

# Establishing a 'Knowledge Commons' at the CSIR

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# Background

- The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)
- 5 Operating Units, 3 National Research Centres, Services Group
- Main campus in Pretoria, with a number of regional offices
- <http://www.csir.co.za>

# Background

- Team work & collaboration across boundaries
- Request to establish a 'Knowledge Commons'
- Knowledge transfer is problematic:
  - Organisational & physical distribution
  - Modern information technology & email
- Knowledge Management initiative



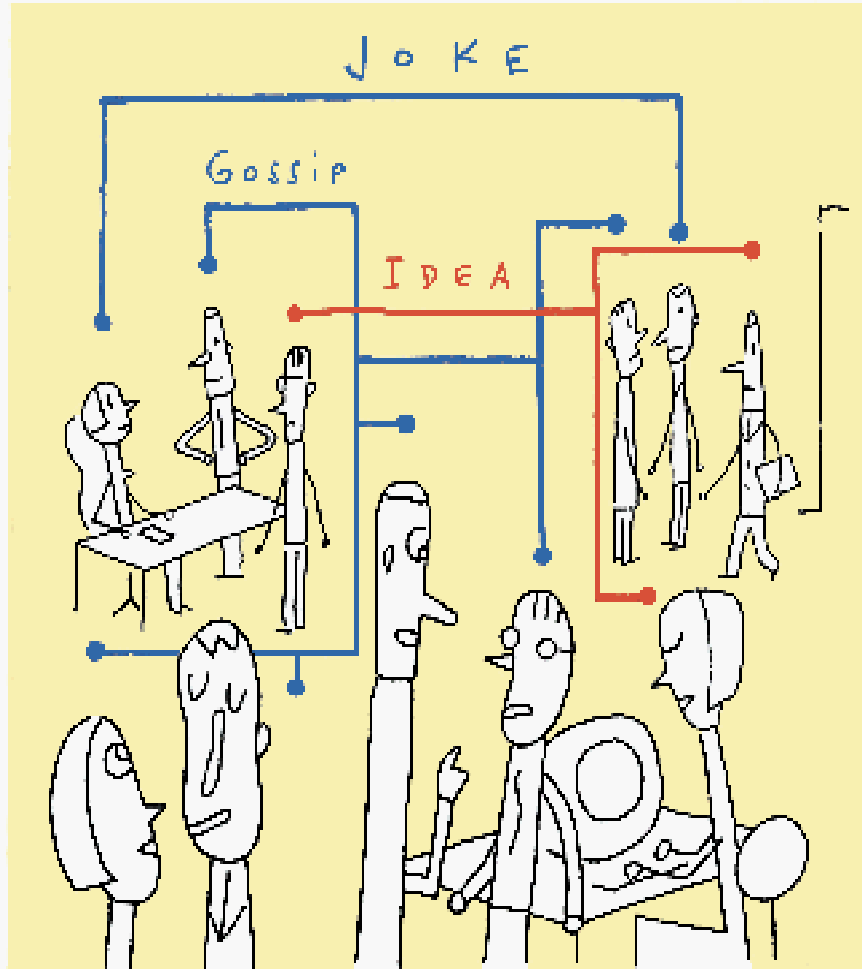
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# KM Strategy

- 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
  - Encourages tacit knowledge sharing through person-to-person contacts
- Spatial school of KM (Earl)
  - Use of space & spatial design to facilitate knowledge sharing



Graphic from Gladwell (2000:60)

Casual conversations provide an opportunity for tacit knowledge transfer as they have the “advantage of opening the door to serendipity. They are opportunities for spontaneous meetings of the mind that have the potential to generate new ideas and solve old problems in unexpected ways” (Davenport & Prusak)

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”.

