

WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT AT WORK

A Look at What Young Professionals Want and
How to Meet Their Needs For a Better Workplace

ORANGEPAPER INSIGHTS VOL.1 BY BIRSEL+SECK - NOVEMBER 2015

HELLO!

Birsel+Seck is starting a new series: OrangePapers. Periodically, we will share our point-of-view, around subjects that interest us, informed by our creative process Deconstruction:Reconstruction and our co-design work, Design the Experience You Love with actual users. Our First OrangePaper is about Millennials at Work and a look at what young professionals want and how to meet their needs for a better workplace.

WAIT, WHAT'S AN ORANGEPAPER?

It's a short thought piece that summarizes our perspective on complex topics as diverse as Work, Desire, Mammography, Aging, Driving, Bathing or other topics that inspire us. We pick a topic that matters to us, lead a co-design session with people we recruit and learn with them.

WHY ORANGE?

It's our color and it brightens our mood, helping us to think optimistically and playfully about serious topics.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM OUR ORANGEPAPERS?

- 01. **OUR POV AND NEW VISION:**
We deconstruct and reconstruct, synthesize and develop a unique POV that will help you think differently.
- 02. **UNIQUE INSIGHTS:**
In our co-design sessions, we break our subject down into its pieces, gather inspiration, generate ideas, and create a reconstruction map to understand what matters most. This process has led to unique insights time and time again, which is why we want to share the results with you.
- 03. **RECOMMENDATIONS:**
We offer our recommendations and suggestions on how to apply these insights. We would love to hear your feedback.



“For me, I want to come to work with a common goal, a purpose that’s shared. Telos — purpose in latin — is what matters to keep pushing forward, beyond money, status or comfort.”

“We need to humanize LinkedIn and break down the perceived notion of rigid job descriptions and structure. I want to know people by their skills, emotional and otherwise, strengths and work with good people”

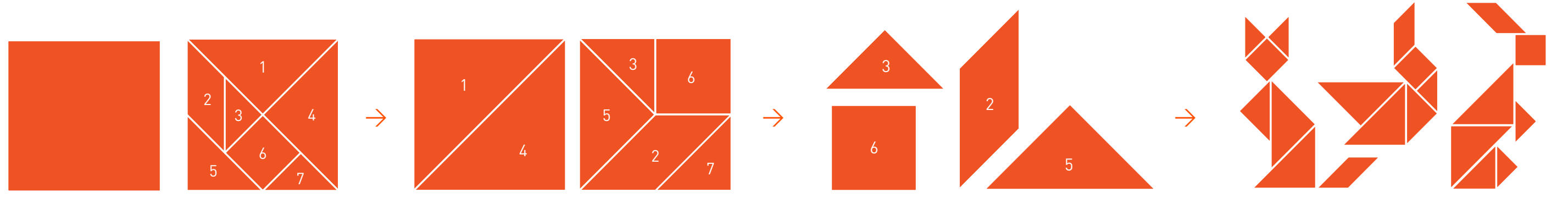
“If Work is like a top notch design school studio, it brings people together, it has enough flexibility to be reconfigured by people depending on your needs and it’s transparent...”



APPROACH

We use our creative process, Deconstruction:Reconstruction during a Design the Experience You Love (DEYL in short) session. DEYL gives us the format and tools to gather insights and co-design in 3-hour sessions.

We use the 4 steps of our creative process, DE:RE, to uncover insights and imagine a new experience:



01. DECONSTRUCT
We Deconstruct the current experience with a carefully selected user group.

02. POV
Together, we shift our POV to re-imagine a new experience utilizing design tools and powerful visualizations.

03. RECONSTRUCT
Then we reconstruct the experience into a hierarchy of their most desired wants and needs.

04. EXPRESSION
Express this as a new experience in designer + user pairs that result in deep insights and rich content.

OUR CO-DESIGN GROUP

We were finding that most of our clients were at a loss when it came to understanding what Millennials want at work. This fascinated us and we decided to figure out together with Millennials. We started by gathering a group of Millennials to Design the Work They Love, the first of a series of Design the Experience You Love insights sessions. Our Millennials live in New York, are between the ages of 24-30 and work in creative fields—a mixed group who are full of charm, optimism and idealism.



