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CORPORATE CULTURE AND DESIGN

Theoretical reflections on case-studies in the web design industry

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Synopsis

In this paper we present a framework to study the relationship between culture and office design. Different levels of culture are discussed as well as various ways in which culture can be expressed in the physical work environment. The framework is applied to contemporary changes in organisational culture and office design. Offices of progressive companies seem to be dominated by 'hip' and 'cool' design, colourful materials, luxurious facilities such as gyms or lounge areas and gimmicks such as jukeboxes and pool tables. In this article we try to find out whether these characteristics are the visible expression of a new workplace culture. Should the 'office-de-luxe' be interpreted as a hype or are the inhabiting organisations the forerunners of news ways of working? To answer these questions we take a look at the what-is-called dot-com industry. By studying three cases in the web-design industry we try to achieve two goals: 1) a better understanding of the relation between office design and culture, and 2) exploring new workplace demands and desires. Confronting theory with practice, we observe similarities and contradictions between corporate architecture, identity and culture.

Keywords

Architecture; culture; identity; new economy; offices; workplaces

1   Introduction: just do it!

In 1999 American sports-giant Nike moved into its new European Headquarters at Hilversum in the Netherlands. Nike's business of selling sports goods is directly reflected in the building's campus layout (with a basketball court, fitness studio, tennis court and a racetrack) and its interior (dominated by graphics and video screens showing sports activities). Furthermore, the building mirrors the corporation's distinct ideas about environmental awareness. Nike feels that it has a corporate responsibility in sustainability, which is reflected in the building's 'green' design, reflected for example by the use of recyclable materials, energy-saving lighting, and underground storage of warmth and

coldness. To Nike, this combination of 'green' and 'sporty' elements is a logical outcome of their

corporate culture and not the result of elaborate internal discussions or external pressures such as

legislation. As they say at Nike: 'Just do it!'

Insert figure 1 here (picture of Nike)

The Nike example illustrates that office buildings are more than just a piece of technology, a business

resource or an asset. It shows that office buildings are also reflections of corporate identity and

culture. Just like the architectural remains of past civilisations, office buildings can be regarded as

artefacts. Their interiors, layout and architecture tell something about the social structure and social

relationships of their inhabitants. Deal and Kennedy, writers of one of the first major books on

corporate culture (1982) state: 'a company's investment in bricks and mortar inevitably says

something about its culture'. To managers, this is interesting because buildings and workplaces are

much more visible and tangible than vague mission statements or new management philosophies. For

this reason, most organisations highly value the 'representation qualities' and 'image' of their

buildings. With each move to a new building, huge amounts of money are invested in improved

corporate 'looks'. When designed intelligently, these 'looks' can be used in two ways. First, they can

be used to convey a desired image to the outside world. For visitors, a company's building, entrance

and reception is the first clue of the organisation's 'worldview'. Misfits in the corporate iconography of

the 'front office' and the corporate culture may lead to misinterpretations and an unwanted image to

clients, job candidates and passers-by. Secondly, building design can be used to convey a message

to its own users. Layout, architecture and workplace design can act as a mnemonic or prompter for

desired behaviour and working processes. Thereby, buildings can influence a company's culture.

Space standards, for example, can weaken or strengthen an organisation's norms and values about

hierarchy and status. The general idea is that changes in the physical environment in a right way

might lead to a preferred cultural change, exemplified by architects and consultants who currently

claim to revive or revitalise organisations by the design of new, innovative workplace layouts.

However, changing organisational culture is much more complex than often thought (Gagliardi, 1990).

The major difficulty of culture is that it is intangible and deeply rooted. It is by nature probably the most

persistent part of an organisation. To use its full potential, designers have to move away from the

drawing board and go deep into a client's culture, observing how people behave and getting a clear view of their norms and values. This is, however, easier said than done. Tools and methodologies are sparse and the underlying theoretical knowledge tends to be thin. Therefore, we start this article with a brief discussion of the concept of culture itself. Then we explore the relationship between corporate culture and corporate architecture, first on a general level, second focusing on dot-com companies, illustrated by three case studies. Finally we discuss the results from a theoretical perspective and give recommendations for further research.

2   Culture, symbols and artefacts

In anthropology and business literature, many different definitions of culture exist (an extensive overview can be found in Neuijen, 1992). For example, Hofstede (1991) states that culture is the *collective mental programming* distinguishing one group of people from people in other groups. According to Schein (1992) the essence of culture is to be found in what he terms the *basic assumptions* of a group –a term that cannot be found in Hofstede's work. A common feature of most definitions is that they refer to the norms and values shared by a group of people. These norms and values are expressed by both written (explicit) and unwritten (implicit) rules about how people should behave, interact and work. An informal definition of culture may be: 'the way we do things around here'. For example, in one company it is accepted that employees call their manager by their first name whilst in others it is not. Such a difference has to do with norms and values about how people should interact: do people value formality or not?

