



ISPSO 34th Annual Meeting, Copenhagen 3rd - 9th July 2017: Dreams always take place: Spaces, Places, Rooms, and Furniture, inside and around us

PARALLEL PAPERS V
SUNDAY 9th JULY 930-1045
ROOM I - 7.0.01

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The consultancy stage

The 'third' dimension in the engagement between client and consultant

The leader of a successful social marketing organisation with an emphasis on human rights has often referred to the open plan arrangement of their office as a sign of their transparency and non hierarchical structure. She doesn't have her own office, despite her high profile inside and outside the organisation.

We usually meet in a glass box near the reception desk. This time she looks very upset. 'I have major issues with my deputy' she whispers.... I sit in my usual position with my back to the door. After a couple of minutes she asks me to swap seats. She is concerned that her staff could 'lip-read' or understand what we are discussing.

Later on in the consultation I link this incident with an organisation that wants to present itself as modern and open minded (contemporary building, open plan and glass walls), but struggles with an underlying culture of

secrets, gossip and at times unprofessional relationships.

In this paper I am going to discuss the impact that different 'stages' have on the consultancy engagement and the role that physical space has in enhancing, inhibiting and developing the psychological work. By observing how individuals and teams use, relate and engage with different spaces it is possible to understand some of the underlying organisational and leadership dynamics. The choice of location, space, furniture and colour can convey key elements of the organisational culture and task - helping to understand the wider context. I also want to explore the consultant's experience of working in different settings and the influence on his/her creativity and capacity to think. Through a number of vignettes I'll try to identify what is projected into the physical space, its objects and ambience to discuss how the 'stage' represents the 'third' in the relationship between client and consultant. My examples will try to convey the experience of working in 1) Clients' different stages (a grand old building, a modern open space, a hotel board room), 2) My own stage - my consulting room and 3) The virtual stage of Skype – where you get glimpses and impressions of

people offices and private spaces. Being aware of the impact and significance of the physical environment in the consultancy engagement can help to develop a transitional space that can be containing, challenging and transforming.

References

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