature. Rather than a fact-based framework, it is a way of holistically approaching the complexity of one's organisation.

Another point Brand argues in his book *How Buildings Learn: What happens after they're built*, is the importance of taking an evolutionary approach. This means constructing an architectural framework that the inhabitants can customise and develop according to their needs—stretching the life and relevance of a building significantly. Deepening an understanding of the transformative nature of coworking spaces allows you to better plan for time.

Yes, designing for change reinforces a sense of belonging and ownership in the residents, yet abandoning the value of coherence and reliability all together would be foolish. Keep some constants; a recurrent visual element, a piece of furniture specific to each space, a colour that tells you where you are. These provide a comforting sense of quality and reliability—knowing, even if vaguely, that some things remain.

Keep flexibility at the heart of things. People's needs vary vastly—embrace it by facilitating levels of flexibility. One way of doing this is by creating options. In a spatial context, you can do this by sectioning the workplace according to the levels of presence and investment.

Use the threshold as a mean of variation
Most of all, design for all kinds of atmospheres and situations, considering the many positive side effects of a change of environment, one of them being an increase in the occurrence of unexpected meetings. While the space must accommodate some needs on an individual level, you cannot stress the importance of communal space enough. Create compelling crossroads where residents meet, either by passing through or dwelling.

Offer a variety of contract options, short-term non-commital to long-term, to indicate a different emotional investment in the space. Some are there for the daily banter associated with an open office, others come to enjoy shared spaces and the convergence associated with them. The main shared space, be it a foyer, lounge or restaurant, is what we have called the square, an important extension of the exterior. It facilitates participation across levels of commitment and emotional investment, either as a resident or external passer-by.

A range of investments and thresholds adds complexity to the service experience. Build for low threshold and openness, supporting a goal of increased convergence that stimulates innovation and sharing of information. However, these low thresholds should have several steps or levels of privacy. The space should both be able to stimulate interaction and facilitate retreat. Consider the holy trinity of privacy as a three-step ladder: private—shared—co-created. Having the choice of participation is important.

Increase the chance of serendipity
Let's return to the subject of unexpected meetings. A coworking space would be wise to keep them at the forefront of their daily agenda, as they are fundamentally
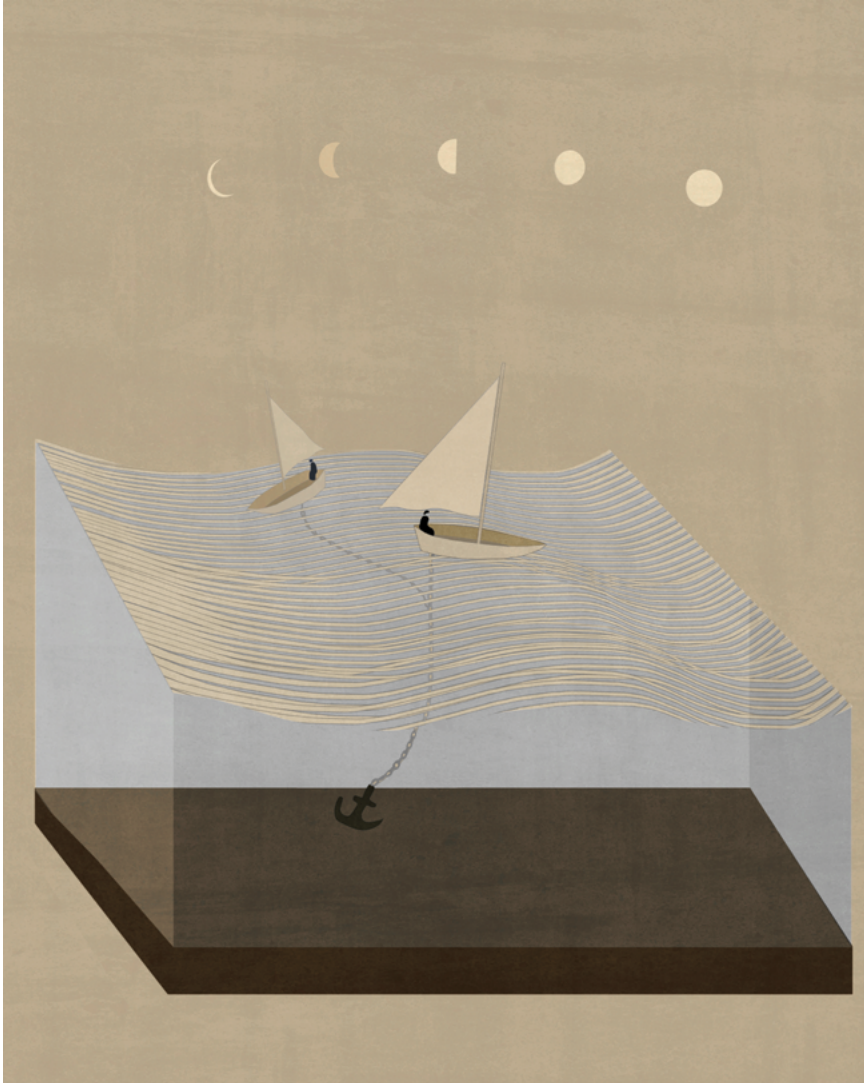
[6] Building from his work in the seminal article *Strength of Weak Ties* sociologist Mark Granovetter states in his book *Getting a Job* that "when it comes to finding out about new jobs – or, for that matter, new information, or new ideas – 'weak ties' are always more important than strong ties."

