

Hierarchy in office buildings

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Existing Case Analysis:

The new office building of the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment



Fig.1 the new office building of the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment

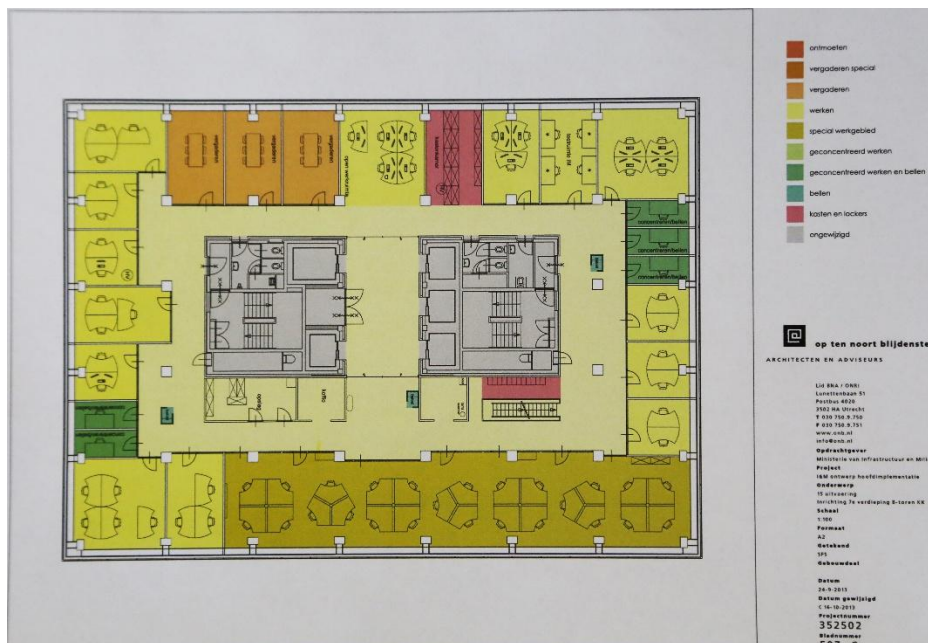
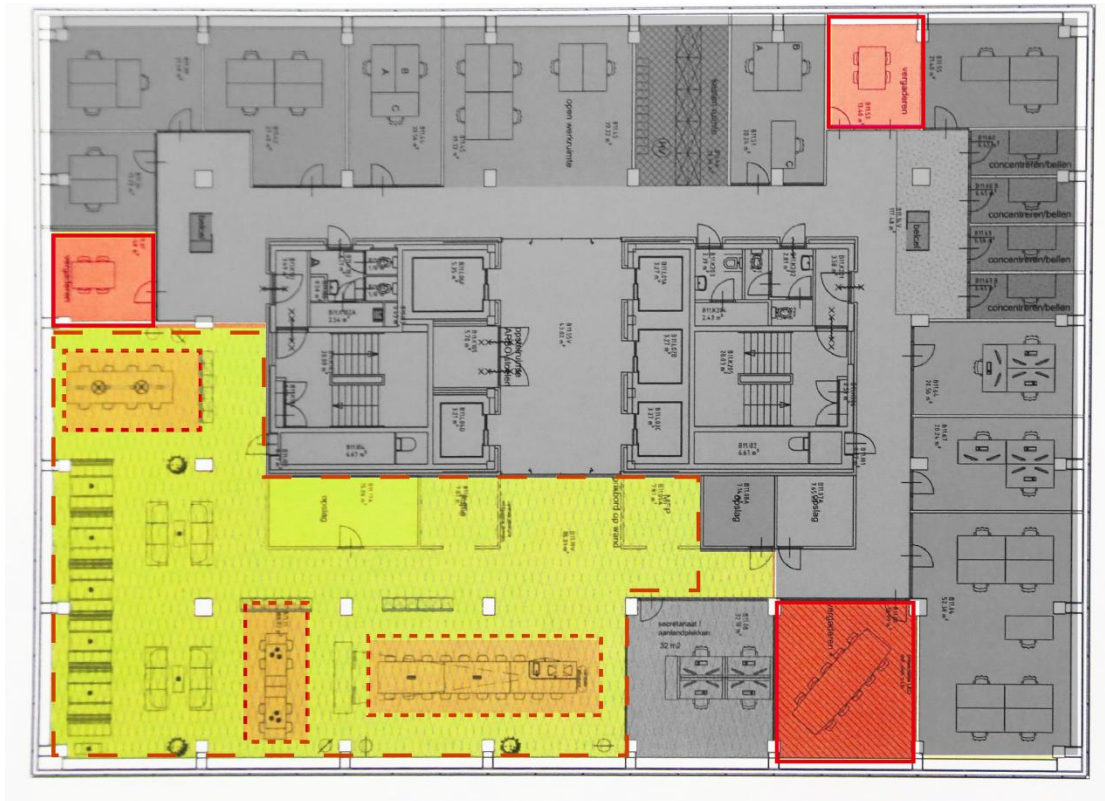