# 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)

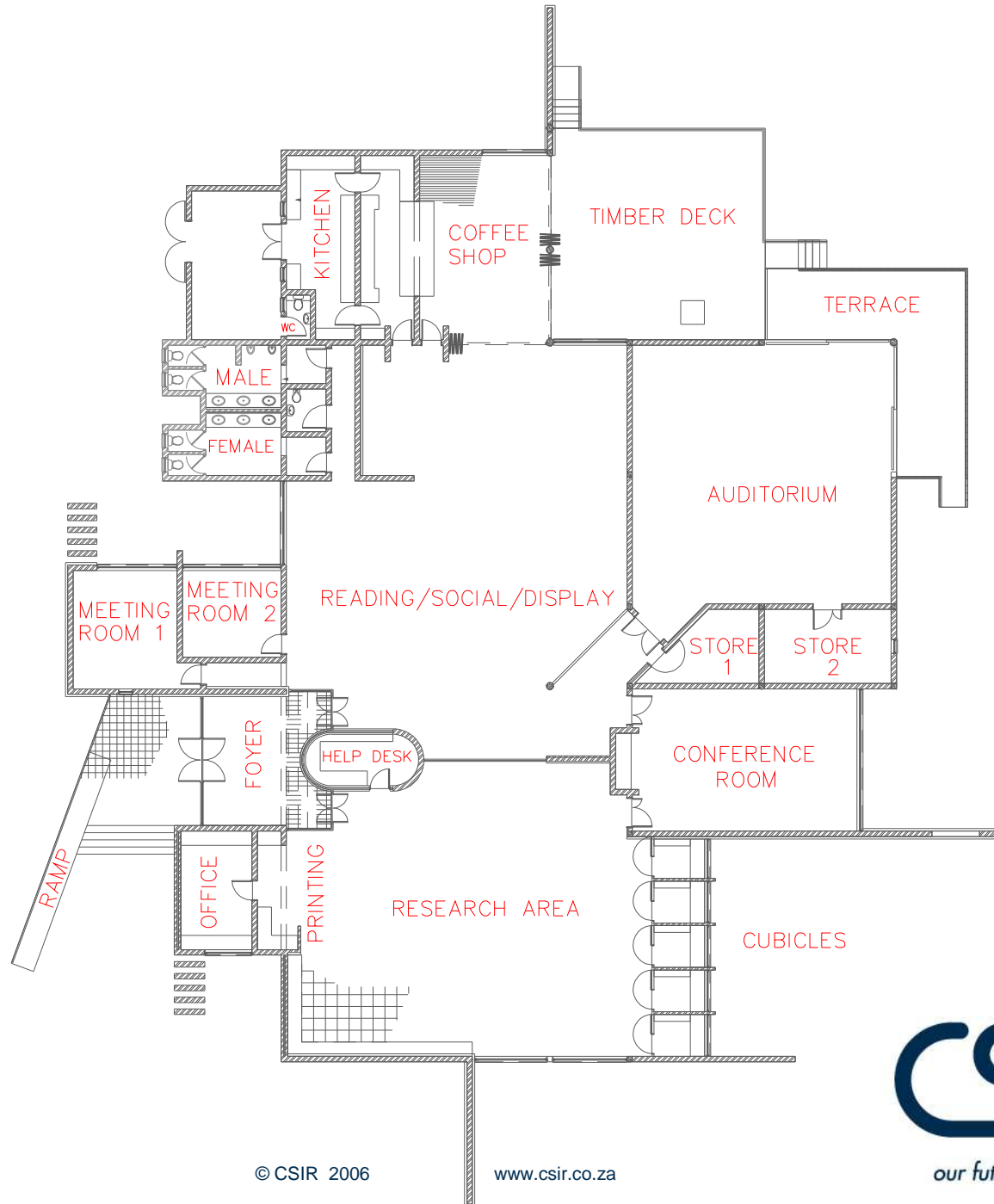


# Critical success factors

- If we build it, will they come?
- Principal of 'contactivity' (Earl)
- Other initiatives to build social relationships (Davenport, Thomas & Cantrell)
- Encouragement & legitimisation (Earl; Miller)

# The 'Knowledge Commons'

- Floor plan
- Provision for individual, team & social space



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