linked to the potential for convergence. The square and other social objects are stages for these serendipitous encounters, but they are not self-sustaining. One must continually draw people from their private spheres to the common arena by providing incentives to meet and share. [6]

The word serendipity is befitting to describe these meetings as they need to be without an agenda. Creative minds are familiar with the innovative potential of convergence across backgrounds, belonging and disciplines—if anything, this knocking of heads drives them. Perhaps that is why creatives are so disproportionately likely to seek out coworking spaces.

There is an exhilaration in the daily occurrence of these no-agenda meetings, reaping benefits by simply being in the same place. Serendipity alludes to a fortunate happenstance, but in our situation it is not necessarily a random one. There is a dualism to the work of stimulating serendipity; it needs to be agenda-free yet happen at a high frequency.

So-called "water-cooler conversations" are of the essence in all aspects of convergence, and in the maintaining of community and the feeling of belonging to a larger entity. There is a difference between asking to be included and simply being included. This is one of the many reasons social objects have a critical function —they naturally facilitate inclusion, acting as social anchors open and available to all residents. We gravitate towards them.

Be a mindful new kid in town
As the question of branching out or scalability comes up, one should become increasingly aware of the unique qualities and shortcomings of a place. Avoid the mistake of making copies of yourself or others, as each new

space comes with an entirely new set of prerequisites and possibilities. Coworking spaces should have a deep knowledge and understanding of local culture and history, constantly addressed and reinforced, day-to-day.

Every new prospect requires this heightened state of understanding, a concern for what is local—the place and of course, the people. This show of interest and eagerness to grasp can lead to not only credibility and trust, but also the ability to make a better fit for the residents, who are always at the centre of what we do. A coworking space is a living organism that never stands still, an ever-changing format fashioned in collaboration between the host and the current residents, who will inevitably keep changing. We are the music producers working on a song with a band. When it is done, another band moves into the studio with a completely different sound. Embracing the capricious quality of our work means we can better help our residents to thrive.

"When I'm working on a problem, I never think about beauty. I think only of how to solve the problem. But when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it's wrong." – Richard Buckminster Fuller