6 WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT AT WORK?

“Bring Emotion to Work”

“Feel and Show Excitement”

“Spaces that Reflect the Company Culture”

“Live your Telos”

“Take Physical and Intellectual Breaks”

“Have Empathy”

“Give and Receive Help”

“Be Challenged and Learn”

7 INSIGHTS IN A NUTSHELL

Here we wanted to share our insights in a nutshell, before breaking it down according to the steps of our process. Our research and co-design suggests that young workers just joining the workforce are looking for a holistic workplace experience that goes beyond intellectual satisfaction. They are looking for a place that aids them in finding purpose within the work they do and in creating emotional connections with the people they work with.

Organizations that believe in making their purpose apparent and create physical environments that reflect the organization’s culture will succeed in relating to the youngest workers of our generation. This is critical in an age where a recent Gallup poll shows more than 75% of American workforce is not motivated or engaged at work.

Work for Millennials is about finding your purpose and bringing your whole self to work, with your emotions and spirit. At work, you give and take, helping others intellectually. There is a good balance of tension and play, pushing boundaries and doing what comes naturally. Your office is a physical expression of your culture — it looks, feels and acts like your organization, if you’re agile, your space is agile too. Work is where you make emotional connections to people and where you are passionate about the work itself. It’s a place of empathy and of diverse ideas living side by side in a safe environment.

DECONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK I LOVE

DECONSTRUCTION

Deconstruction is the first step of our Deconstruction:Reconstruction™ creative process: This is where we break down the whole to see the parts without the links that form preconceptions.

We deconstruct using 4 quadrants: Emotion, Physical, Intellectual and Spiritual to make sure we look at any topic holistically.

The deconstruction of work pointed out positives and negatives; it is a tool to put everything on the table. The deconstruction of work highlighted issues around self-expression— the difficulty of being yourself at work vs. an expectation of having a “professional” identity. Intellectually, work gives the opportunity to grow and gain knowledge; yet within the constraints of time, tension, risks and change.

Technology is seen as a double-edged sword: People are happy when it works, but often find it a distraction from doing focused work. Millennials recognize that good work happens without WiFi. The environment of work encompasses everything from physical and mental breaks to good coffee, good music, comfort and well-lit spaces. The deconstruction of the spirit of the work was rich with ideas, including: devotion, giving everything you have, good vibe, recognition, being in the zone and finding purpose.



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE WORK I LOVE

RECONSTRUCTION

After changing our point of view about work with various design tools and generating ideas, we move on to Reconstruction. While Deconstruction breaks Work into its pieces, Reconstruction builds it back up, identifying what matters most for us in this new experience. We identify our key design intent across Emotion, Physical, Intellect and Spiritual qualities of Work. We use these maps as initial guides to our design, use them separately or in conjunction and coherent with our initial intent.

The reconstruction of the work Millennials love point out a different workplace experience: They look for a greater emotional connection to people and the workspace, they expect that the physical space reflects the organizational values and they're consistent, they want to be in a safe environment to learn and being challenged while intellectually helping others. The spirit of the work millennials love is about coming together around a cause and empathy.



INSIGHT #1

HERE WE HAVE 4 KEY INSIGHTS THAT EMERGED FROM OUR CO-DESIGN SESSION, WHY WE THINK IT MATTERS AND HOW YOU CAN APPLY THIS INSIGHT IN YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION.

We want to bring our whole selves to work, not just the “professional” part of our personality.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Millennials’ work is not too different than life; it is a continuum rather than two separate things.

We found that being yourself at work and expressing your emotions, and with that your vulnerabilities, without fear of ridicule is a serious matter to millennials.

HOW TO APPLY THIS INSIGHT

- Develop a workplace culture where emotion and empathy are part of the working hours.
- Emotional match-making is the new work mantra. This generation is asking to humanize LinkedIn and proposing to match not only skills but passions at work. Create formal or informal structures to connect work related passions and interests.
- Design teams and processes to allow Millennials to bring love, excitement and where they can express their passion for work.



SHIFTING OUR POINT OF VIEW ON WORK I LOVE

Point of View (POV) is the second step of DE:RE. POV lets one see the same constraints and problems in a different light, as opportunities and solutions. We shift our perspective and generate many ideas using seven different design tools, including cross fertilization.