According to Schein (1992), norms and values are the result of underlying basic assumptions about fundamental issues such as human nature, human relationships, the nature of reality, time and space, and relationships to the environment (figure 2). These basic assumptions are taken for granted, invisible and preconscious. Values are invisible too, but come up with a greater level of awareness. Most people are for example quite conscious of their values about issues such as interaction ('informal communications are regarded as very important in our company') or hierarchy ('formalities are highly valued in our organisation'). Schein (1992) also argues that culture is expressed in 'artefacts'. Artefacts are the visible expressions of basic assumptions and values. Artefacts may be social (activity patterns, behaviour) or physical. Examples of social artefacts are formal versus informal ways of

communication, fixed or flexible working times, and communal coffee drinking 'rituals' ('everyday at eleven'). Examples of physical artefacts are logos, dress codes and corporate architecture.

Insert figure 2 here (model of Schein)

Crucial question when studying culture is how such a vague phenomenon can be described: how can you characterise a company's culture? Which variables should be looked at? Literature shows that there is a variety of cultural characteristics that can be studied. Each expert on culture has his or her own list of 'cultural dimensions'. Best-known, however, are the dimensions of Hofstede. On the basis of an analysis of attitudes and opinions of IBM employees in 50 different countries, Hofstede (1991) concluded that cultural differences particularly focus on social equality, the relationship between individual and group, the roles of men and women, and how to cope with uncertainty. As a consequence he distinguishes four dimensions of cultural differences:

- *Large versus small power distance*: Hofstede's term 'power distance' refers to the extent to which differences in power are accepted and expected by people. Large power distances are for example associated with hierarchic organisational structures, large income differences, formal contacts, status symbols etc.
- *Collectivism versus individualism.* In a collectivist society people are involved in strong groups, giving them protection in exchange for loyalty. In contrast, members of an individualist society are supposed to look after their own interests and that of their immediate family while other relationships are quite loose.
- *Masculinity versus femininity.* A masculine ('patriarchal') culture puts emphasis on the differences between sexes and is primarily focused on material success. Men are expected to be ambitious, assertive, concerned with money, and to admire what is big and strong. In feminine cultures, men and women are expected to be non-competitive, modest, concerned with relationships, and to sympathise with whatever is small and weak. Such a society is merely interested in the quality of life.

- *Strong versus weak uncertainty avoidance* i.e. the extent to which people become nervous in unstructured, ambiguous situations and try to avoid such situations by strict rules of behaviour, intolerance of deviants, and a belief in absolute truths.

Other authors mention similar dimensions or add dimensions such as contact versus non-contact cultures (Hall, 1960) and high trust versus low trust cultures (Fukuyama, 1995). On an organisational level these dimensions may lead to different cultures, too, such as process-oriented versus product-oriented organisations, normative versus pragmatic, formal versus informal, authoritarian versus democratic.

Interestingly both Schein (1992) and Hofstede (1991) explicitly mention office buildings as artefacts of corporate culture. Schein (1992), for example, describes the case of a chemical company where corridors are deserted and rooms are closed. He sees this office environment as an artefact that stems from the company's individualistic, introvert culture. Unfortunately neither Schein nor Hofstede elaborate on this particular topic. In practice, however, a lot of similarities can be observed between corporate culture and corporate design. Nike's European headquarters, mentioned at the start of this paper, is a good example. Law firms are also a good example. Lawyers often try to evoke an image of reliability and stability and, not surprisingly, they are usually accommodated in clearly structured, conventional offices. In contrast, architectural firms – often equipped with a culture that stresses creativity and originality – tend to prefer open layouts and buildings with a strong expression. Another striking example is the difference between buildings for private and public companies. In the Netherlands governmental agencies are often accommodated in sober and efficient buildings, in order to reinforce the impression of governmental norms and values concerning efficiency with public money.

Still, the relationship between corporate culture and corporate design is a complex one. Firstly, a large number of organisational characteristics contribute to corporate culture. A company's norms and values are not only influenced by its type of business (e.g. law firm or architect), but also by its size, life cycle, work processes, type of clients and so on. Particularly, the personality or personal preferences of the 'founding father' and powerful stakeholders may have a strong impact on corporate

culture and corporate design. A good example is the difference in design of the ABN AMRO Bank and the ING Bank –two major Dutch banks. Recently, each of them has built new headquarters in the same area of Amsterdam. The headquarters of ABN AMRO Bank (designed by international 'business' architect Henry Cobb) has a 'hard' businesslike style, with a lot of concrete, steel and glass, which is often used to express stability and reliability. In contrast, their competitor, ING Bank, has built a building designed by young, relatively unknown Dutch architects. The building is regarded as one of the more 'progressive' buildings in the Netherlands (see figures) and featured in architectural magazines. The differences between both buildings strongly reflect the difference in ideology and personal preferences of their CEOs.

