

a cbt study

DESIGNING FOR THE NEW CULTURE **IN AN ERA OF BEHAVIORAL FLUIDITY**

//HOW IS OUR PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT
HELPING OR HINDERING PROGRESS?



AS WORK, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACES ARE CHANGING, DESIGN NEEDS TO KEEP UP.

The most recent roundtable discussion hosted at CBT had a big goal: understanding how the current innovation economy that surrounds us is affecting our ability to create and navigate environments where people can thrive. We seek success and balance; equity and innovation; newness and stability. However, where the physical and technological resources are accelerating in opposite directions — one seems to be shrinking, while the other is expanding — what does this mean for design? What can we, as designers, affect in these realms?

Looking into the future, what factors will support high-growth industries, accelerate innovation, foster entrepreneurship activity, build human capital, and invigorate people and organizations even more? We are working to better understand some of the universal and experiential qualities of space design. **Today, everything is mixed-use.**

The lines between education and work are blurred. Play is productive, creativity is more relevant than ever, and space is at a premium. In this roundtable talk, we explore which factors make people and communities thrive. Which ones hinder development?

The discussion sought to better understand the direction and patterns of behavior that are contributing today to the shape of the next generations of our innovation economy.

PARTICIPANTS OFFERED PERSPECTIVES FROM MANY FIELDS:



Digital Marketing



Real Estate



Higher Education



Science & Technology



Journalism



LIFE AT WORK

CBT editorial comments are in bold type.

Speed and collaboration were two major factors in discussing the quality of both today's work environment and the work experience. Are speed and collaboration enablers of one another, or hindrances?



The new issue we're seeing is speed to market. What used to need several months to complete now is needed in half that time, so you have to work collaboratively.



I disagree: collaboration, while valuable, runs counter to speed.

But when we don't collaborate, are the social effects detrimental to the work? One of the participants had a strong response to the anti-collaborative model that we see in many open office environments.



This model has so backfired that when people are put together, they automatically put on headphones, and it's like an interruption to then try to interact with them. You almost want to say, "would you please start interrupting me?!"

Culture is an inevitable topic when we talk about the workplace.



Trust is a key part of culture. We have to interrupt each other! Getting people to work really, truly together is important. In order to make progress, we need to disagree.

Another theme that emerged is that on both campuses and in professional environments, the core of what people are there to do is not only changing, but being forgotten entirely.



People's sense of purpose now matters more. When it comes to physical space, what are the true needs versus the wish list in their daily activities? This is important to be precise about.



Yes; we need to ask: what is the work at the center? In order to create environments where people and groups thrive, we can't lose sight of the core mission(s) of the work that needs to be completed. What is the conversation we need to be having? People need to understand this to grow, to feel satisfied, and for discovery.

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ANALYSIS GROUP
BOSTON, MA

What do privacy and space mean for different types of work? We can't be agnostic about the kinds of work that's done in a million different companies and firms. It matters what kind of activities people are expected to do, and with whom, and when.



How does industry affect that? At MIT, it doesn't. The practice and research they do resist global forces. There is an institutional lag in terms of industry evolution.



Companies are reorganizing more than before. Openness is something writers struggle with. Deadlines don't get along with openness, yet spaces are getting condensed everywhere we look.



Since personal vs. work time is now blurred, it's critical to give people options. Don't dictate what they should be doing and where. Give them the power to choose, give them environments where they can have a variety of activities and bring people in.



Yes — people resist change because it usually equates to a reduction in space and/or privacy.



To change culture, you need leadership to change theirs as well — *and model the shift*. It is important to have a prototype for the new model.

The question is whether space actually plays such an important role in life at work; does it?




It is the spaces in between that matter; I just want to work with smart people. The two things you are hearing about all the time are these:

- Everyone is talking about work/life balance, but we need to make it real. It's work/life convenience that we need.
- Collaboration needs to be taken seriously. We say we do it, but what's missing is those real "foxhole moments" that really cause people to bond; the experience of going through something in the professional world. We need to learn how to curate a shared moment and how to solve problems together.

"You know, real things start with a person. Companies need to hire good cultural fits, and give them the space that makes them say 'I feel like doing something important today.'"

WE CAN'T HOUSE TODAY'S ECONOMY **IN YESTERDAY'S** **REAL ESTATE MODEL**


HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH REAL NEEDS FROM PERCEIVED NEEDS?

 "The leaders in ride-sharing are successful because they invented something where there was a need. They have actually succeeded in changing behavior, and that is where the value lies.

By contrast, leaders in the coworking sphere didn't invent anything — they are the middlemen, only masking the traditional model. They have made risk sexy by aggregating companies; but can they survive? They are creating an illusion of stability by co-opting flexibility."

REAL ESTATE IN A CHANGING ECONOMY

How do we reconcile an outdated industry model — traditional commercial real estate (CRE) — with the fast-changing expectations of today's tenants?

 We are confronted with enormous changes and shifts right now. The real estate industry hasn't changed that much, and the way that this industry uses data is the same as it was 20 years ago.