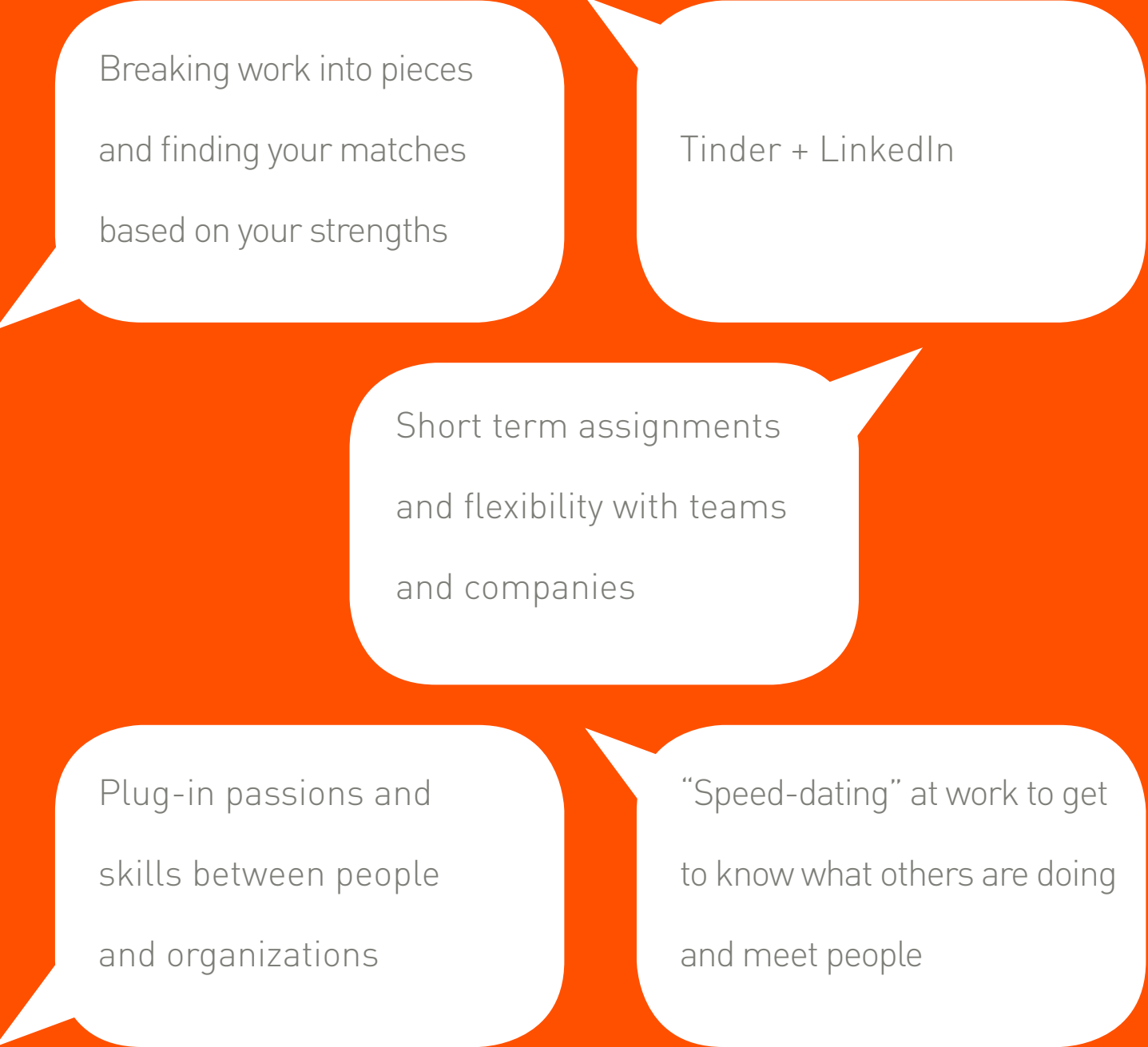
Cross fertilization is to bring a solution from another context into ours to generate new ideas. Here is an example of cross fertilizing work with Tinder or match.com for generating ideas on customization.