Insert figure 3 here (pictures of ABN AMRO and ING)

Secondly, it is not always possible to make a distinction between corporate culture and the broader context in which a corporation is operating. For example, much has been written about the relation between corporate culture and national culture (Hofstede, 1991; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993; Hickson, 1993). According to Meel (2000), this relation plays a large role in office design. His comparative study of European office design shows that in particular national norms and values about equality and user participation have a strong impact on office layouts. In Sweden, for instance, the strong social-democratic culture has resulted in a design approach in which user satisfaction is highly valued. Buildings tend to have narrow floor plans with spacious workplaces next to (openable) windows and lots of common spaces. To the Swedes (and also the Dutch and Germans) this kind of office space is normal. It is an integral part of their work culture. In the eyes of British and American employees, however, such workplaces may seem luxurious as they are more used to deep open plans (Meel et al. 1999). Interestingly, such differences can even be seen within international companies. An organisation's workplace culture seems to be fed as much by local cultural conditions as by corporate ethos. Even regional culture may have an impact on corporate culture and design, witnessed by differences between the classic glass and steel skyscrapers at the East Side of the US versus the low rise, plastered and colourful buildings that can be found in California and Florida.

Thirdly, it is clear that not only culture has an impact on office design. Besides national, regional and organisational culture, the urban context, site characteristics and market conditions also have a strong impact on design. Research by Hakfoort and Lie (1996) suggests, for example, a correlation between rent levels and the use of space per employee. In the financial district of London, for example, tight workplace standards may be related to the extremely high rent levels, rather than a company's culture. So, although there seems to be a clear impact of corporate culture on corporate design, the relationship is not deterministic. Economical factors, geographic circumstances, individual characteristics of stakeholders and non-cultural factors play an important role as well. This makes it difficult to get a clear understanding of culture's consequences for design.

3. Dot-com cultures and architecture

In order to obtain a better insight into the complex relation between culture and office design, we focus on a single, much discussed, type of company: the dot-com company. Dot-com companies can be characterised as companies whose core-business is directly related to the Internet, such as web design, internet hosting, domain registration, internet consultancy and the like. A few years ago, such companies were seen as the new elite of business. Andy Grove, the chairman of Intel, said: 'In five years time, all companies will be Internet companies, or they won't be companies at all' (Economist, 1999). By now it is clear that the take-off of the new economy and its 'dot-commers' is yet not as successful and revolutionary as predicted. Technology shares have slumped and managing a dotcom has since become much more difficult (Economist, 2002). Nonetheless, it is clear that a new 'breed' of organisations has emerged that previously not existed. Common characteristics are: they tend to be relatively new; their employees are often young; they are working with the latest technologies and they are all doing 'something' with the Internet. It is very likely that these characteristics affect their culture.

In spite of sparse scientific research on 'dot-com cultures', there seems to be enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that dot-com companies are different. A quick glance at popular business magazines such as Wired and Business Week indicates that internet companies have culture that is informal, non-conformist and rebellious (Meel and Vos, 2000). They proclaim to deviate from the 'old economy', 'boring' gigantic multinationals which have dominated the economy for so many decades.

In that sense they seem to be forerunners when it comes to new management philosophies and the underling norms and values. American Journalist David Brooks (2000,) says: "today … the dirtiest word in the corporate lexicon' is mainstream'…. every company in America seems to be an evangelical enterprise rocking the establishment". The key is to be youthful, daring, and avant-garde, to personify change. Using Hofstede's dimensions we might say that their corporate culture is low on uncertainty avoidance. Other characteristic cultural features seem to be the informal and non-hierarchical nature of personal relations within the company. Hofstede would probably refer to it as a small 'power-distance'. Formal titles are hardly used and decision making seems to be decentralised. Andrew Ross, who did extensive social research in New York's 'Silicon Alley', states that in the history of work employees never had so much personal autonomy and liberty to manage themselves (Canabou, 2001).

The basic assumption underlying the 'dot-com' culture seems to be that work should no longer be regarded as a means to make money, as a means for survival. Rather it should be the central focus in life. Ross observed that during the internet boom, employees at dot-com companies approached a job as if it were a test of their 'innermost essence and integrity' (Canabou, 2001). Labour seems to be regarded as a form of self-expression or self-actualisation as Ross calls it. Work should be interesting and the workplace should be an fun place to be. The predominant protestant work-ethic –according to Weber (trans. 1958) the main explanation of our economic success— seems to be replaced by the idea that work should be an extended hobby. Contemporary management gurus suggest that work is an expression of who you are: I work, so I am (see, for example, Himanen 2002).