"Design is a verb, not a noun." – Ilse Crawford

Keeping the mindsets from the last chapter in mind, we now dig deeper and make things more tangible. Using the 10 following tools allows you to roll up your sleeves and get started transforming your space right away.
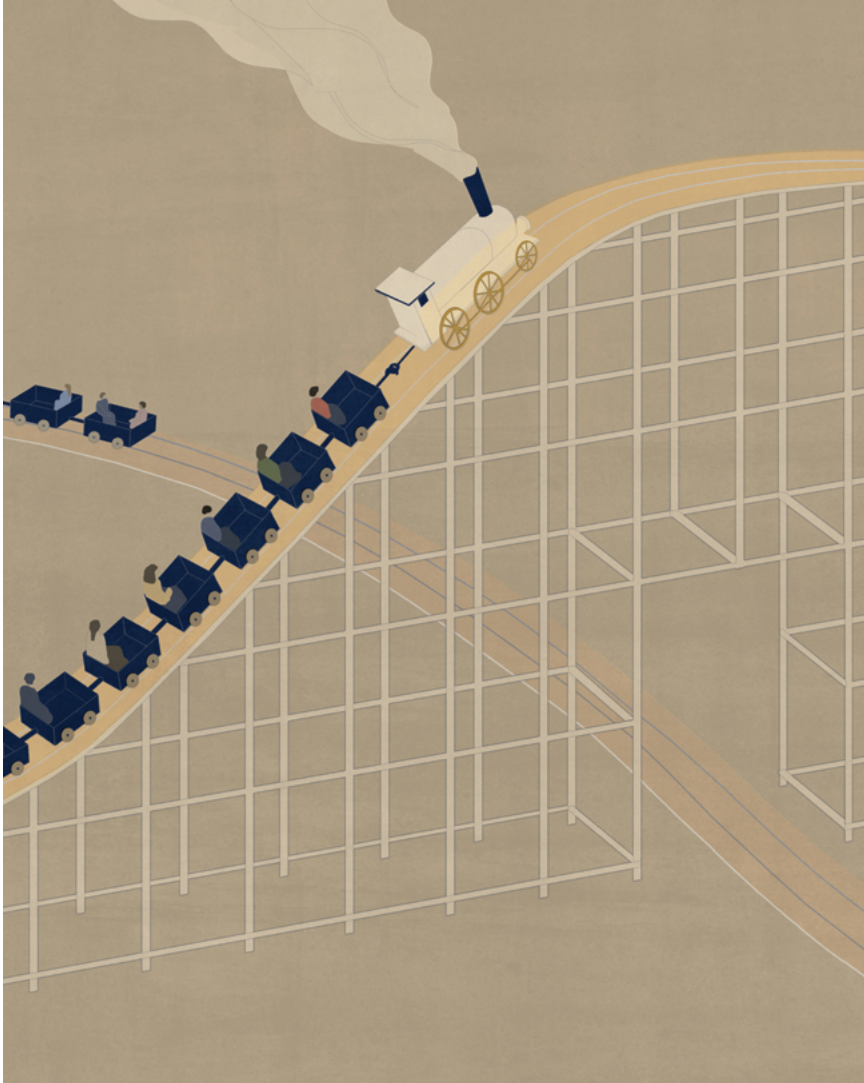
Be present
Presence should be at the core of your activities as a team. It is our prime tool for managing and reasserting a dynamic community where the residents feel appreciated and seen.

This is a valuable principle to keep in mind as you meet your community 1:1. Being available, approachable and present, not to mention visible, means your residents will be able to keep in touch for daily banter and voicing their concerns and ideas. As you amass this kind of daily input, you are able to make sense of the state of things and hence make better decisions. You will know where things are flowing well and which matters are pressing.

Keep your staff within arm's reach of the residents. As we have already discussed, one way of doing this is by replacing the traditional reception with a more non-hierarchical front desk. Keep its design informal and atmosphere easy-going in order to invite conversation and interaction. Erasing the boundaries between organisation and resident emphasises the importance of and belief in dialogue and equality.

Always co-own
The word co-ownership implies sharing of both benefits and responsibilities.

By asserting the notion of co-ownership in a coworking space, you can forge even stronger bonds between the residents and the community as a whole. As previously mentioned, you can encourage emotional investment in the community by including its future residents in the process of ideation and decision-making in the early stages of planning. But tapping into the pool of residents for insight should not stop there.

Coworking spaces are in constant transformation and as its residents come and go, the needs of the community change. Maintaining a meaningful emotional involvement from the residents, therefore, relies on a constant reevaluation of the status quo. Look for new co-creation opportunities to regularly replenish and reaffirm the sense of building the community together. It is a valuable tool in establishing trust between residents and the management.

A strong emotional investment among the residents enhances the commitment to maintaining a healthy community from both a relational and spatial perspective. The act of maintenance is one of care. When people form an emotional bond to a shared space and a community, it will implore them to better care for it and its people. To take responsibility for it. [1]

The same can be said for the caretakers. If they are not only on board with their employer but also the values and worldview of the larger community, the work might hold a higher purpose. In the caretaker's case, maintenance will inevitably be a way of caring for both the people and the building.

