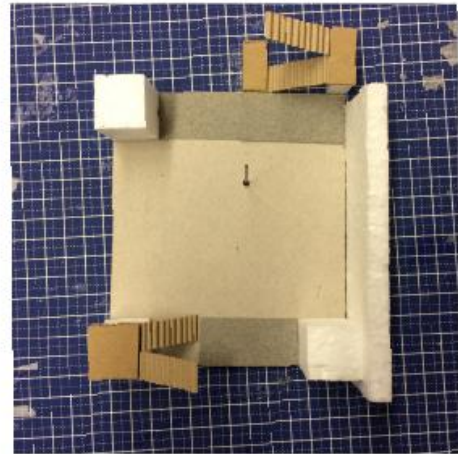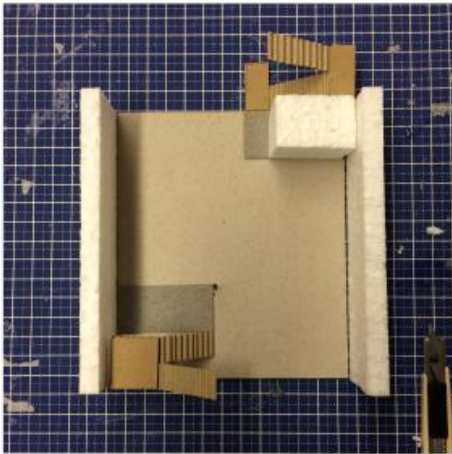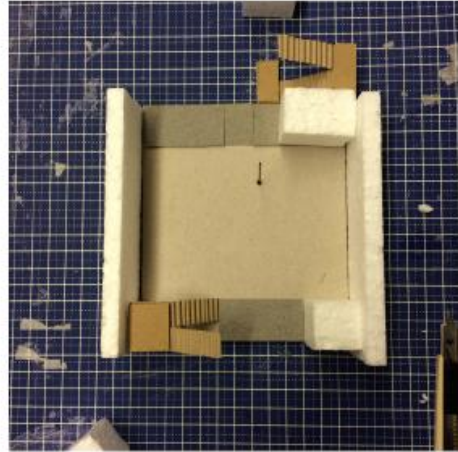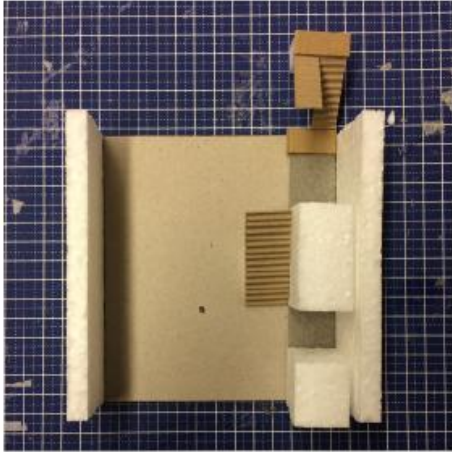# RETHINK THE DESIGN OFFICE
– Reflection

EXPLORE LAB 30

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Problem statement

Businesses grow, at least that's what they aim for. In architecture that is not any difference, most architectural offices start out with a single group of likeminded people, a team of equals. There is no need for any organizational structure and decisions are made by consensus. When the office grows this often happens according to established corporate structures, that are mainly based on efficiency growth and stability. These structures don't appear to be ideal to foster creativity.

Methods

The aim of the research is to understand the structures that make up the design office and how they influence creativity. The research part of my thesis consists of two parts, the first is the literature research building the frame of reference, mainly focused around organizational innovation and the creative work environment. The second part is a case study where three architectural firms that are deemed innovative are researched.

In the design part of my thesis I aim to implement the gained understanding in the creative work environment into architectural design by designing an office for a firm that developed their structures in order to foster creativity and architectural thinking.

summary

The question central in this research was: *What are the structures used by successful innovative firms and how can the understanding of these structures help growing firms to maintain their innovative nature?*

Three environmental factors for creativity have been defined: Group creativity, autonomy and resources. These elements could be the basis for an office structure that supports creativity in an optimal and enduring way.

Three case-studies have been conducted among innovative firms with an innovative record. In the analysis of the cases five important structural factors where identified: collaboration, communal identity, collective working, connection with social resources and creative space.

These five structural elements support a way of working that facilitate the environmental factors for creativity. To Summarize this, the innovative success of these firms can be explained by their 'collective character'.

Most Young firms have an environment very much suited for creativity and innovation, although they might not have the experience or capacity to develop these. When firms grow they do so along a number of paths these paths are 'one way streets'. As a side effect these bring systems into the organization that could be counterproductive to innovation.

When innovation is the main purpose a collective structure is more suitable for this than the traditional business structure. The firms incorporated in this case study have found a way to grow without losing the characteristics needed to stay innovative.

Process

My process hasn't been flawless, I knew quite clearly what my frustration was and thus the problem I was aiming to solve. I was desperate to find my solutions by looking at architectural firms. By using the skills I developed in architecture school I wanted to understand the relation between their processes and their office (layout, construction, program etc.). My tutor at the time thought I needed to find my solution in literature by understanding the work already done in this field.

Also because of the current corona situation getting into contact with firms proved to be very difficult, going there was almost impossible. This meant that my data was very limited because most firms don't publish any of their methods and internal functioning.

Very late in the process of my research I found how an understanding of the established research on organizational creativity could help me to understand my findings in the case study.

This moment proved to be the most valuable lesson of my graduation because it gave me an understanding in how the creative work environment functions in the real world.

Design

My design features a design office in the heart of Rotterdam. The design office is hosted by a collective of architects, this group is the embodiment of my research and they enable me to bring elements socio-theoretical in the design that would be difficult to design for otherwise.

The office that is designed could be seen as an experiment in what the work environment would look like if we would base our design only on creative productivity.

Where the research touches on various fields, the design only represents a spatial representation. This meant that in the sketch phase of the design it was easy to fall into bold naïve spatial design.

The understanding gained in the final phase of my research helped me to understand that the physical implications of the creative work environment are really subtle. By boiling down the design to its essence the subtle distinction of this work environment from the corporate environment we all know is highlighted.

Relation to the curriculum

There is a gap between architecture education and architectural practice. This project enables to bridge this gap by looking at the practice from the sideline and question it with an academic mindset. During my master program I have worked in the studios of urban architecture and interiors, learning about the importance of the architectural narrative and its implementation in simple but precise architectural means.

This idea shaped me as an architect and also is an important theme in my translation of the design office where simple means are used to create conditions for different workstyles and creative processes.

Relation to the studio

By doing my graduation within the studio of explorelab I had the chance to work on my personal fascination for the workplace and creativity. But this also meant that I worked alone. Within my research into the creative work environment I found how important social interaction is for the creative process.

Ironically a few months in this thesis, at home due to the current pandemic I was looking for interaction with other students as much as possible. It helped me regain my creativity and inspiration. This situation gave me an idea about what kind of architect I would like to be and that I have to find a place that fosters the same ideas about collective creativity.

Relevance of the work

The importance of social interaction and collective identity for creativity is not yet recognized in established practice. The fairly new concept of the architectural collective could change this. The architectural collective is a management structure that lacks the proper research. Where the extend of this thesis can only recognize the similarities between theory on organizational creativity and the collective. My hope is that further research into this topic will be able to bring about a real change to the management structures of our practice.

Tutors

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