These new ideas and values have left their mark on some of the dot-com companies' office architecture. Various journalists and architectural critics have observed that 'new economy' companies have different accommodation demands than 'traditional' organisations. In management magazines like *Red Herring* we can read how Californian Internet companies take up residence on the edges of town, in rehabbed warehouses, converted lofts, and old breweries (Landry, 2000). According to architectural critic Russel (2000), people working at Internet companies have different lifestyles and, therefore, different ideas about how their office should look. Russel (2000, 72) states: 'They (dot-com companies) are heavy on graphic designers, interface designers, and animators, people whose

education may be art school and whose lifestyle is urban, who draw inspiration from arts and culture, and who socialise in downtown night-clubs rather than suburban golf-clubs.' He argues that these employees will have new workplace demands: "the employees tend to prefer urban loft environments to the carpeted, mirror glass confines of business parks" (Russel, 2000, 72). This tendency to choose for 'non-office buildings' is also reflected in dot-com office interiors. In popular management literature one can find plenty examples of offices equipped with kindergarten-like 'romp spaces', coffee bars, gyms, corporate stores, day-care centres, pool tables, and dartboards. In contrast to the seriousness of conventional space planning, with its emphasis on efficiency and flexibility, these office interiors stress irony and amusement. David Brooks (2000) mentions that in a 1950s *Business Week* profile, an executive would be sitting in an impressive mahogany and brass office, wanting to show how much they embodied Benjamin Franklin's virtues: industriousness, thrift, reliability. In contrast, successful high-tech managers of today may display a snowboard that is hanging from the ceiling next to an ominously broken piece of a bungee cord. To test this attractive (?), but possibly over-idealised image of the 'dot-com' world, we have conducted three case studies in the web design industry.

4. Case studies: Netlinq, Adcore, Razorfish

The methodological problem of the emergence of a dot-com culture and an accompanying office style, is that it is highly anecdotal and speculative. To say something sensible about the workplace demands of such companies, further research is necessary. Delft University of Technology has made a modest start by conducting three case studies in the Internet sector: NetlinQ, Adcore and Razorfish (Smulders and Teurlings, 2001). All three are in the same business (web design); they are all relatively young (founded between 1994 and1999), and they are all medium sized (65-142 employees in the Netherlands). For each case, an in-depth analysis has been made of the organisation, its culture and their offices. The methods used were interviews with employees and management and an electronic questionnaire. The goal of the research was to determine whether the accommodation demands of the Internet companies are new and different from mainstream organisations. Below the research outcomes will discussed for each case.

4.1 Netlinq

Organisation	Building
Business: webdesign	Type: former church, now used as headquarters
Total number of employees (NL): 142	Number of employees in this building: 90
Founded: 1994	Date of move-in: 1999

Insert figure 4 here (picture of Netlinq)

Two students in artificial intelligence founded NetlinQ as a 'hobby company'. Within four years NetlinQ
had three offices and more than one hundred employees. Workplace design was hardly an issue
during these years: office space had to be readily available, flexible (open) and affordable. In that
sense, NetlinQ is typical for a starting business. Today this 'garage spirit' remains. The company is
accommodated in non-office buildings such as a former sports facility and a converted church building.
Inside, spaces are open to facilitate the communication between employees. The general atmosphere
of these open spaces is rather 'chaotic'. Desks are filled with papers and gadgets and employees
have personalised their workplaces with posters and photo's. Most furniture comes from IKEA :
mainstream, functional, fairly cheap (according to Dutch standards). In the interviews and the survey,
employees and managers clearly indicated that the work environment has, above all, to be practical.
They are little interested in design or 'fun' elements such as game rooms or lounges. The only 'fun
feature' is a 'relax room' where employees can watch television and read magazines ("the latest
Wired"). This practical view on workplace design clearly matches the company culture. At NetlinQ,
'being hip' is not considered important. The spirit of the company's early days, in which all time and
energy were invested in growth and product development, seem to have left a clear mark on the
company's culture. Decisions concerning non-core activities, such as accommodation, are still taken
ad-hoc. One of the basic assumptions of NetlinQ's culture is that the company should primarily focus
on its products instead of its image. One of the interviewees remarked: "We want to be known for our
products rather than for who we are". Another characteristic that has left his mark on NetlinQ's office,
is the company's egalitarian culture. The power distance between management and employees is
small. Management and employees inhabit the same space and there are no clear status symbols

showing who is in charge. When there are workplace changes to be made, the manager sends an e-mail to all employees to get their response. The involvement of employees is regarded as important as employees make long hours at the office (working at home is hardly practised). So, basically employees create their own work environment. Only recently NetlinQ has hired an architect to get some sort of structure in its accommodation. Hiring an architect, however, does not mean that NetlinQ will adopt a 'new economy' workplace style with bright colours and designer furniture. The overall image remains that of a practical company with practical workplaces.