Co-ownership also implies a democratic approach to community-building. We have already identified some ways in which this can affect the mindset of a society or organisation. One way of physically manifesting the idea is by flattening the visual hierarchy. Setting a standard for residents' visual communication enforces an aesthetic and idealistic coherence while letting everyone know they are equally important. A 'no-logo on the facade' policy or a shared typography for signs on office doors are some ways to maintain this. The whole is more important than its parts.

In so many ways, a sense of co-ownership plays into pride of belonging to something good, perhaps even great. If this pride revolves around a specific place, residents are more likely to talk about it. It means they are

[1] In his book *The Inevitable: Understanding the 12 Technological Forces That Will Shape Our Future* the American writer and technologist Kevin Kelly very wisely notes that "everything, without exception, requires additional energy and order to maintain itself."

also prone to inviting people in, supporting our greater goal of creating convergence within the community, and stimulating synergies between our residents and external parties.

Consider quality
When considering the architectural aspects and design of the coworking space, it's wise to think of each room in the following way: Which surfaces and objects will be touched or used by many and which are merely seen? How do people move around spaces or between them? Where do they stay for long periods and where do they only pass by fleetingly?

The answers to these questions will indicate the different requirements you will need to consider when planning the space. A general rule is to invest in things that will have a lot of wear and cut costs for those less used. This goes for furniture and materials both.

With flex desks, where people come and go, one might emphasise flexibility in storage and workstations. A sober and practical atmosphere encourages the additional use of shared spaces to create a fulfilling service experience. This option allows for cheaper solutions, as it simply will not see the daily wear of surfaces and materials.

On the other hand, a fixed desk or office begs for more durable solutions. The question of quality arises. Where should one invest? Points that see a high frequency of contact are the ones you should allocate funds to. Here, one does well to invest in good design that has a timeless flair and proven ability to withstand the passing of time. These objects often lift the perceived quality of general space, creating a sense of pride in their users too, rightfully feeling they are worthy of good design.

Additionally, quality materials and objects will require much less maintenance and service, as they are less likely to need replacement within a few years, making your job a lot easier. This is an issue inherently connected to the subject of time and longevity. As we have previously stated, coworking spaces are arenas of constant change. If your objective is to exist in years or decades, choose materials that allow you to maintain rather than dispose.

What is exciting and new at the moment surely will not be in a year or two, so choosing classic and robust designs allows for a more graceful passing of time and a more sustainable approach. Time is fleeting, but a mix of functional and fine furniture and objects usually last. That being said, a workplace is not a home, and keeping a balance between the two allows for people to not feel intimidated nor nonchalant or reckless towards the objects around them.

Appreciate tactility

Think about tactility [2] in surfaces that people frequently interact with or touch. In other words, do not only consider these from a purely functional point of view. Imagine their potential to forge meaningful and stimulating relationships between object and user, hence taking the aesthetic experience beyond the superficial. A tactile approach to design allows residents to feel the subtle care and consideration behind each choice.

In current architectural discourse, we speak about tactility beyond the sense of touch. It is a term that includes daylight and artificial light, air quality, temperature and other seemingly practical aspects that have the potential to enhance and impact quality of life in our work environment. Not to mention its obvious poetic potential in a space.

[2] In his book *The Eye of the Skin* the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa talks about the importance of the materials that touches our bodies – "We remember through our bodies as much as through our nervous system"

Add transformative elements

At least part of a coworking space should aspire to be adaptable to the current users' needs. This doesn't mean abandoning a visual coherence, but rather including a few transformative elements that will enable the residents to customise their surroundings to their preference. By doing so, you endow them with a sense of ownership of the space. It is the extension of a gesture, one of consideration and generosity.

These tokens of transformation can come into play by adding customisable furniture and accessories to the office. An example could be including a shelving system where the resident can add shelves, cupboards or other units according to their preferences and needs. The addition of sit/stand desks or adjustable height chairs also contributes to a sense of adaptability.

Introduce adaptable elements to meeting rooms as every congregation has a unique character. Some thrive in performing and being seen, while others require the option of closing off from the rest of the world. A simple thing like curtains can accommodate this concern. Consider transformation in shared spaces too. An example could be the addition of modular ottomans in a common area that residents can arrange to accommodate their party. These solutions support a wide range of contexts and situations, enabling a high level of flexibility.