Fig.2 A typical floor plan (the 7th floor plan)

The Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment is committed to improving quality of life, access and mobility in a clean, safe and sustainable environment. The Ministry strives to create an efficient network of roads, railways, waterways and airways, effective water management to protect against flooding, and improved air and water quality. The ministry built their new office building in Koningskade 4, Den Haag (Fig.1), it is a reconstruction project of a existing building, and the original building was built in the 1960s. We had a visit to investigate the hierarchy and organization system in this office building.



- hierarchy 1 : most informal
- hierarchy 2 : informal
- hierarchy 3 : formal
- hierarchy 3 : most formal
- type 1 : leisure meeting space
- type 2 : open meeting space
- type 3 : private meeting space

Fig.3 meeting spaces in 11th floor

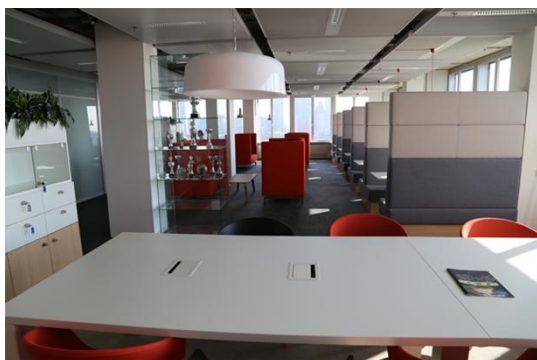


Fig.4 informal meeting space

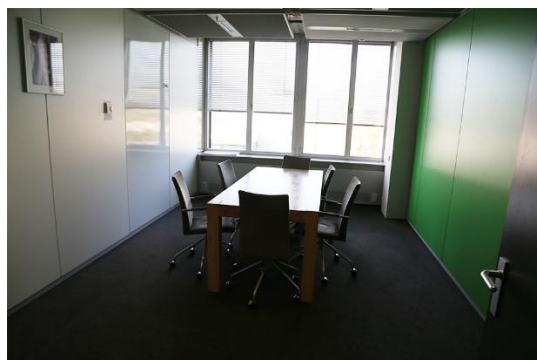


Fig.5 one type of the formal meeting space

The meeting spaces play a very important role in this office building, in this floor (Fig3,4,5), approximate half of the acreage used for informal and formal meeting. Hierarchies in meeting space are divided very obviously, which means people can



- hierarchy 1 : open and flexible
- hierarchy 1 : close and flexible
- hierarchy 1 : close and fixed
- type 1 : open work space
- type 2 : big group (>6 persons) work space
- type 3 : small group work space
- type 4 : private (solo) work space

Fig.6 work spaces in 11th floor



Fig.7 small group work space



Fig.8 open work space

choose different meeting environment depends on a variety types of working assignments. It can promote the efficiency of working. However, these hierarchies in meeting space could not produce estrangements between staffs, oppositely, people

look these space as a precious interactive space for each other, especially in informal meeting spaces. The hierarchies in work spaces are not very obvious, because the ministry and the architect prefer to alleviate the notion of hierarchy in people's minds when they working in this building. So, even there are many types of work spaces, the hierarchies are no so many.

Actually, three-quarter of the work places are flexible in the building (Fig6,7,8), which means people can choose wherever they want in most situations. The typical model in the building is that people take away all the working documents at the end of a day, then, at the beginning of next day, people can choose a new room and seat which depends on the working assignment of that day. As a result, although in different rooms the capacity of people are different, varying from 1 to more than 6, the hierarchy is the same. This difference of capacity is only because of the types of working, for instance, if you need collaborate with two of your team members, you can choose a room for a small group in the morning, while if another staff has to really focus on a complex program and its output for a long time, he or she can find an individual small room today. Another aspect of alleviating hierarchy is the personal acreage in these rooms, which means the average square meters of each person in all the different types of rooms is the same, so even one can occupy a single room, but the acreage of this room is only half of a two-person-room.

Many office building arranged the most important offices on the top floor, which is a common sense of hierarchy in office building design. But in this building, the top floor is a restaurant for all the staffs(Fig 9), this place offer lunch between 11am to 2pm, and open for the whole day, but nobody prefer to work here. For one reason the building has much extra work space, for another, there is no working atmosphere in this space.



Fig.9 the top floor in the office building

Comparative Case Analysis: Larkin Administration Building, Buffalo, New York.

The Larkin Building was designed in 1904 by Frank Lloyd Wright and built in 1906 for the Larkin Soap Company of Buffalo, New York. It was the first open work space office building in the world. The organization of work space and the decoration are customized for the administration ministry of Larkin Company. Comparing to the office building of the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment, the hierarchy is a significant characteristic of this building.



