Establishing a ‘Knowledge Commons’ at the CSIR

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Background

- Interdisciplinary research projects
- Collaboration across organisational boundaries
- Opportunities for informal interaction & serendipitous knowledge sharing
- Knowledge transfer is problematic:
  - Organisational & physical distribution
  - Modern information technology & email
- Knowledge Commons facility
KM Strategy

• How can spatial design be used to:
  – facilitate knowledge sharing?
  – increase collaboration across boundaries?

• Study consisted of:
  – Literature review
  – Determination of stakeholder requirements
  – Design, functionality & planning of the Knowledge Commons
KM Strategy

• Personalisation strategy vs. codification (Hansen, Nohria & Tierney)
  – CSIR provides highly customised solutions to unique problems
  – Tacit knowledge sharing through person-to-person contact & development of networks

• Spatial school of KM (Earl)
  – Use of space & spatial design to facilitate knowledge sharing
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Gladwell maintains that “innovation, the heart of the knowledge economy, is fundamentally social. Ideas arise as much out of casual conversations as they do out of formal meetings. More precisely, as one study after another has demonstrated, the best ideas in any workplace arise out of casual contacts among different groups within the same company.”
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The Knowledge Commons is located at the main entrance to the Chancellor Oppenheimer Library.

It provides undergraduates with a "one-stop-shop" for access to printed and electronic learning and research resources, plus office software to process their work.

Four UCT Libraries' staff and 30 Student Navigators offer a service that is available 74 hours a week and accessed by over 8000 students a week.

- The Knowledge Commons offers:
  - the Internet
  - ALEPH, the online catalogue
  - indexes to journal articles
  - full-text electronic journals
  - SABINET, the online catalogue of South African libraries
  - electronic reference books
  - MS Office software, with online training
The use of space for knowledge work

• Personal space - Individual time for concentration, reflection & learning
• Team space - Collaborative learning
• Social space - Casual interaction in a non-threatening environment

(Ward & Holtham; Doyle & Nathan; Gladwell)
Critical success factors

• If we build it, will they come?
• Principal of ‘contactivity’
• Encouragement & legitimisation
• Marketing & liaison
• Draw cards
  – Top class facilities
  – Networking events, talks, Science Cafes
• Measurement & evaluation
Bibliography


Bibliography


Questions?