Set out table lamps or lights that people can take to their desk or office if needed. Allow residents to individualise their spaces, to hang visual elements or organise their belongings in storage. What people keep in their space says a lot about who they are and it is one of the many ways in which they connect in the workplace.
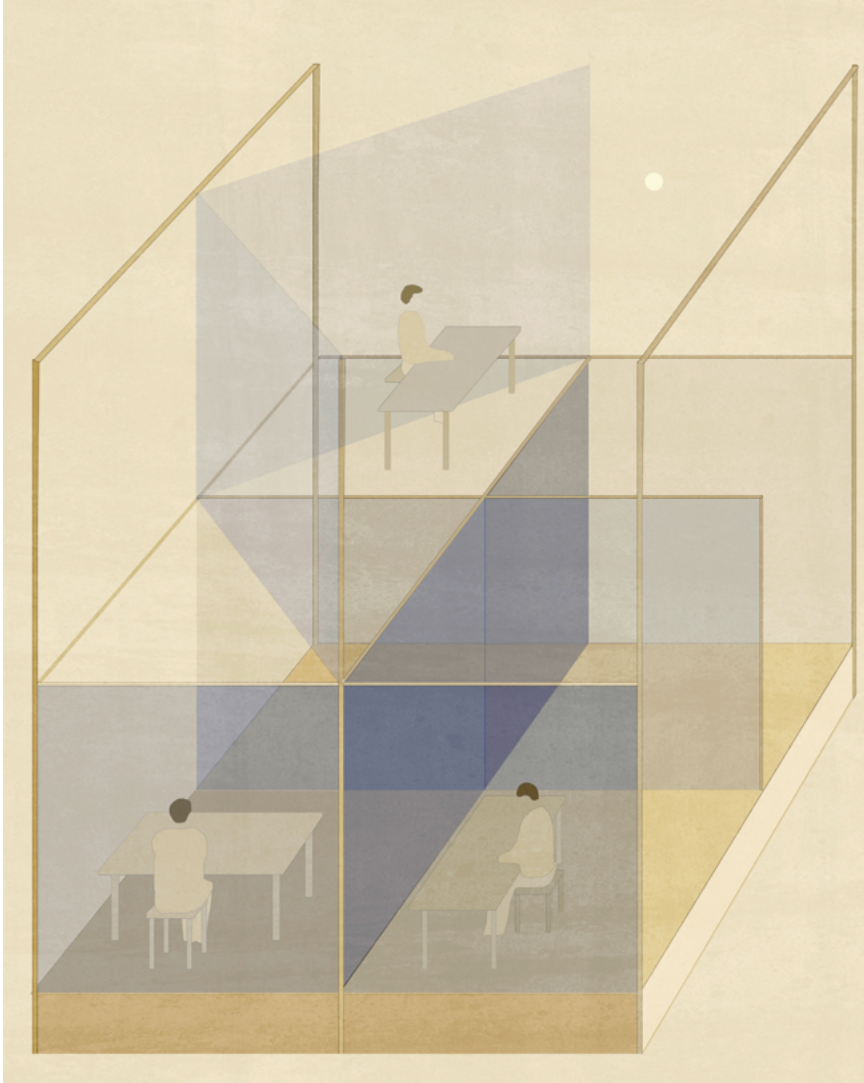
Favour sliding doors

A thought to consider on the issue of stimulating meetings across the community is to design for people to leave the office—to wander. The term implies "walking around slowly in a relaxed way or without any clear purpose or direction" and, furthermore, a state of curiosity and openness. This open-endedness is favourable to serendipity and the occurrence of agenda-less meetings.

Address this in a spatial context by designing for open doors. An open door is more likely to both invite in and inspire venturing out. A practical application of this theory could be sliding doors in offices, as these are much more likely to stay open than a door that automatically shuts.

An open door, in turn, implies a lowered guard—it welcomes engagement. The imagined line between private and shared space becomes fuzzier, allowing for more casual exchange as well as a higher frequency of curiosity-driven interactions within the community.