4.2 Adcore

Organisation	Building
Business: webdesign	Type: standard office building
Total number of employees (NL): 65	Number of employees: 65
Founded: 1995	Date of move-in: 1997

Insert figure 5 here (picture of Adcore)

Adcore is an international Internet company with offices in Europe and Japan. The Dutch office was created by a take-over of a small, local web design company. Like NetlinQ, Adcore has grown rapidly. The company has relocated several times before it moved into its current office in Amsterdam. Unlike NetlinQ, Adcore is little interested in 'characteristic buildings'. Instead it chose a mainstream, non-descript office building. They simply wanted a functional and business-like office building, just like most other businesses. The workspaces of the employees are predominantly open. Like NetlinQ, open communication is regarded as important by both management and employees. Only project managers have some privacy in a cubicle with medium-high partitions. The general atmosphere in the workspaces can be regarded as 'neat': colours are neutral, spaces are clean, and employees do not personalise their workplaces. There are only a few 'loose' elements such as bright coloured chairs in the canteen, and 'odd' objects such as an American traffic light, a 'wild' mural and a replica of an American petrol station. Overall, the Adcore office seems to be a normal, rather traditional, work

environment like so many others. The excitement and revolutionary character of the Internet business hardly leaves any traces here. Again, this is a clear reflection of the company's culture. Adcore wants to be a business-like and trustworthy company. It is working with the latest technologies and developing innovative solutions, but it certainly does not want to be associated with the 'hip' and 'trendy'. From the start, the company was set up as a 'real' business with a clear structure, goal and organisation. Client satisfaction (in many cases large companies) and profits are regarded as most important. From that perspective, it is not surprising that both employees and management regard 'fun' elements, such as game rooms and billiards, as nonsense. Another explanatory cultural characteristic lies in the general opinion that work and private life should be separated. The office is simply regarded as a place to work. It should be pleasant, efficient, and little more.

4.3 Razorfish

Organisation	Building
Business: webdesign	Type: former synagogue, now used as office
Total number of employees (NL): 100	Number of employees: 100
Founded: 1995	Date of move-in: 2000

Insert figure 6 here (picture of Razorfish)

Razorfish is a large, international company, established in New York in 1995. The Dutch subsidiary was created by a take-over of a small company of twelve people; within two years it grew to over 100 people. Unlike the other two companies, these employees are accommodated in a bespoke 'designed' office, expressing a distinctive 'Razorfish' style. The company (both in New York and locally) takes a great interest in all aspects of their accommodation (location, building, layout and furniture). The Amsterdam office is, for example, deliberately located in the old centre of Amsterdam, close to where their employees live and in the vicinity of cafés, shops and eateries. The office itself is an old synagogue dating from 1748. Its interior is made up of bright colours and a large variety of materials. Desks come in four different colours, together with designer lighting. In the basement there is a 'chill-out' space. Employees work in group spaces, located in such a way that the chances of employees

meeting each other are optimal ('natural flow' as they term it). 'Hip' and 'cool' are probably the best characterisations for this office. The major difference this and the two other studies, is that this office is specifically designed and thought-through. It is less chaotic and spontaneous than the Netlinq office and less ordinary than the Adcore office. Again, the norms and values of this particular organisation can explain this. One of the core values of Razorfish is that it wants to be different. Being innovative and progressive is the norm –"stepping out" as the local manager puts it. Another crucial cultural characteristic is that Razorfish tends to put the employees first (rather than the clients, as for example Adcore does). The idea is that employees should feel comfortable, they should feel at home. Work should be 'fun'. Obviously, this idea does not derive from simple kindness. After all, even more than the other two described companies, Razorfish was soon a 'real' company with lots of offices worldwide and company policies. Employees get a lot, but so does the company: employees are loyal and work hard over long hours.

5 Similarities and contradictions

When comparing the three cases, we can conclude that there is no such thing as one single 'dot-com culture' or one type of 'dot-com office design'. Indeed they are very similar in terms of creative and technology-driven activities, young, ambitious, hard working and open-minded employees, team spirit, young age of the company and rapidly expanding, a high level of professional skills, a high level of communication and flexibility. But we saw also many differences between the three organisations (figure 7). Where NetlinQ and Razorfish focus on employee satisfaction – with high autonomy and binding employees with nice work or material gifts – Adcore puts a premium on client satisfaction. The former wants to keep an atmosphere of a young, informal and 'cool' company, the latter propagates an image of a solid business working at the top of the market.

Insert figure 7 here (Culture and strategy of the three cases)

A second conclusion is that the similarities and differences are more or less expressed in their office design. NetlinQ's culture can be characterised as 'practical' and so is its office. Adcore is clearly much more 'business-like' and has little in common with the almost chaotic and ad-hoc office solutions of

NetlinQ. At Razorfish, both culture and office design are, above all, 'hip'. When looking at the office location, we see that all three companies are located in Amsterdam: the centre of the Dutch IT industry. However, NetlinQ and Razorfish have their office in the inner city, whereas Razorfish is located in a business park (figure 8). NetlinQ and Razorfish prefer 'non-office' buildings, whereas Adcore is housed in a more or less standard office building, with only a few 'fun' elements. An important factor explaining these differences is the overall atmosphere of being a young rebellious firm versus a classic business culture. All three companies pay a lot of attention to their accommodation. However, NetlinQ is too busy with their products and are above all very practical: affordability and capacity in floor space are more important than trying to get the best accommodation. They recently hired an interior designer to upgrade the interior. Adcore uses a 'design menu' in order to evoke the same image in all business units. Many other new economy companies involve artists or stage designers to create a remarkable interior.

