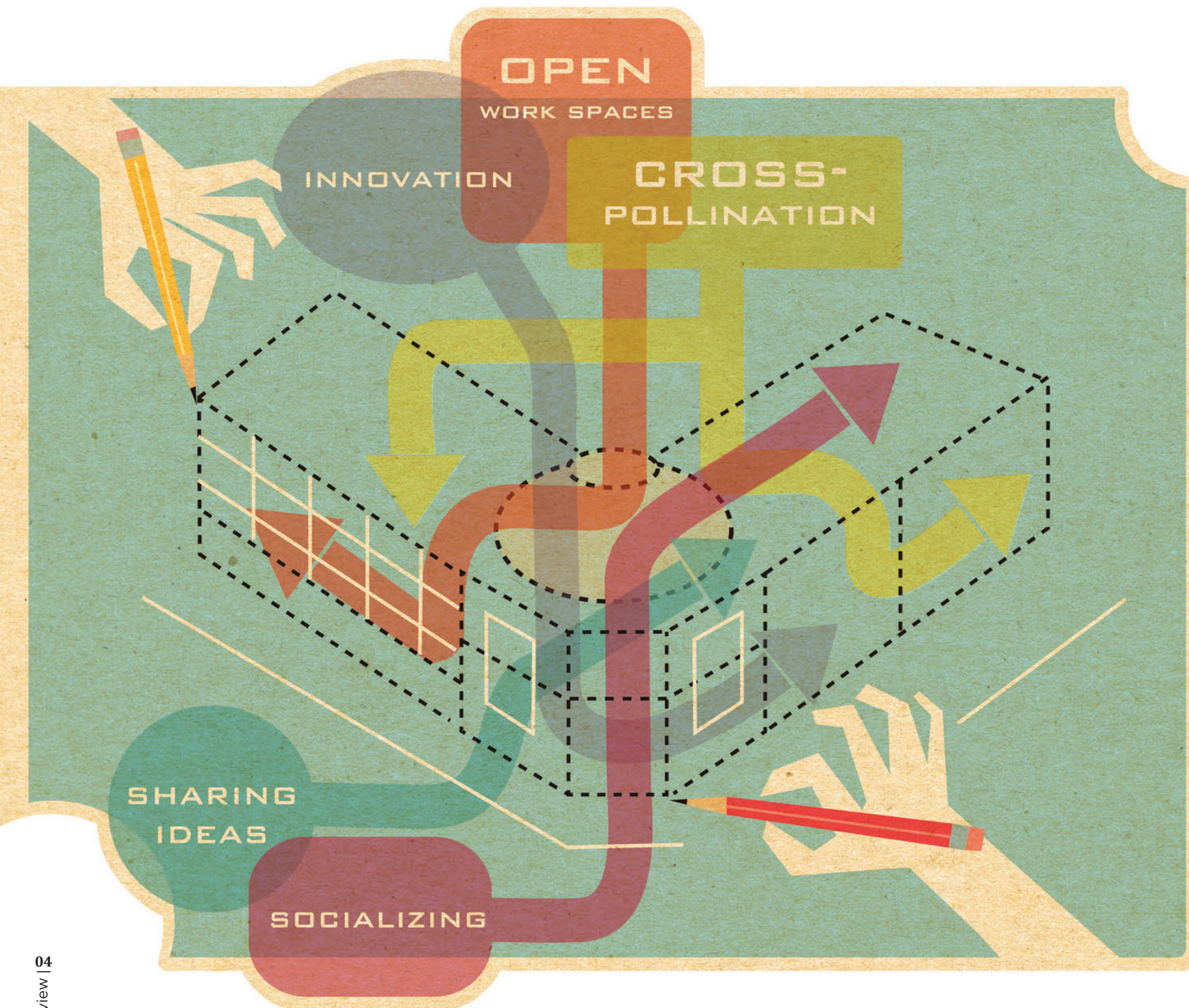


Redefining Offices and Classrooms: THE EMERGENCE OF

FLEXIBLE PRIVATE & PUBLIC WORK SPACES

BY / BARBARA ELMORE



Twenty-somethings,

forgive your grandparents for thinking the open office you describe at your work sounds just like their office of the 1940s.

Because similarities exist. At one point in American history, office workers plied their trades side-by-side in giant warehouses without walls. Pictures in the online Early Office Museum demonstrate this—or just ask your grandmother.

Still, vast differences between today's open workplaces and those of an earlier time present themselves. Whereas early office workers were more likely to sit in a straight row facing one direction—a bit like a factory line—today's workers might not sit at all, or they can carry chairs and notebooks from place to place. Their work area is everywhere—nameplates, electrical cords and offices not required.

And whereas the goals of earlier open space creators were to place as many workers in a room as possible, the object of today's free-flowing office is more likely to enhance entrepreneurial interaction.

To this end, some companies on the cutting-edge of technology design their work areas like villages, with laundromats and dry cleaners, yoga studios and cafés, thus providing convenience and blurring the line between work time and off-time.