Empower residents with a privacy switch

Continuing the train of thought, one has to consider the issue of boundaries—physical and mental. A way of embodying this subject is by thinking of thresholds and their many roles within the coworking space. An open door suggests a lower threshold for engaging in conversation with another resident. Similarly, curtains closed in a meeting room suggest a high threshold to interrupt without purpose.

These are some ways of designing for participation and privacy, as they are equally necessary to maintain a relatively functional and harmonious life at the office. The latter example speaks of visibility, a powerful tool when facilitating both privacy and openness.

Do not underestimate the importance of designing for a sense of being secure and comfortable while being
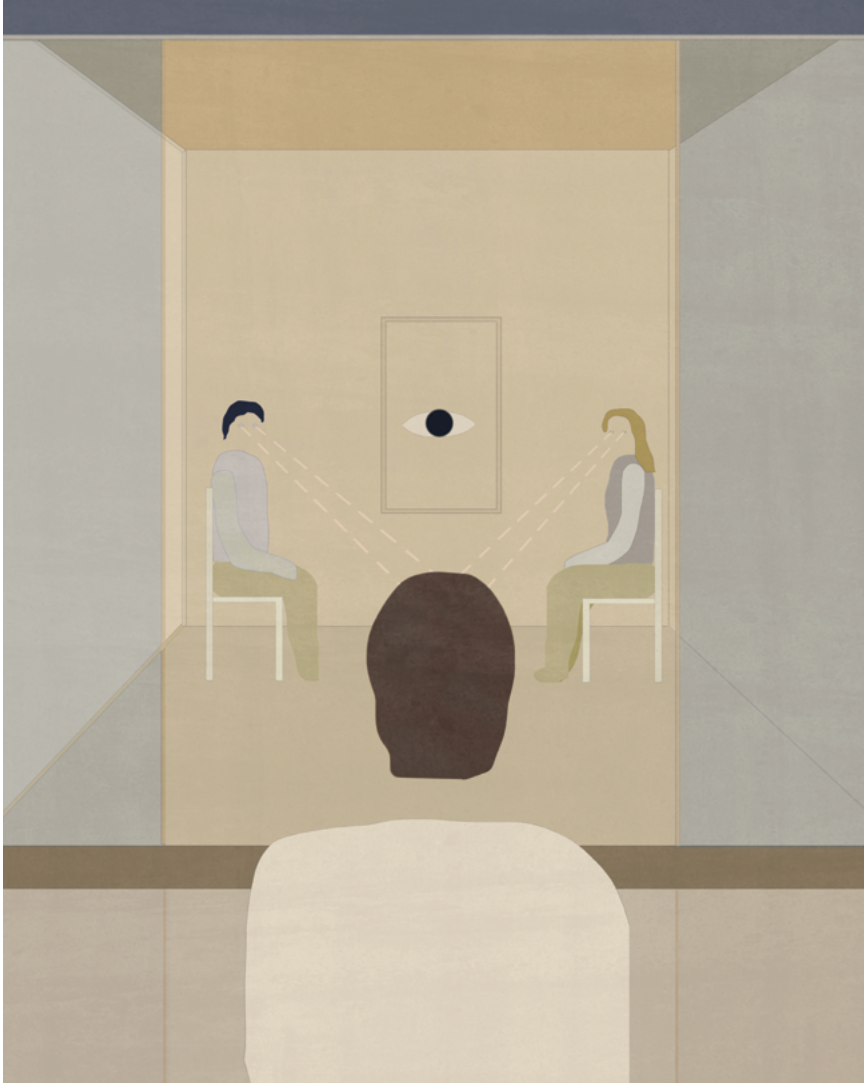
[3] The Grand Master of Memory Ed Cooke spoke at The Conference 2014 about how a good party is one that takes place in multiple rooms. This is because a change of scenary gives our brain multiple rooms to connect our memories to. In a professional setting the same is true for our ability to learn and be creative.

open, when the privacy switch is off. By raising the floor of offices one step, you allow their inhabitants to meet pass-ers-by at eye level. Not only does it eliminate intimidation between the two, it also plays into the perceived feeling of safety in your own space.

Design for variety and add sugar cubes
Building on the notion of curiosity, openness and low-ered thresholds, it is natural to underline the impor-tance of building for a variety of situations. In order for people to wander, they need something to wander to. We call these mechanisms "sugar cubes", as they are social objects or places that draw people to them.