Insert figure 8 here (Accommodation characteristics of the three cases)

Contrary to our expectations, the interviewed managers did not mention office design as a means of attracting employees. When they invest in office space and extra amenities they do so because their employees spend many hours in the office and because they believe employees should feel at home at the office. This long-hours culture is interesting because it excludes the concept of teleworking, which is hardly practised in these companies. This is surprising because one would expect these high-tech companies, who actually design our virtual world, to be more open to telework than any other organisation. Instead of working less hours at the office, employees seem to do more. One explanation for this is that the employees' private life overlaps their working life (most employees are young and do not have families –yet). Adcore is an exception as this company propagates a strong separation between working and private life. Another explanation for the absence of telework is that webdesign is a very creative activity that requires teamwork. Employees simply have to see each other to produce good work.

The three web-design companies are, as a group, different from say a bank, consultancy agency or government office. At the same time, they have much in common with other firms for whom creativity

is one of the most important issues, such as advertisement and design agencies. Common characteristics are an informal way of working, an emphasis on communication and social interaction, resistance to belong to the mainstream, and – two out of three – trying to achieve a working environment that resembles that of a small company: the 'spirit of the garage'. They desire to avoid incorporation and maintain the creative spirit. Employees prefer open spaces. In that sense they clearly differ from more strict and formal cultures as can be seen in the financial sector.

Finally, with reference to 'luxurious' extras such as lounge areas and chill out rooms, we observed that these are appraised positively as far as they support the working process and raise a nice, informal, home-like atmosphere. At the same time, most employees say that they do not care for extravagant design; functionality is regarded as most important. The emphasis on functionality is supported by the priorities that employees assigned to a list of twenty building aspects (Table 1). Easy to reach by public transport and ergonomic furniture rank highest, while architectural quality, 'designed' furniture and 'materials and colours' rank low in all three cases. Adequate lighting, a nice lunchroom and facilitating both face-to-face interaction and concentrated working are perceived as (very) important, whereas the availability of a meditation room or sleeping facilities are perceived as (very) unimportant. When we showed pictures of extraordinary designed spaces such as a meeting room that looks like a log cabin or an employee sleeping in his working environment, we got responses such as "funny and provocative, but not functional and too stylised". However, a nice atmosphere is also given a high priority. So, be it a little vague, a nice 'overall experience' is very important, too. Most employees of the three Web design companies prefer monumental buildings above standard buildings, a chaotic and homelike atmosphere above a businesslike environment, and warm, vivid colours above cool or neutral colours (Table 2). Although important to create a feeling of being at home, these issues are of relative importance in job selection. Priority is given to 'rational' issues such as having a nice job with interesting work and nice colleagues, a good salary, autonomy and opportunities for self-expression (Table 3). According to about 10% of the respondents to the questionnaires, the accommodation is relevant in job selection; for 30-40% it is 'a little bit' important and for 50-60% of the respondents it is not important at all. So in spite of some typical characteristics of web designers, with respect to job selection criteria they show to be ordinary people. However, it is striking that in the case Razorfish, its extraordinary corporate culture shows to be an important pull-factor!

Table 1: Importance of items with reference to the accommodation according to the employees of three Dutch web design companies (ranking 1-20).

	Netlinq N = 40	Adcore N = 10	Razorfish N = 13
Easy to reach	20,0	20,0	14,7
Ergonomic furniture	18,1	14,7	16,0
Atmosphere of work environment	18,1	16,0	10,7
Lighting	16,3	13,0	16,0
ICT	15,3	12,0	14,7
Openness of the lay-out	11,6	9,3	17,3
Recreation room	11,6	10,7	12,0
Inner city	7,4	10,7	20,0
Image of the environment	6,0	4,0	5,3
Non-office image	6,0	1,3	8,0
Type of building	4,7	4,0	5,3
Safety of the environment	4,2	6,7	8,0
Facilities in the environment	3,3	0,0	14,7
Entertainment	3,3	5,3	0,0
Parking facilities	2,8	10,7	0,0
Architectonic quality	2,3	4,0	4,0
Design of furniture	2,3	0,0	1,3
Materials and colours	0,0	8,0	2,7

Source: Smulders & Teurlings, 2001

Table 2: Preferred type of building, interior atmosphere, furniture and colours, according to the employees of three Dutch web design companies