WORK



TINDER / MATCH.COM



INSIGHT #2

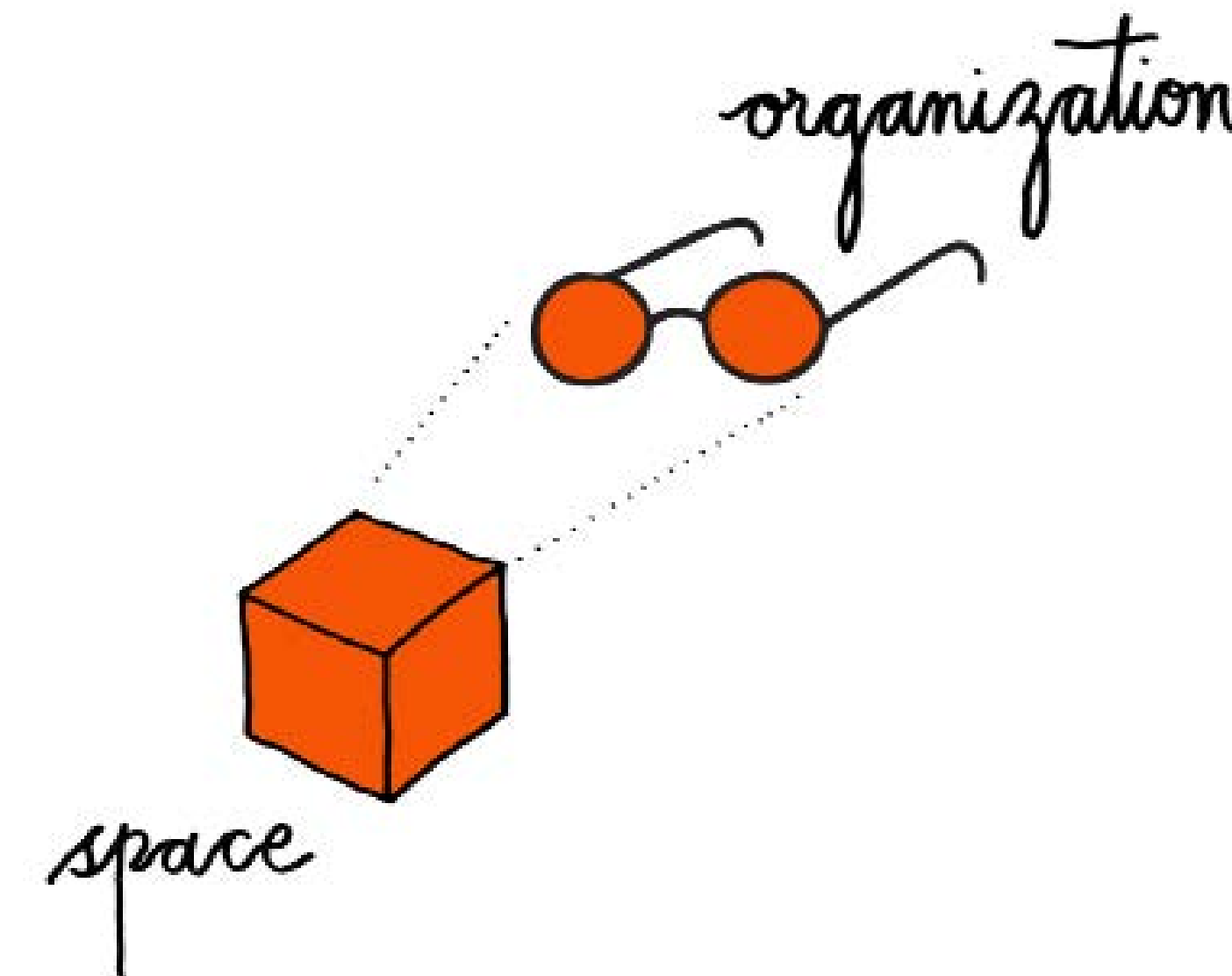
Our workspaces should look like the organization, a reflection of its ethos and values.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Millennials value coherence between the physical workspace and the culture of the organization. They expect to see the office as an extension of the purpose and meaning of work. Although physical comfort is important, it's more than the ergonomic chair and desk setup; it's also about being comfortable in your skin and the freedom to be yourself.