Designing for variation aligns with the mission of offering flexibility as part of an excellent service expe-rience. Having the possibility of venturing between the work desk, phone booth, meeting room, amphitheatre or loveseats for private conversations and casual lounges is key, as it addresses a range of needs head-on. They facilitate a change of scenery [3] and thereby another kind of experience, another kind of meeting between minds. Design for a variety of situations so that people might see themselves and each other in more than one.

Creating compelling local revolving points allows one to harbour strong synergies. The kitchen or coffee maker is one of these mundane mechanisms that easily leads to convergence. These maintain the fundamental function of water-cooler conversations by enabling the frequent and casual meetings taking place here.

Utilise social objects
As we have already mentioned, people need a reason to leave the office and non-residents need reasons to come

and visit. For that to happen, we need to be aware of what the sugar cubes are and how often they are needed. Think about them as social objects people flock to and have a conversation around. They can also be attractive in their own right and flair. They are places of attraction and aggregation.

By combining the sugar cubes with other essential functions in the building, you can elevate their impact. For example, a restaurant not only serves the purpose of providing tasty meals to the residents and visitors—it is a platform for convergence across the community. It enables a change of scenery and lowers the threshold for interaction significantly, perhaps making it the most relaxed space in the building.

Likewise, an amphitheatre or lecture hall can serve the basic function of assembly and sharing of information through talks and other events. But it also supports the convergence between residents and external parties, allowing outside perspectives a presence in the space. This encourages a sharing of information and ideas that exceed the community. It also relates to the issue of co-ownership, residents can organise their own events, attracting co-workers in the space.

In cognitive sociology, social objects are conceived as "objects that gain meaning through processes of reification, for example, a ritual". On Twitter it is the tweet, on Tumblr it is the post, on Instagram it is the photo and on Spotify it is the playlist. In a coworking space, this could be the food we have for lunch, the cappuccino we sip in the morning or art that challenges our perspectives. In the design of social networks, there is a rule of thumb that the more frequently a social object appears, the more successful the platform is.

The purpose of the social object is the convergence of people, knowledge and ideas. For it is the fuel of innovation.
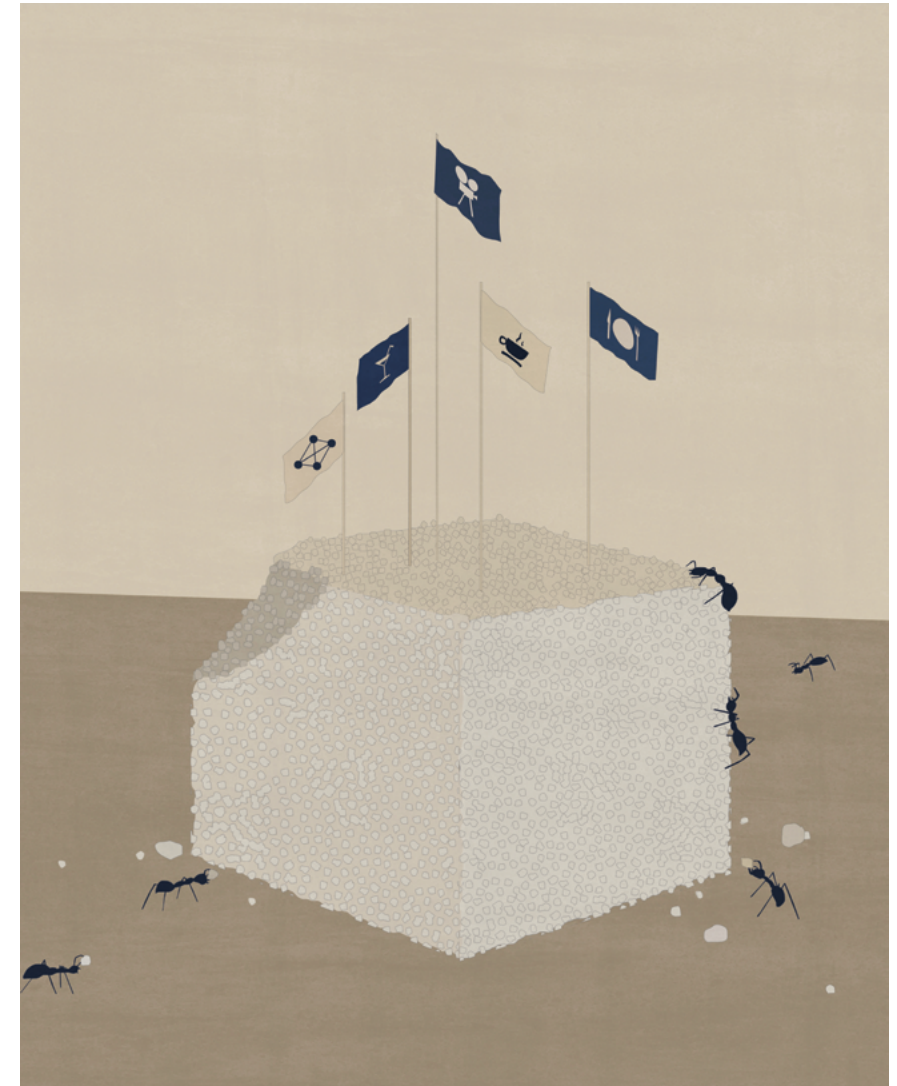
Orchestrate the square