	Netlinq N = 40	Adcore N = 10	Razorfish N = 13
	%	%	%
Type of building			
Monumental building	59	50	69
High tech	20	10	23
Prestigious building	13	-	8
Standard	8	40	-
Atmosphere			
Chaotic	43	10	54
Businesslike	13	10	-
Homelike	44	70	38
Hip	-	10	8
Furniture			
Ergonomic	39	40	15
Simple	28	40	55
Luxury	20	10	15
'Design'	13	10	15
Colours			
Vivid	25	20	54
Cool	20	10	15
Neutral	15	-	8
Warm	40	70	23

Source: Smulders & Teurlings, 2001

Table 3: Items that are most important in job selection according to the employees of three Dutch web design companies (ranking 1-20)

	Netlinq N = 40	Adcore N = 10	Razorfish N = 13
Job satisfaction	20,0	19,2	11,0
Type of work	17,0	19,6	11,5
Salary	16,3	17,1	13,0
Self-expression	16,2	20,0	14,0
Autonomy	15,7	15,4	12,5
Appreciation	15,3	10,0	10,5
Colleagues	14,3	13,8	13,0
Corporate culture	13,9	12,5	20,0
Atmosphere workspace	12,2	10,0	10,0
Participation	9,6	10,8	6,5
Career perspective	8,7	13,8	13,5
Secondary conditions of employment	8,0	11,3	2,5
Location	7,8	5,8	5,0
Lay-out of workspace	1,6	2,1	0,0
Image of the building	0,0	0,0	1,5

Source: Smulders & Teurlings, 2001

6 Concluding remarks

Overall we can conclude that office buildings can indeed be seen as material expressions of corporate culture, as reflections of norms and values. The three web design companies clearly wished to show who they are and what they stand for. They also use their accommodation as a marketing tool. The organisations' and employees' accessibility to new trends, innovations and risks is particularly important in this context. Future oriented organisations will be less resistant to change than organisations and individuals with a strong incline to uncertainty avoidance. It is important to note that corporate culture also effects design by its impact on change processes. In a hierarchical culture, a top-down approach may work quite well, whereas in a more democratic culture a bottom-up approach may be more successful. According to Wissema et al (1991) and Reenen and Waisfisz (1995), the potential to change is particularly effected by high-trust, open communication, an offensive strategy, and a young and small organisation with a transparent organisational structure. This relationship between culture and process is an interesting and relevant topic for future research.

Another direction for further research is to obtain a clearer view of how culture relates to the many other factors that have an impact on design. Although we have seen that corporate culture is important, it is equally clear that culture is not the sole factor in design. Apart from corporate culture – effected by organisational characteristics and individual attitudes, preferences, habits and values - also national and regional culture may have a strong impact on corporate design, as well as urban context, site characteristics and market conditions. Figure 9 is an attempt to translate the complex interrelation between factors into a model. This model is an extension of the model of Schein (1992) by including factors coming up from our case studies and research from Deal & Kennedy (1982), Sanders & Neuijen (1987), Hasselt (1991), Hofstede (1991), Gagliardi (1990) and others.

Insert figure 9 here (extended model of Schein)

The problem of studying workplace design and culture is that it does not result in clear, practical tools such as computer models, checklists and guidelines for briefing and design. The topic is too intangible in nature. It cannot easily be measured by questionnaires, rather it is something one must feel and see. Interviewing stakeholders, listening to stories, organising workshops and observations in situ seem to be much better research methods if consultants want to include cultural issues in the briefing and design process. Walking around, talking with all kinds of users and knowing what to ask for and where to look for is just as important than the time-utilisation studies which are so popular today. A more 'anthropological' approach will give added value to the more 'classical' methods of architectural programming.

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Figure 1 Gym at the Nike European Headquarters (Hilversum, the Netherlands), designed by William McDonough (US)

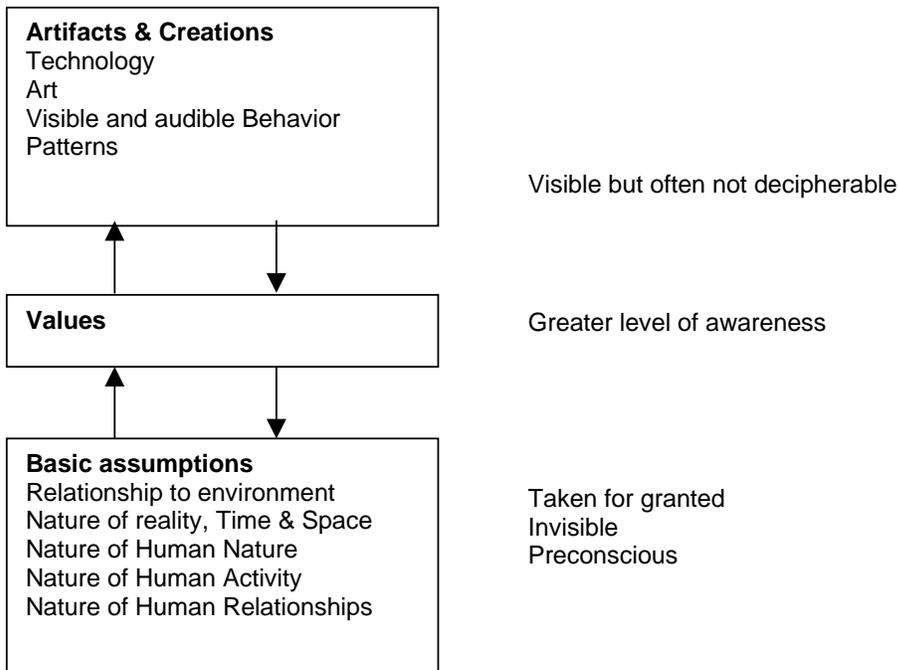| **Artifacts & Creations** Technology Art Visible and audible Behavior Patterns	Visible but often not decipherable
Values	Greater level of awareness
Basic assumptions Relationship to environment Nature of reality, Time & Space Nature of Human Nature Nature of Human Activity Nature of Human Relationships	Taken for granted Invisible Preconscious

