

Book Review:



Make space: How to set the stage for creative collaboration

Scott Doorley & Scott Witthoft. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons. 272 pp. \$49.95 ISBN: 978-1-118-14372-8

I got the gist and the joy of *Make Space* on page 18, an entry on foam cubes. The authors recommend simple foam cubes as both seats ("seating comfort: 25 minutes") and as building blocks for prototyping space ideas. If you don't have foam blocks, they recommend milk crates or reinforced cardboard boxes.

Authors Scott Doorley and Scott Witthoft, both of Stanford University's Hasso Plattner Institute of Design -- the "d.school" -- are not trying to promote expensive architecture or furniture. They are not trying to intimidate us with their unapproachable design school taste. With pictures of offices and studios full of foam blocks, homemade plywood tables, tape lines on the floor, cheap alternatives to expensive commercial whiteboards, and instructions on how to build simple objects and tools, they urge all of us to experiment with our spaces, using whatever we have or whatever we can afford. As they counsel under a heading *bias toward action*, "Do something first. Talk and think about it later" (p. 51).

Make Space is primarily about how to make office spaces more collaborative and creative. For those of us involved in designing learning spaces for students, some concepts apply

and others do not. Doorley and Witthoft want us office workers to open our eyes and see the limitations of our cubicles, corner offices, and conference rooms, and the possibilities of re-making them. "Space is the 'body language' of an organization," they claim (p. 38). They sometimes push the argument to extremes: a meeting where everyone is sitting on foam blocks at a train station, for example.

Make Space, as a printed object, is beautiful and interesting. The square shape of the book, the page layout, pictures, colors, and "b-side instructions" (on how best to browse it as a reference work), reflect the premise that design is important. Entries are short, usually two pages, never more than four.

Make Space is worth your time if your curiosity is peaked by imagining the following spaces in your office:

- surprise spots
- huddle rooms
- perches in active spaces
- project rooms as distinct from meeting rooms
- office cul-de-sacs
- no-tech hiding places
- casters "in unconventional places"

Against the authors' advice, I read the book from cover to cover. Taken in small doses, *Make Space* feels fun, clever and even inspiring. In larger doses, doubts set in. If I were to host a meeting and ask my librarian colleagues to sit on cardboard boxes that I had spent hours reinforcing, they would not think I was d.school cool. They would probably wonder why we can't work like normal people. Some of my doubts stem from the fact that the book never makes clear exactly for whom it is intended. In my opinion *Make Space* is clearly for architects and interior designers pondering the next Googleplex, artists creating a studio, and designers of conferences -- in short anyone trying to, as the subtitle suggests, "set the stage for creative collaboration." Is it also for accountants? English professors? Call center workers? Chemistry lab techs? Actors? At the beginning of the book, I would have appreciated a brief theoretical framework on who the authors believe would most benefit from investing serious amounts of time making and re-making their office space.

Additional Recommended Readings:

Two other books, *I Wish I Worked There! A Look Inside the Most Creative Spaces in Business* and *Where We Work: Creative Office Spaces*, contain photo spreads of beautiful office spaces including Bloomberg, LEGO, and Ogilvy & Mather. Both books are great fun to page through and do indeed make you think "I wish I worked there." In contrast, *Make Space* does not show or emphasize fully-realized, huge budget

corporate headquarters. It is instead about discreet elements and ideas that you could consider for even the humblest of offices.

Those of us designing learning spaces at college or university campuses should aim to provide students with good collaborative spaces that will inspire them to make space when they go on to work in offices of their own.

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