

# The Impact of Physical Space on Innovation: An Example of Research Informed Teaching in Action

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**Research Oriented and Research Tutored:** Learning about research processes and how to critique research through analysing how organisations manage innovation.

Students were studying Innovation Management on an MSc program. It was a module with widely regarded text on Managing Innovation. A lecture had been given by showing the textbook to the students, suggesting that there was a chapter missing. A dramatic device aimed to highlight to the students that knowledge was always advancing through research. We went on to look at photographs of Spotify and Facebook offices and queried why they were laid out in the way that they were. We had previously discussed the social nature of innovation and the importance of serendipitous encounters on creativity. Methods for researching the link between space and encounter were then discussed by drawing on research from architecture.

As part of their assessed work, students were asked to analyse how an organisation of their choice managed innovation. The idea behind this request was to work together with the teacher in a research like process of shared learning where critiquing theory in a detailed and analytical way would encourage students to provide contributions to fill the gap identified in the textbook.

A group analysing Grab, a ride hailing service with operations across SE Asia, presented an argument that this organisation had explicitly used spatial arrangements to improve their innovative capabilities. The students had *discovered* that this organisation had; distributed their innovation activities spatially across multiple countries, not just reserving them for head office; had designed office layouts to encourage the type of social interactions that research had shown encouraged innovation; and even gone to the lengths of designing furniture (all supported with photographs) that the organisation believed enhanced innovation. It was *suggested* that this physical environment was responsible for producing '*hundreds of new innovative ideas every quarter*'.

After each presentation the students answered questions from their classmates. One of the groups, the 'Grab' group, was bombarded with questions about their analysis of physical space as the class had made a link between space and innovation, which also was recognized by the teacher. This was a clear sign of shared learning.

From the student's perspective, this research led teaching was encouraging a set of behaviours that should be encouraged at Masters-level. Highlighting a gap in a well-respected text made it acceptable to critique existing research and to look for gaps. Working through the logic of the research hypothesis using real world examples made the subject relatable and showing the methodologies employed by architecture researchers provided a glimpse of the rigour with which academics seek to find new phenomena. In this way the class tested whether the principles and theories involved can be applied in practice. This contextualization led to the discovery between the layout of physical space and innovation, which was integrated into the teaching via the shared learning experience. It was a serendipitous encounter that could be integrated in an updated version of the textbook on Managing Innovation.