And it's shocking how quickly things change. Tenants are evolving, but our industry is not keeping pace. It is very difficult to change the way an industry operates when they have such an embedded way of thinking.

When tech and innovation firms represented around five to 10 percent of the market, it was not a big deal for most CRE firms. However, we're now looking at nearer to 50 percent in the Greater Boston area. How can we translate what is happening at the tenant base into how we operate?


The challenge is that companies these days just don't know how they're going to grow, and they are looking for maximum flexibility. This makes sense. They want shorter lease terms. But how do you take all of the creative ambitions of today's tenants and translate that into a viable lease? All parties need to survive (not just the startup tenants, but the landlords as well!). The commercial real estate industry is tradition-bound because that is how it has always survived, and designers and tenants should understand this.


We, as owners, need to try and satisfy the cultural needs of tenants while also needing to meet the real-world requirements of our own industry.


So, how can the CRE and A/E/C industries reconcile the vastly different paces at which they evolve?

SOCIAL AND SPATIAL


People in all industries are experiencing growing pains with the ways that changes in physical space are influencing our behavior together. How do you manage this in your organization?


 I say start with the human. People are changing dramatically, and we're trying to educate them; and they are arriving at our university with different expectations than in years prior. We also face challenges with some faculty members who are not comfortable teaching in the new ways and using the new methods.


 The economy is moving faster than education and workplaces. To work with this, our firm has decided to give employees guardrails more so than linear steps to follow. Agility is the key word here. Roles are getting blurred. Sense of place matters; interactions between people matter; and establishing a culture matters.

 The challenge is trying to facilitate collaboration while maintaining "separateness."

The trend CBT is seeing across industries and environments is how much more focus there is on interior spaces and the daily human experience. There needs to be an innate human-centric approach to space design. What types of spaces have you created at your firm/institution?


 It used to be that the work done *in* the lab was the best. Now, we have created three two-person meeting rooms that cannot be reserved. The funny thing is that there is no technology in them at all, and they are always in use.


 Although they are nothing fancy, we have small rooms with frosted glass, a phone, and sometimes a couch. They are very popular.


 We have created a real mixture of spaces; we understand the "alone together" concept, and are working to get to what people are doing in their jobs. We have space at the edge of the campus that is totally programmed for the community. However, we believe that flexibility and transparency both have limits to how they can help people and organizations.

TECHNOLOGY AND PEOPLE


Is technology working for or against our progress as teams and as organizations?

 We find that technology is promoting decentralization because you can do your work any time and anywhere; and we're asking what effect the diminishing nature of face-to-face interaction is having. When you have a digital option, people choose to dial in vs. meeting up.

 Now with the power of technology, so much can be done at a distance. We need to understand how to make people come in and interact with each other.

 In my opinion, all tools are useless if they don't bring people together.

Are we being helped by all of the media and data that our technologies provide?

 The definition of media today is really anything that you can use to express yourself. Data means different things to different groups. Since data of all kinds is ubiquitous, you need to be able to analyze it. You need to be able to connect the dots. We have more data these days than we can really handle.

Conclusion: no matter how quickly the factors which enable progress are changing, it seems that across industries and organizations, people are invariably looking for a range of ways to advance and succeed. The solution seems to be based around highly responsive spaces and work options so that progress isn't slowed by either one.

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PARTICIPANTS

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Brian specializes in counseling clients on issues related to location, labor market dynamics/talent attraction, real estate strategy and economic incentives negotiation.

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Jeff leads the strategic practices team at Primacy, a national digital-first marketing and technology agency. He is a creative catalyst, intent on developing exceptional experiences in an increasingly digital-first world.

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Amy is the Senior Campus Designer for Campus Planning and Development at Northeastern University. This role requires Amy to manage design teams and lead design for national and international regional campus expansion sites, and for select capital projects.

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Young sets strategic priorities for the firm and directs investment production, investor relations and development activities.

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Pat is a Senior Vice President and Creative Director with the digital services agency Primacy where he founded the User Experience and Content Strategy practices. Recent projects include virtual reality and conversational interface experiences.

Emily Rueb

Reporter, The New York Times

Emily Rueb wrote and produced New York 101, a multimedia column explaining infrastructure. She is currently a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. At the Times, she has pioneered new approaches to storytelling for the breaking news blog, City Room, where she covered Hurricane Sandy and major elections, and created a niche writing about avian life.

Kathy Spiegelman

*Vice President and Chief of Campus
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Kathy works to ensure that the university's physical resources keep pace with its core values and ambitions. In this role, Kathy is responsible for the effective use of land and buildings on Northeastern's main campus in Boston and supports the university's growing global network of learning hubs.

Jessica Tsymbal

Director of Facilities, MIT Media Lab

Jessica oversees the daily operations of the MIT Media Lab. Her team is responsible for long-range planning, all building renovations, laboratory safety, building security, event scheduling and wellness initiatives to support 30+ proudly anti-disciplinary groups.

