REPORT 3

Findings and architectural implications
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The company</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods used</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions and architectural solutions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Sources:</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Already in my first report I was investigating a subject of flexible working places. In particular, I was interested in answering the following questions: in how important is privacy in the working environment? How can you combine privacy and working in a team? How do people perceive flexible work environment and how does it affect their productivity and relationship with other workers?

After I have conducted a research for the first report I found out that the attitude towards a certain kind of office layout or type can be related to the type of work a person does or a position he or she has in the company. It seems that most of the time the staff members that hold the highest managing positions in the company prefer to have their own personal cell office rather than to feel uncomfortable and intimidated when being placed in an open office space.

When we visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – where a couple of years ago they transformed the static office environment into a flexible one – I tied to pay attention to the different configurations, work atmospheres and level of comfort. But, it was not enough for understanding people’s opinion about the new concept. In order to get people’s perspective on the issue I would actually need to get in touch with people who experience this environment.

In this report I will first of all introduce you to the company which I was interviewing, as I think it is important to get a picture of the company’s culture and identity. Then I will explain you the methods I used to collect the results I needed. Afterwards I will present you with my findings, and at the end I will draw the conclusions with possible architectural solutions according to the needs of the user.

The company

In order to get good results that I could use for my projects it was the idea to interview an organisation which is either a ministry or has a similar working culture as ministries. Eventually I received a help in organising an interview with employees from ACM. ACM stands for Authority for Consumers and Markets\(^1\). ACM is an autonomous administrative authority (under Dutch law), and is part of the Dutch central government, but does not belong to any ministry. It is an independent authority that creates opportunities and options for businesses and consumers alike. ACM always listens to both consumers and businesses and always helps to find a solution which does not violate the law. In order to solve these issues ACM has about 520 professionals, who often work together in project teams, consisting of co-workers from different departments. The diversity of team members is a key to finding a solution. As all organisations, ACM has hierarchical structure (fig. 1). At the head of ACM is the board consisting of three members, which have a final say over all the decisions. Then there is the Office of the Chief Economist and seven different departments: Policy and Communications Department, Consumer Department, Energy Department, Telecommunications, Transport and Postal Services Department, Competition Department, Legal Department, and Corporate Services Department. At the head of each department there is a director.

\[\text{Figure 1 Organisational structure}\]

When having to solve different issues involving consumers and businesses, ACM needs to deal with many secret issues. This is why there is also a high level of security, especially for certain rooms, floors and departments.

\(^1\) [www.acm.nl](http://www.acm.nl)
Methods used

In order to general a good result I decided to use two research methods on sight. First method is observation and the second is interview.

Firstly I wanted to observe what was happening in the building, on the floor: what types of work spaces there are, where people meet, how busy it is at restaurant and coffee corner. And the second plan was to interview employees. I was very pleased, that I have received an opportunity to interview a rather large group of people (10 participants) who worked at different departments. At the end, this gave me a good perspective on the opinion of people of different work position.

My interview questions were partially inspired by the questionnaire we have received from Irene Cieraad at the beginning of the semester, but it really fit what I wanted to find out from participants. As in my first report I have mentioned that person’s position within the company and the work he does can affect the way he perceives flexible working environment, it was important for me to ask questions about the job status. I also thought that it was not only important to ask people about their personal working space, but also the way they perceive the new openness of the floor plan and what they think about the communal space. Then I think that an overall satisfaction might also depend on how busy a person is: does he have time for a lunch break or to catch up with his colleagues on an informal level? And so on.