Figure 2: The levels of Culture and their Interaction, according to Schein (1984)

Figure 3: Two bank buildings: same function, same location (the South of Amsterdam, the Netherlands), built within the same period, but with a very different appearance and layout.
a) ABN AMRO Bank, designed by Henry N. Cob and opened in 1999
b) ING Bank, designed by Meyer and Van Schooten and to be opened in 2002

Figure 4: NetlinQ

Figure 5: Adcore

Figure 6: Razorfish

	NetlinQ	Adcore	Razorfish
Start	Hobby enterprise	Business	Purchased early
Corporate identity	Cool, student-like	Solid and reliable	Hip
Values	Focus on employees and products	Focus on clients	Focus on employees
Autonomy	High	Medium	High
Binding	Nice work	Top market segment	Material presents
Decision making	Ad hoc	Business-like	Risky

Figure 7: Culture and strategy of the three cases

	NetlinQ	Adcore	Razorfish
Housing as a tool	Not much attention	Positive image for clients	Marketing tool
User participation	Many personal decorations	Low impact	Strong impact
Location	Inner city	Business park	Inner city
Building	Former church	Standard	Former synagoge
Interior design	Student-like	Business-like	Hip design

Figure 8: Accommodation characteristics of the three cases

Geographic characteristics Continent; country; region; city; district	
Corporate characteristics Branch; size; structure; scope; history; life cycle; work processes; staff; clients Gender; age; education (home, school); profession; occupation; skills; personality	

Office design

Values

Basic assumptions

Market

Site characteristics

Other factors
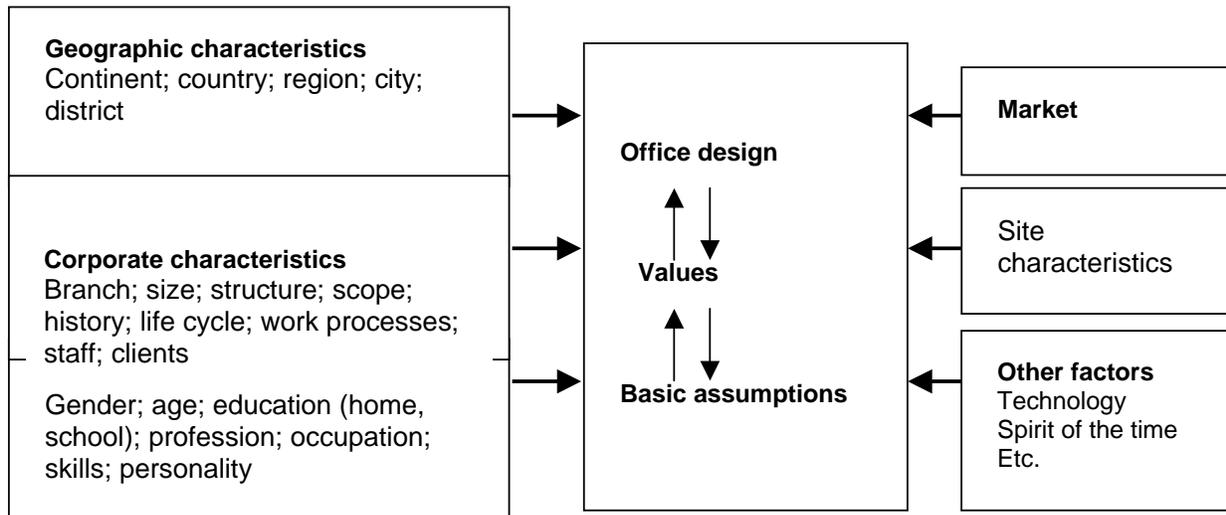Technology
Spirit of the time
Etc.

Figure 9: Relationship between corporate culture and corporate design