Fig.10 view from Darwin Martin's desk facing the main floor light court.
source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*



Fig.11 metal desk with attached chair folded
source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*



Fig.12 the inspiration slogan on walls
source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*

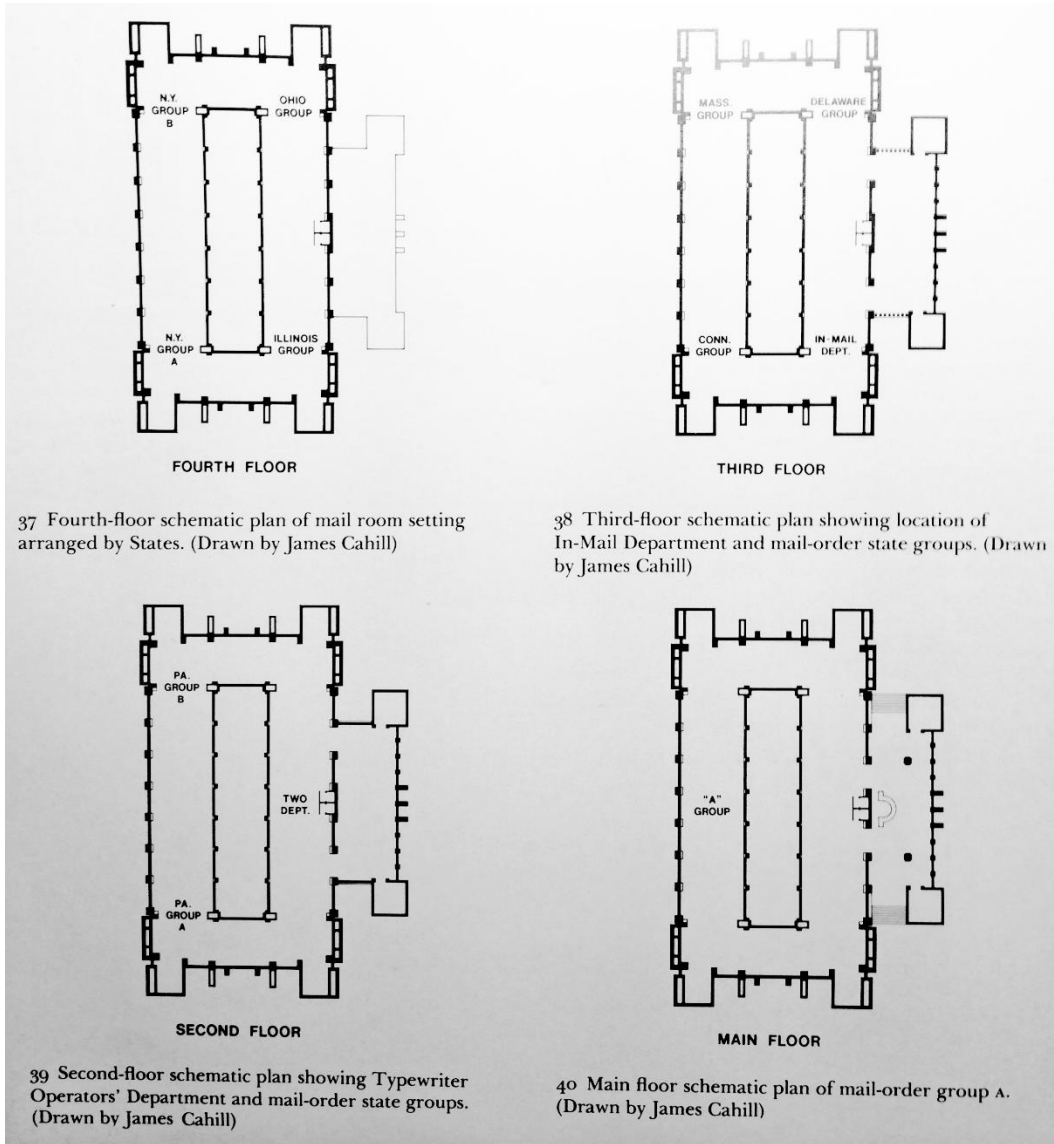


Fig.13 the plans of work groups in Larkin Administration Building
 source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*



Fig.14 typewriter operators' department on the second floor
 source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*