The main purpose of interviewing the employees was to really understand what the users think about the new way of working: flexible working. The flexible working has been praised a lot at it is said to be the future of the office typology, but I really wanted to find out from personal conversations about how people see it, and what, for them, are advantages and disadvantages of this new office concept. And, no matter what the result and their answer is – whether they like it or not, are they ready to compromise – I want to find out how they see their ideal working situation, where does this flexible working stand in relation to it, and which compromises they are ready to make.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. male/female
2. nationality
3. age (18-30) (30-40) (40-50) (60-70)
4. a – The country of the place of work/office
   b – The name/type of organization the office is part of
5. Travel time from home to work
6. Part-time or full-time job (related to question 1?)
7. Temporary job contract?
8. Flexible working hours or strict from 9 to 5?
9. What kind of work do you do?
   Do you usually work alone or in a team?
10. Are you allowed to work at home?
    If yes, how many days a week/month?
11. Even if you are not allowed to work at home, would you prefer to do so?
12. Why do you prefer (not) to work at home? Are home workers perceived negatively in your organization?
13. a – What do you like about working at the office?
    b – How important is meeting and chatting with colleagues?
    c – Do you consider social control and/or social contact to be essential for a productive work environment?
14. About your work setting:
    a – Do you have your own chair/desk/pc in a room, or do you have to search for a place each morning?
    b – What kind of work place do you usually choose for?
    c – Does the higher management in your organization have their own rooms, or do they have flexible work stations?
15. a – If your work setting is recently changed from fixed chair/desk/pc into flexible or mobile work stations – how do you appreciate the new situation compared to the former situation?
    b – Has your concentration/productivity been improved or deteriorated in the new situation?
    c – Would you like to return to the former situation of fixed work stations? Or do you prefer the new situation, perhaps with some amendments?
16. a – Where do you have the formal meetings with your colleagues? (separate meeting room or in the office space?)
    b – Do you appreciate these formal meeting spaces?
    c – Where do you have informal meetings with your colleagues? (for example at the coffee machine, in the hall, the smoking zone, or the office restaurant, or outside the building)
For what kind of occasions do you use these?

d – Would you prefer more suitable informal meeting spaces in the building? What kind of informal meeting places would you like?

e – Do you take short breaks during work and where do you go then?

  g – Would you appreciate it if your building had an outside terrace?

17. Surroundings:

a – How important are the surroundings outside the building for you?

b – Do you like to go shopping during lunch?

c – Have lunch outside?

18. 

  a – Do you consider your organization to be hierarchical or egalitarian? (relate to question 13c)

b – Could you describe the culture of your organization, and in what way it differs from other organizations you know.

19. Do you have other remarks, or suggestions that are relevant in judging workplace satisfaction?

**Figure 2 Interview questions**

**Findings**

First I will start with **observations**. Because the company works on many secret things, I was not allowed to walk around the building by myself or to stay and observe what is going on for a long time. I did get a quick tour around a few floors which gave me a general impression about some key moments that I would like to present you here to you with small sketches.

Zurich Tower – a building where ACM company is located – is located next to the Hague Central Station. Actually, very close to the former VROM building. This means that there are many useful functions in the neighbourhood: train, tram, cafes and restaurants, and shopping facilities. Not to mention that many other ministries are also located in the same area, which creates a certain image for the neighbourhood.
The entrance to the building is located at Muzenstraat 41, but it is directly accessible from Oranjebuitensingel. The tower has an unusual shape and is 18 storeys high, excluding the very top itself, which add about 5 more levels.

When I was approaching the building, I could see the entrance (fig.7) very clearly, as it is elevated, so you need to take stairs to get onto the level of the reception area.

The reception area is a rather tall space (fig.8). As soon you come into the building, you have the reception desk on your left, where you need to check in and say why you are here. Farther away from the entrance, behind the reception area there is a waiting area with a rather large library-like table and some chairs where I was waiting to get inside. When I was picked up by my ‘guide’, we had to go through the gates.
After passing the security gates I found myself in the core of the building: this is where stairs, elevators, sanitary and technical rooms were located. ACM only takes a few levels of the building as it shares the building - and the restaurant - with a few other organisations.

When we reached our floor we went out of the core and ended up facing an open room which had lockers along one wall and hangers along the other (fig.9). I thought it was a handy way to organise it, rather than spreading the coat hangers around the building/floor. It is handier this way, because you do not need to take the coat with you every time you change your working location, which is supposedly the whole idea of flex working.

Another central point of the floor plan was a coffee corner (fig.10), which was also located close by the building core. When I visited the building, the coffee corner was rather lively: some people were having a sandwich with a colleague; others were engaged in a friendly chat or maybe even in a work related conversation. It is a pity that the coffee corner only provided with coffee. If you wanted to get a snack or anything like that you were supposed to go downstairs to the restaurant.