HOW TO APPLY THIS INSIGHT

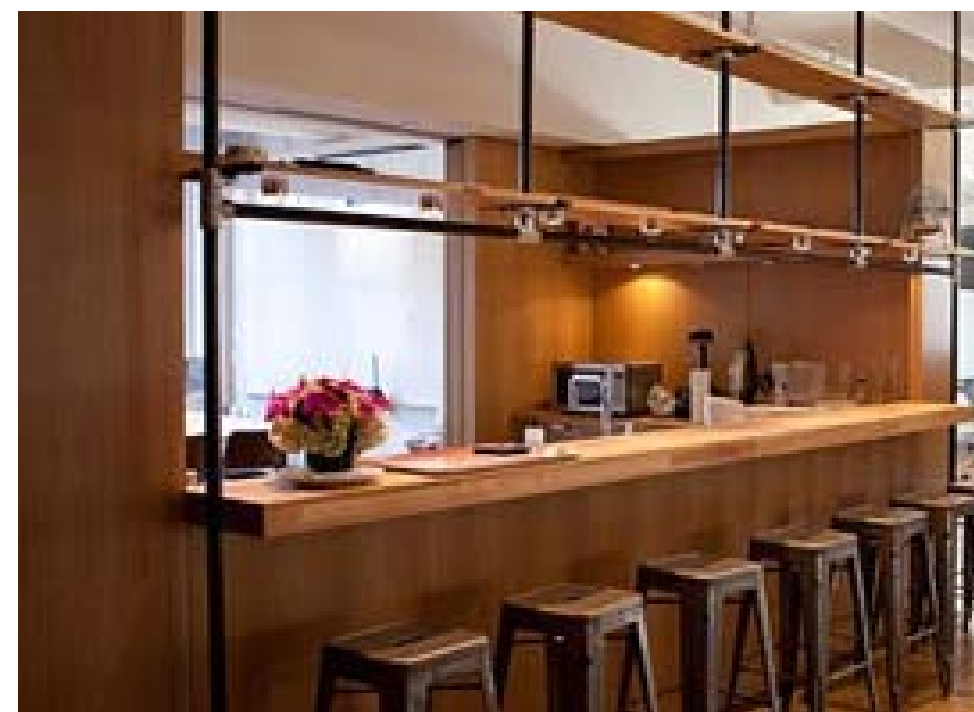
- Define the ethos of your team together: Whether your team is transparent, opaque, hierarchical, flat, flexible, empowering...etc, strive for coherence and create workspaces that reflect that.
- Designate workspaces that don't judge ideas and allow overflow of ideas visually.
- Encourage a level of individualism to enable personal reflection and emotional connection.
- Spend time together like an improvisational jazz band: perform, share, even cook and eat together.



SHIFTING OUR POINT OF VIEW ON WORK I LOVE

Another Point of View (POV) tool we use is constructive metaphors. Metaphors help us understand new or complex things in relation with things we already know. For the Work Experience, we used the Products of Design Studio at School of Visual Arts as a physical space metaphor.

This metaphor led the group to think differently by considering its space values, responsiveness, balance between community and individuality, creating non judgmental spaces for free flow of ideas.



- Kitchen is the center of the activity, food brings people together



- Space reflects the organization culture: Flexible, transparent, creative
- Furniture that allows for make-shift group discussion and the movement of people within the space



- Great level of individuality for your own space - you can be yourself!



- Responsive spaces and furniture that are highly and easily configurable by its users such as movable walls, space-making elements, configurable desks...etc.



- Ideas that are visible and allow for sharing and constant exchange and inspiration- on the walls, as prototypes on desks, sketches, post-its, posters...etc.

INSIGHT #3

We want to have room for serious play that allows for tension, challenge, and pushing boundaries.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Young workers look for the tension and growth that comes with being challenged in a safe environment.

This environment also allows for a level of vulnerability at work where you can give and receive help, much like what Adam Grant talks about in his book “Give and Take: A Revolutionary Approach to Success”.

Grant explains that giving more than getting and a generous orientation towards others lead to successful leaders and organizational performance.