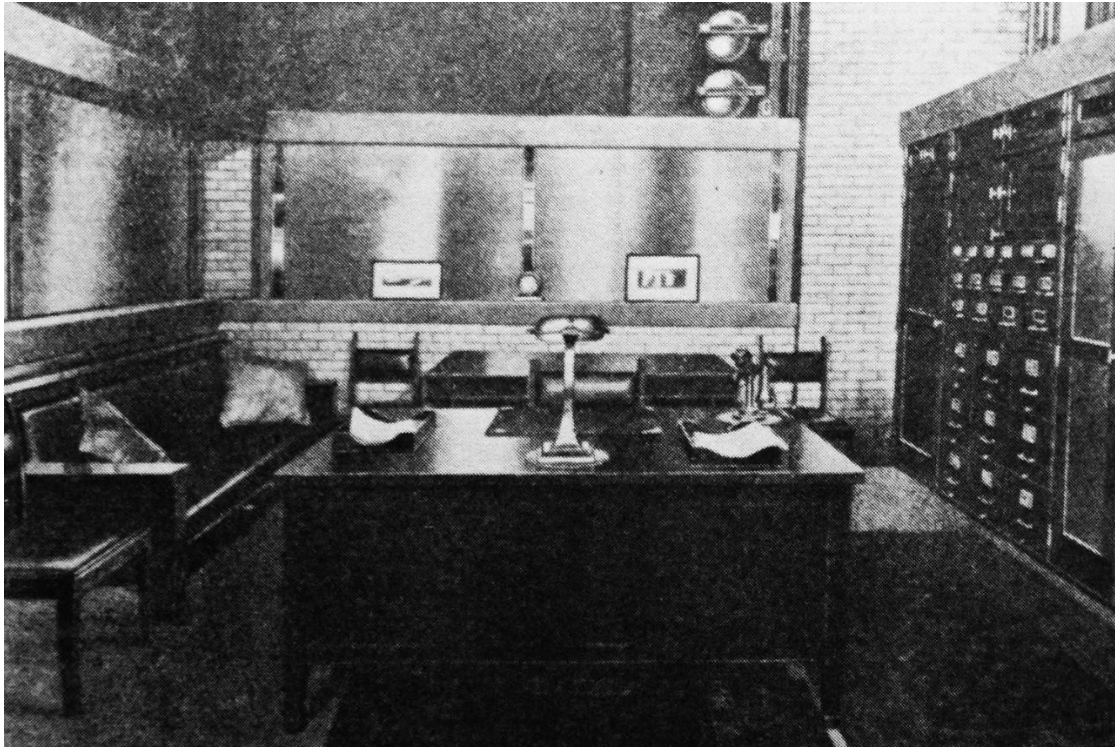


Fig. 15 office of John D. Larking
source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*



Fig.16 office of Charles, John, Jr., and Harry Larking
source: *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building*

In the Larking Building, hierarchy is a tool that administrators control the workers and promoting efficiency of them. In terms of furniture design, Wright was proud of the easy cleaning made possible by his design for folding chairs that cantilevered from most metal desks, but in use these chairs allowed only a limited arc of movement and may have been uncomfortable over the course of a full workday¹ (Fig.11). These unchangeable furniture are reflecting a hierarchy between top administrators and ordinary workers. The ornament of Larkin Building tended to stimulate working enthusiasm of employees or advertise the culture of the company, which is a symbol of hierarchy (Fig.12). A view from Darwin Martin's desk facing the main floor light court (Fig.10) shows how the manager try to supervise the workers. Darwin Martin was one of the partners of Larking Soap Company, he had a work place in front of the light court, the ground of this part was higher than other parts, so it is more convenient for him to supervise those workers². Figure 13 shows the distribution of the mail order state groups on the different floors. Mail would first be sent up to the third floor to the in-mail department and then be distributed to the respective state groups, and the work environment of these groups were more or less the same, every staff looks as a component of a pipeline(Fig.14). While in the management layer, people have their own office, several people shared a single room (Fig.16), with walls to distinguish them to ordinary staffs. A private office with good quality furniture was belonged to the boss John D. Larking (Fig.15).

Conclusion

Comparing to the Larkin Building, the layout of the building of the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment is more freedom, and the notion of hierarchy is not emphasized in it. When zoom out to the passed one century, office buildings were becoming more and more open, and the relationship between workers are more and more equal, these two office buildings are good examples to illustrate this tendency. Also, people have more choice of work spaces in a building depends on different kinds of assignments. However, whether the tendency of abating the notion of hierarchy in work spaces is a promotion of efficiency or not is still need to be considered. For instance, the Larkin Administrative Building was a work space mainly for accounts and typists, these jobs had fixed models and steps and more individual, so hierarchy and social control could promote the efficiency in a large degree, but in the Ministry of Infrastructure & Environment, most staffs in the building are city planner and landscape or infrastructure designer, their assignments are more flexible and creative, a heavy notion of hierarchy maybe cause restrictions to their thinking and communication.

¹ Quinan 1987: 62

² Quinan 1987: 50

Literature

Quinan Jack

1987 *Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin building, Massachusetts*: The MIT Press