



Zinc-covered walls invite staff at Bosch AS to scrawl their ideas in words and drawings.

WORK

Alexander Fehre's 'agile' human-friendly office is fit for the future



Zoeey Braun

SCHWÄBISCH GMÜND – For many of us, the ‘office of the future’ conjures up images of rampant, robotic technology. But Alexander Fehre, founder of the eponymous studio, says that ‘it will be less like *Minority Report* and more about a variety of spaces for working in – whether tailored to collaboration, focused tasks, or being close to your family’.

Not surprisingly, then, variety animates the lively 3,200-m² space that the Stuttgart-based outfit produced for German steering-systems manufacturer Bosch AS. The

brief asked for a scheme that would reflect the company’s new work philosophy.

Like an increasing number of businesses, Bosch is adopting ‘agile’ work practices in order to achieve the kind of innovation needed to take the car industry into a new, post-carbon era. Born in the software sector, ‘agile’ means empowering people to work where, when and how they choose, with a view to unleashing their creativity. So how should office spaces incorporate these new aspirations? »

Lockers – which are located along a central 'roadway' that features bends, turn-offs and refuelling stops that encourage accidental encounters – facilitate desk sharing.





Reflecting Bosch's new agile work philosophy, the office includes a variety of meeting spaces.

'Shorter lines of communication help to generate new ideas faster'

According to Fehre, the office design for Bosch helps the company 'to generate new ideas faster because of shorter lines of communication, flexible ways to connect with colleagues, and lots of surfaces for jotting down new ideas'. Communication and contact are fostered at every turn, since they are vital to the success of temporary project teams composed of members from the facility's diverse departments.

A central 'roadway' features bends, turn-offs and 'refuelling stops' that encourage the sort of accidental encounters that can lead to innovative exchanges. Meeting spaces abound, ranging from a telephone booth to fully upholstered alcoves. Zinc-covered walls invite staff to scrawl their ideas in words and drawings.

The work experience blends with relaxation and play. A café at the heart of the space tempts employees to linger and chat over a cup of coffee. There's also a lush 'peace garden' and a Scalextric race track. Lockers allow for desk-sharing and ensure that no one is tied to their workstation. The temporary teams are assigned colour-coded cubes. 'The initial goal,' says Fehre, 'was to create something completely different from Bosch's existing offices. From that starting point, we developed the concept closely with the client, in a series of workshops.'

He believes that a tailor-made approach – rather than a one-size-fits-all plan – guarantees a future-proof office: 'Individualism is the key word for me. Every employee is different, with different preferences and needs. If you want your people to be comfortable, creative and productive, you have to give them the freedom to choose their workplace and their way of working.'

The Bosch office embodies the village-like environment that Fehre envisions for the future. It will stimulate uniquely human 'soft' skills. 'We already know that algorithms and machines will replace routine human tasks,' he says. 'The jobs that will still be done by people will be higher-valued work.'

He believes that 'the future will be all about flexible ways of working. Clients have different needs. You have to ask yourself how you can improve the situation at the actual "point of work". It's not about design. It's about thinking in solutions.' – JS

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