HOW TO APPLY THIS INSIGHT

- Create assignments and roles for learning and pushing boundaries in a safe environment.
- Create a giving environment: Intellectual help (informal mentoring and other forms) as giving and getting is fundamental to success.
- Team Co-Design: Choose who to collaborate with, instead of an being thrown in with a group of people. Consciously design and build teams who have a shared vision and values.

SERIOUS
play

EXPRESSION OF THE WORK I LOVE

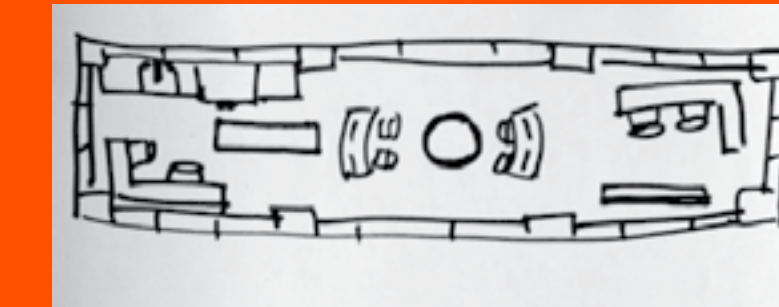
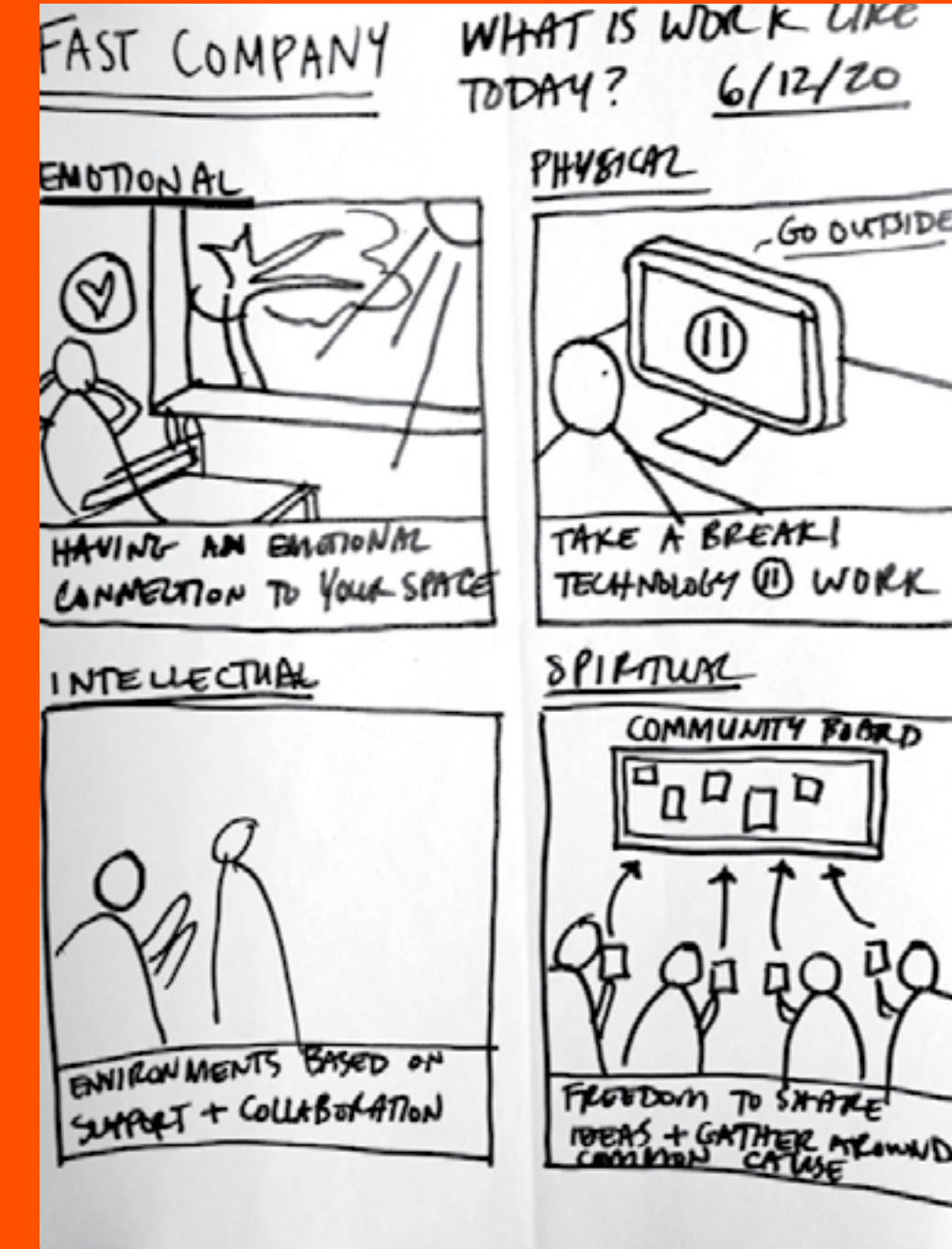
Expression is the last step of DE:RE and it can be a concept, design, story, article, manifesto - depending on what we are working on. Our millennials expressed the work they love through sketches and articles.