Enter the New Paul L. Foster Campus for Business and Innovation,

a 275,000-square-foot campus designed to prepare business students for the work world of today and beyond, and you will see a thoughtful mixture of openness with the addition of privacy. With public spaces on the bottom floor and areas that become more private as you move upward, the new campus strives for balance between the need for collaboration and socializing, and for quiet and conversations that need not be overheard.

"We could define the open office movement as no walls," said Sara Perry, assistant professor of Management. "But there needs to be a hybrid approach of public and private space, and that's what the Foster Campus is."

Faculty offices are private, but more open than traditional office space because they are interconnected, with glass walls that allow for additional natural light in departmental suites. There are other transitional spaces as well. Classrooms allow for different levels of collaboration, meeting rooms can convert from public to private, and public meeting spaces allow for incidental interactions. Chairs and couches in open public spaces invite conversation.

"It seems like a nice balance and consistent with what research is showing," Perry added. "People need autonomy, so if you have the freedom to choose what kind of space you are going to work in, that need will be satisfied."



“You have to be deliberate and actually plan for innovation, in order for innovation to succeed,” Perry said. In the workplace, this means everyone is empowered, but there is a “logistical structure that allows everything to run.”

The principles the authors researched and detailed in the book are applied at the Foster Campus, she said. These include “channeled curiosity,” or having a goal in mind when beginning research on a project; “boundary-breaking collaboration,” which is multidisciplinary in practice and crosses all types of boundaries; and “orchestrated commercialization,” or creating new processes or products for public consumption.

Hunter helps smooth the path to career development and placement, and keep HR students up-to-date with the workplace by bringing in guest speakers from HR departments at companies such as Microsoft, Dell and NASA to discuss new HR practices. She also provides students with a job-shadowing program, where students spend a day with executives from Dell’s HR department and discuss current workplace challenges.

Hunter believes the open concept of the Foster Campus will help encourage research and innovative teaching practices because of its team-based work environment design that encourages meetings throughout the day and after hours.

Faculty and students sharing space improves both teaching and research, she said. “Foster [Campus] is not only on the cutting edge of technology to facilitate teaching, but we are preparing students for a highly technology-focused working environment where comfort with and ability to adapt to new technology is critical.”

Sharing across disciplines was a driving factor in the design of the new campus, Archer said. Although each department wanted its own identity, openness is accomplished through reception areas and signage instead of walls and office suites. “Behind the scenes, all of the offices are interconnected. The real beauty is in how it functions, with spaces designed for planned collisions.”

Baylor is in the forefront among business schools

training students for the new world of business, which is about entrepreneurship, innovation and solutions for complex problems, Archer added. “This is a shift in academic thinking—equipping people across spectrums—for example, marketing people and accountancy people, to get them working on the same project.”

“The business school wanted faculty and classrooms together, so that students could move from a classroom to a professor’s office without having to break artificial barriers,” Archer said. “That is Baylor’s philosophy—very hands-on.”

The space also is designed so visiting business leaders can watch students engaged in active learning. “Leaders love to see students doing what students do, and the new building creates multiple opportunities for that to happen naturally,” Archer said. “This way we can showcase the mission. It’s an exciting experience for everyone in the building, and truly transformational for the campus.”

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The intention of the Foster Campus was to provide spaces where people want to hang out, to enhance the idea of a community and to allow for more cross-pollination and the sharing of ideas.

Architects approached the design through study and inquiry. “We’ve done a lot of listening,” said Rick Archer of Overland Partners/Architects, the San Antonio firm that designed the campus.

During the eight years Archer and his team have worked at Baylor, they have gained a deep understanding of Baylor’s culture and values. Overland incorporated into the design the kinds of classrooms, offices and meeting rooms that encourage flexibility and flatten barriers, planning the campus from the inside out rather than the outside in. “We’ve talked to department chairs, students and faculty about their aspirations, and we designed the new building based on what we heard,” Archer said.

Perry, who teaches Negotiation and Conflict Resolution and a human resources (HR) management class called Human Resource Staffing and Labor Relations, is working with Associate Professor of Management Cindy Wu to develop partnerships

with companies to enrich the curriculum. Students will organize into teams to study an HR-specific problem raised by an industry partner, such as workforce planning or job analysis, and compete to find a winning solution. “They may also look at designing recruitment programs, using social media to recruit a more diverse workforce,” Perry said.

The Foster Campus’s use of public-private spaces and flexible classroom setups enhances this kind of teamwork, as well as the team activities that Perry and Emily Hunter, an associate professor in the Human Resource Management major, use with students in Negotiation to demonstrate how companies accomplish tasks via virtual connections.

Perry and Hunter co-authored, with two others, a book titled “Organized Innovation: A Blueprint for Renewing America’s Prosperity,” which studied university-industry collaborations called Engineering Research Centers to discover how leaders can coordinate technology breakthroughs to advance American competitiveness and prosperity.