Ultimately, the square is intrinsically linked to the concept of social objects. Yet, it holds a more complex function in the community. The square is often one of the first shared spaces you encounter—the beating heart of the building just as in the context of a city—or a crossroads between floors and functions. All roads should lead to the square to activate its full potential. In other words, you should have to pass the square to get anywhere.

This central location makes it an ideal point of access to and distribution of information relevant to the residents; events, invitations, practicalities, etc. There are, of course, many ways of going about this, both analogue and digital. Maintaining a strong physical and visual presence at the square allows the administration to deliver information directly to its residents in a hospitable and personal manner that sticks.

A square should never be constant nor passively existing, it is a place of happening and of rousing action. Its function is not only one of transfer from one place to another. Rather, it could be a place of waiting, welcoming visitors, casual meetings, events, parties, ping pong or other goings-on. It should be a place you want to spend time, a place of participation.

On the other hand, this participation should be considered from several points of view. Just as a successful square facilitates a myriad of functions, it should also enable a multitude of ways to participate. You should be able to be at the centre of what is going on as well as at the periphery of it. To both linger and to pass by. A considered use of shadow and corners allows one to be at the edge of things [4], yet part of it. We have a tendency to gather at the edges [5] of spaces where we feel safe and protected.

[4] "We might think we want to be in the center of things in order to meet other people, but when it comes to space it's actually on the edge that things happen" – Ewa Westermark at Deep Cuts #2 2019

[5] "I think that a lot of the interesting things that happen, happen on the borders of things and in the places where different areas overlap." – Brian Eno

[6] "In a fragment of a second you can understand: Things you know, things you don't know, things you don't know that you don't know, conscious, unconscious. Architecture to me has the same kind of capacity. It takes longer to capture, but the essence to me is the same. I call this atmosphere. When you experience a building and it gets to you. It sticks in your memory and your feelings." – Peter Zumthor

Think in subsections, considering the square as a microcosmos accommodating a variety of situations within one space. This evokes the image of the square in Mediterranean countries, where it is essentially home to a wide range of activities and functions in daily life.

The square of a coworking space should speak to similarly complex layers of function and meaning. For example, a variation of seated and standing situations should appeal to both groups and individuals, so they can find what they identify with at the given time. Could certain pieces of furniture be mobile in order to transform into the constellations needed? Or stackable to be easily put away or into use?

Furthermore [6], the atmosphere is a powerful tool in the design of the square. Consider this question: What kind of atmosphere would provoke and support synergies we are trying to create best? Is it calm and collected? Is it bustling? Is it professional or relaxed? What music do we play? How many lumens do we beam from the lighting? Consciously working with ambience can support one's identity as a community or organisation, drawing residents to the square or, worst case, driving them away from it.

Coworking spaces evolve and transform as time passes. One should build for longevity by investing in details that matter while staying agile and flexible on the subject of new needs and requirements. People come and go, the composition of your residents changes, affecting the activities, conversations and ventures taking place within their four walls. You are the only constant in the equation, ceaselessly stirring the pot, bridging the gaps. This constantness is deeply connected to your mindset and values, the DNA of your business or organisation.