Walking around on the floor I noticed a few main typed of work places: semi(-open) work places for two or four people (fig.11), silent work areas for at least four people (fig.13), and concentration rooms for one person (fig.12). Both silent rooms and concentrations rooms were situated behind closed doors in order to retain their privacy. There were also larger rooms that looked like a combination between working office and a meeting room (fig.14). As it turned out later they were team rooms: rooms where teams could work together on a project. It was handy, because it also had a desktop and enough of place on the table for everyone. Because the hallways were rather harrow and only allowed space for people to walk through them, there was barely any decoration or elements in them.
There were no formal meeting rooms on a typical floor level. A typical floor only had informal meeting spaces like coffee corner and team rooms. But there was a specially designated floor with only meeting rooms (fig.15). When you would enter it from the elevator core, you would right away end up at the reception, where you would be able to ask information and assistance. The meeting room could not be used spontaneously, but most of room booking could be arranged by phone or network.

When we went down to the building restaurant (fig.16), I cannot say I was impressed. The space was rather large, but it was located half way underground and there not so many windows. One of the windows I spotted was facing an inner courtyard that lied on a normal ground level, which means half a level higher than the restaurant.

When walking around the floor I realised that it was rather busy: most of the working places were occupied. I also noticed that it was not quite: people were communicating with each other and greeting each other every time someone passed by. On one hand it gave a good lively and friendly impression to the office, but on the other hand it seemed not very ‘together’ and a bit distractive.

After these personal observations I was looking forward to the interviews as I was curious what kind of answers would I get. I was seated on the meeting level in one of the meeting rooms, which assured concentration and privacy. This allowed me to have a more open conversation with my interviewees without them thinking that someone might hear what they say.

As I mentioned before I had an opportunity to interview 10 people. There were 6 male interviewees and 4 female. The age distribution was also rather nice: three people between the ages of 20 to 30 three - 30-40, three - 40-50 and one - 50-60. It was also nice that I had a chance to talk to people from different department and who were busy working on different projects. And even though their job title was the same, because of the different departments their tasks could differ so they would have different things to do.

Before I started with my interviews I already had some ideas in my mind about the possible outcomes. I thought that young people would be very much pro flexible working and older people – against. I thought that managers would be less eager to switch to the flexible office concept. I cannot say that my predictions came true, but I also was not exact.

I was surprised to see that older people whom I interviewed were rather enthusiastic about the flexible working, whereas many young people were not too happy about it. I think it can be explained with the fact that older people have already been working in a fixed setting for a long time and they are maybe a little tired of it. That is why they are eager to try sometime new which could also help them meet new people and get acquainted with other colleagues better. The younger employees are probably still inexperienced and think that they need more concentration to work. They also might be afraid that with flexible working they will get more opportunities to get distracted and it will not show they good potential to the management.

There were some other responses about flexible working that interested me. Many people mentioned that their concentration level dropped since the flexible working has been introduced: as most of the work places available are open or semi-open. But, even though there is an opportunity to choose to work in a silent or concentration room, most people mentioned that they would not do that without giving a really good reason for it. So, to me it seems that even though people get distracted more often in an open-office they still prefer to be in a more social environment rather than in a closed space.
One of the main things that was appreciated by the workers a lot about the new way of working is the fact that they were able to meet colleagues from different departments whom they would never have met otherwise – except for maybe in the restaurant, but even then they would not have an incentive to talk to them. But, they also mentioned that they miss the feeling and the idea of having the team of professionals you are working with around you all the time. With the old situation everyone who worked together would sit close by, so, if there is an issue, it would be easy to resolve it quickly. Now it takes too much time to find your colleague. Or you need to email them.

