



Room to move

FRANK LEKANNE DEPREZ TALKS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF SPACE FOR THE WAY PEOPLE FUNCTION WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS.

BY HANNA EMMERING

The financial crisis continues to rage, and companies are anxiously looking for new and sustainable business ideas and models that will work. However, the fact that the products and services springing from those new business ideas are developed by the brainpower of people in an organizational context is often overlooked. Late last year a book was published that offers a tried and trusted method to create “a spatial organizational arrangement” for these troubled times. Entitled *Geef ze de ruimte* (Give them space), it was written in Dutch by four authors: René Tissen, Frank Lekanne Deprez, Rosalie Burgers and Frank Halmans. Lekanne Deprez answered some questions.

What kind of space are we talking about?

There are three kinds of space that need to be organized: the physical space of place and time, the virtual space of digital technology and the mental space of human perception and experience. The idea is that employees are given enough space, in all three senses of the word, to execute the tasks they have been charged with. And to do so differently, in a manner that comes naturally to them.

Who needs this space, and why?

It seems obvious that you need space to perform well within an organization – but it isn't. Most people do not get the space they need. What's tricky is that, if you don't make space manifest, the chance that things go wrong is considerable. The financial services field is a case in point. Professionals and knowledge workers in particular would benefit from operating in a clearly defined space. Once they understand this and feel challenged, they'll start to move around and push back the boundaries.

Why is space so important?

We have organized everything – except space. It's the last fordable place in the world of management, and it offers a world of opportunity. Usually, organizations only stress the restrictions of space and how these can be overcome. Too often, the possibilities and opportunities that space offers are overlooked.

What's wrong with the current situation?

The call for new forms of management – or for no management at all – and for new ways of working and organizing is getting ever louder. Yet the structuring of an organization is often bottom of the list. It seems that one structure is just replaced by another. The expression ‘rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic’ springs to mind. And we all know how effective that would have been!

What precisely would you like to change?

Organizations are messy; we'd better get used to that. The realization of this is the essence of the principle of spatial design. Our method of designing organizations leaves them incomplete. The point is that professionals and knowledge workers are expected to excel in such messy environments. At present, professionals decide for themselves when, where and how value can be added. Blueprints and rigid structures usually have an adverse effect. Spatial organization can create the right conditions and give people the space they need to explore and use new knowledge, skills and technology. ✖

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