These expressions inform our vision, insights summary and concept work that follow the sessions. We included a few examples in these pages.

The New York Times
June 2020
The Work That I Love

I've worked at many places over the course of my career. There were things that I'd change at every one. Now, as the owner of my own business, I can finally craft the perfect job for myself - the work that I truly love.

And you know what? It's really hard. Consider this a warning, especially if you're an aspiring entrepreneur. My old friend and mentor ^{Allan Chochinov} told me that designers love constraints. This is so true. When I started this company, there was an overwhelming amount of choice that I had. I didn't know where to start.



Ultimately, I made sure to place the important things front & center. I started my organization on the basis of one very important thing - purpose. Starting with the why helped me frame all of my choices - it gave me a constraint to push up against.

In our office, we have modular furniture, movable walls, the works. Except one thing, that never moves, that is visible from every point in the office. The world, and its wicked problems. An installation piece, part art, part infographic, that reminds us of why we do what we do, that any of my staff can annotate or add to. And that decision to make our purpose front & center informed nearly every other choice I've made - from who to hire to which projects to work on. Of course, it is a somber thing to stare at endlessly, so we make ^{sure} extra effort to have fun together. So far, I don't think anyone will

INSIGHT #4

We are looking for purpose and an environment for collective empathy.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Having and sustaining “Telos”, Greek for an ultimate goal or purpose, was one of the main threads across our explorations.

Millennials are big on empathy, the ability to put yourself in the shoes of someone else to understand them. They seek a collective understanding that allows different styles, points of view and ideologies to co-exist harmoniously at work.

HOW TO APPLY THIS INSIGHT

- Make purpose visible. Articulate the purpose of work, beyond ROI and quarterly earnings to motivate through Telos: what you’re meant to be doing and finding purpose.
- Create opportunities to develop empathy and practicing vulnerability, borrowing from design tools as necessary: observational research, active listening, role-playing and even shadowing to truly understand the other’s point of view.



CONCLUSION

We've been researching, developing concepts and designing award-winning furniture and systems for workplaces for over 20 years. Our findings for the work millennials love align well with a need to approach work holistically. Our insights and recommendations can be applicable to a wide range of workplace solutions, from organizational design to physical design to leadership and management interventions to achieve a better workplace.

Only when we design work holistically, with the emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects well-aligned, we can move towards a fulfilling and purposeful environment, not just for millennials but every generation in the workplace today.

We want to bring our whole selves to work, not just the “professional” part of our personality.

Our workspaces should look like the organization, a reflection of its ethos and values.

We want to have a room for serious play that allows for tension, challenge, and pushing boundaries.

We are looking for purpose and an environment for collective empathy.

THANK YOU

We started OrangePapers to jump start conversations around subjects that matter to us and our clients. Our goal is to continue to discover and learn about these subjects together with you. If you're interested, please email or call us to setup a time where we can answer your questions, exchange ideas and hear about your experiences on the same topics.

For more information on this OrangePaper, our process and tools, please contact Seda Evis at seda@birselpusseck.com or call us at Birselpusseck studio.

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Video and Photo Credit: Victor De La Cruz

Location: Civic Hall, New York.

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