What was also mentioned is that they think that finding a place in the morning takes too much time. And if there is no spot available on the floor where your locker is, this means that you need to bring your belongings back and forth. The problem of finding an available space that fits your standards is probably the reason why most of the people I interviewed do not take the whole advantage of the flexible working. The concept of flexible working means that you choose a place in the morning according to the work you have to do. Then, if you need to leave for a meeting which is longer than a certain period of time, you need to free the space for someone else to use it if they would want to. But because people find it difficult to find a good place they are not giving their space up even if they are leaving for a longer period of time. There was only one person who took a real advantage of the flex working and it was one of the managers. He mentioned that he would almost never sit in one spot during one day, but always move around depending on what he would need to do. In this case he is very different from the other managers. It was mentioned that some managers, who are used to having their private office in the past, sometimes occupy the rooms designated for the team work, even though they are not supposed to. This leads to the fact that there is not enough of space for teams to meet and work together.

When it comes to meeting places it was also mentioned that there is not enough of meeting rooms that you do not need to book in advance. It would also be nice to have some more informal meeting places, as the restaurant is not really comfortable for that.

The location of the building was very important for everyone, especially for workers who were coming from afar (almost half). They appreciated that they could go outside to the café and have lunch with either colleagues or people from the outside. Shops are also appreciated: it was nice to be able to buy something for lunch, but also something for home. So, it seemed that people were using their lunch breaks in a good way. I think this is the reason why they would appreciate having more informal meeting places: when the weather is bad it would be nice to have an opportunity to be able to have a nice place to meet up with their colleagues.

In conclusion I can say that only a couple of people very really negative about the flexible working. Others, who did not like it that much, either wanted to go back to the old situation or would like to have a few improvements within the flexible working concept. One of the improvements was mainly having flex working within a department but then communal spaces for all departments. I think one of the reasons that people are not too happy with the flexible working for now is because it has been too short – only a few months – since this concept has been introduced in the organisation. It might take a while before people try out all its aspects and then can make a good evaluation of whether they like it or not. Although sometimes you just do not like it and that is it.

**Conclusions and Architectural solutions**

The reason why I wanted to do an interview was because I wanted to have a deeper understanding about what users think about the flex working. The interviews that I conducted have given me good information on how I should proceed in my design. Not only I found a part about the flexible offices interesting and useful, but also what I found out about people’s attitude towards their (lunch) break and free time. The fact that they really appreciated their free time and liked to do something else during the break but work, gave me some ideas about my design. I understood that I do not want to create a building where people just come and go. I want to create a sustainable building from a usable point of view: a building that is not boring for either the civil servants or the visitors and the public. For me a sustainable building is not just a building that is built with the latest technological advancements, but also a building that can have multiple uses. This is the reason why I have chosen for the first 4 levels of the building to have public functions and functions for the visitors. But at the same time, when closed off for public, the space could also be used for company events, such as Christmas parties and so on.

In order to make the building easily accessible to the public I decided to focus on the public realm on the first levels (fig.17). In order for this public realm to work the entrance(s) to the building have to be visible and accentuated
It has been decided to create this communal/public space as stairs: a place where people can walk, sit, talk, see and exposition, take a break. I think it can be a connecting elements throughout these first levels. Under the stairs I can locate functions such as cloak room, bathrooms, rentable meeting rooms, exposition and cafe storage storage, some back offices and many other things.

When it comes to dealing with the work places, I think I would like to have a combination of different types of office types: open, closed, shared with team, shared with a small group of people and so on. I also think that I would prefer to have the flexible working strategy within the departments and the ministries. I think it is much more
feasible, considering some ministries do not always want to tell others what exactly they are busy with. But, considering the introvert structure of the building, I would like to focus on activating the atria. Right now when you look at the building from the outside, you barely see the facades of the offices. This means that even if there was someone working there, it would still be private. Also, I am one of those people who do not think that you necessarily need to show how people work and what they do, especially when the work does not concern the others. That is why when activating the atria, I would like to do it with the help of some common functions which need a lower level of privacy. The functions can differ per floor, or, on the contrary, be the same type of function which repeats through the building every so many levels.

Overall I am happy with my research results and the way I got inspired to make certain decisions. The project is still in developments, so it is still a subject of change.
List of figures:

fig. 1: www.acm.nl
fig. 2-3: own illustration
fig. 4: commons.wikimedia.org
fig. 5: www.taringa.net
fig. 6: www.doka.com
fig. 7-21: own illustration