Moderator: Theodora Batchvarova

Senior Associate, CBT

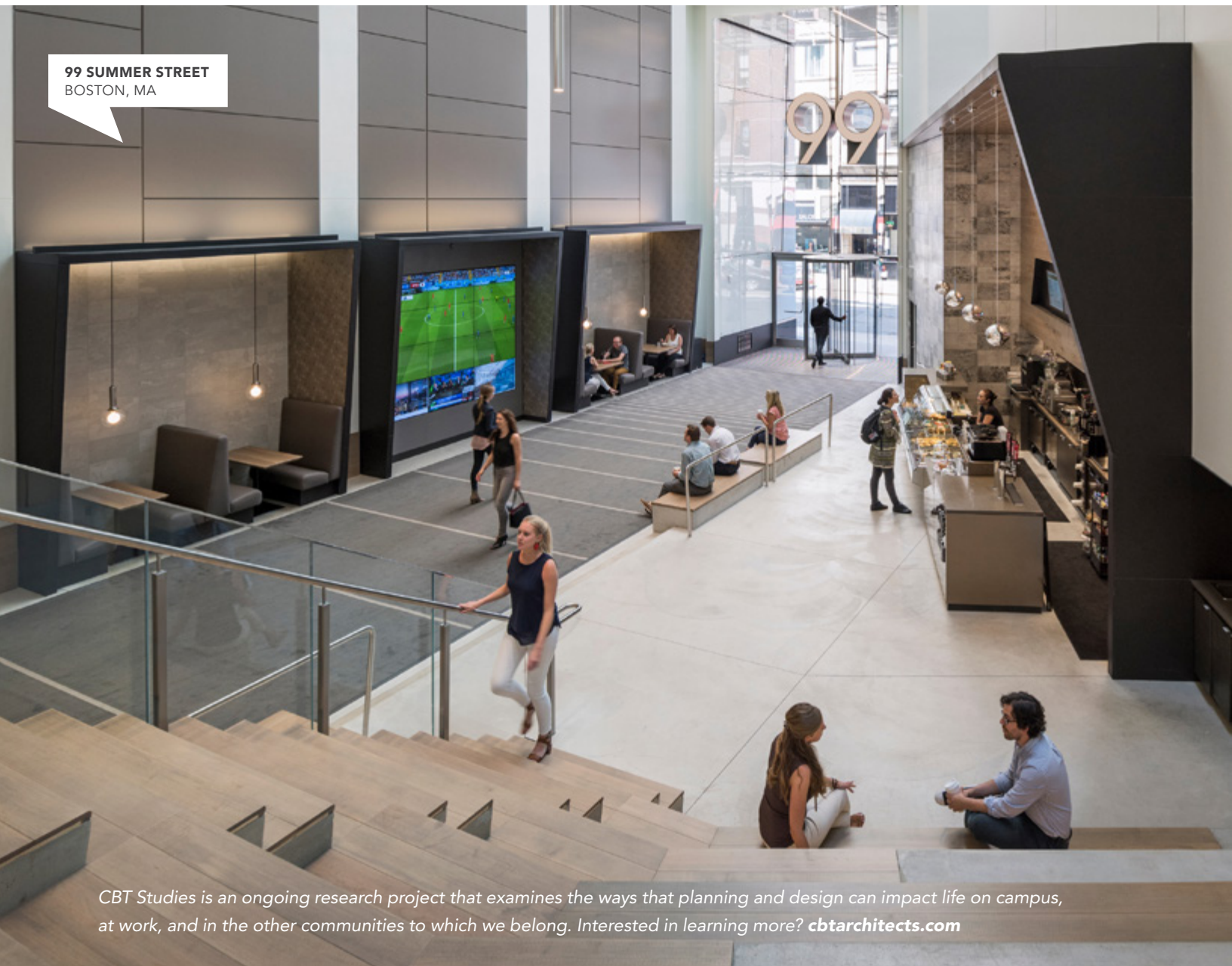
Theodora leads CBT's roundtable discussions. A senior designer, her approach weaves intellectual curiosity with technique and creative problem-solving. Her main interests include sustainable design and the integration of technology into human-centric environments.

FROM ACROSS INDUSTRIES, ACADEMIA, AND INNOVATION FIRMS, WE SURVEYED KEY PEOPLE ON HOW THEIR WORLDS ARE CHANGING IN THE FACE OF EVOLVING DATA, TECHNOLOGY, AND DESIGN.

A free-flowing exchange of ideas around the pace of change revealed patterns of behavior and preference across several different sectors. With a group of influential innovators, thinkers, and industry leaders at the table, CBT hosted a discussion around what we are seeing, experiencing, and navigating in our daily lives.

Participants discussed the different speeds at which industries operate, and whether this facilitates or slows progress of different types; and a key exchange left the question unanswered of whether collaboration is truly a universal path to personal and organizational success — or whether it actually hinders it.

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CBT Studies is an ongoing research project that examines the ways that planning and design can impact life on campus, at work, and in the other communities to which we belong. Interested in learning more? cbtarchitects.com