boss
design

LEARNING

Developing Focus

Understand

Listen.Learn.

**The Four Forms of
Learning Environment**

01—Learner centred
02—Collaborative
03—Focused
04—Assessment

At Boss Design we understand that well designed learning environments can help education establishments succeed and businesses grow.

Universities are no longer just about teaching, learning and researching, but for living and working. Offices are no longer just about the 9 to 5, they are about developing employees through training and retaining skilled workers.

Historically the traditional structures of work and education were rigid, hierarchical and based on a patriarchal approach to achieving their aims.

For some time now people have been questioning this structure and, with it, the design of learning environments.

Over the past few decades, we have not only developed the technologies that allow us to learn in new ways, we have also developed a far better understanding of the process involved. It is one of the new tenets of modern learning theory that different kinds of learning goals require different approaches, the creation of new opportunities and the development of new environments.

Learning is an activity that is hardwired into us. Without it we could not have come so far as a species.

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The Psychology of Learning

Process

When it comes to designing a learning environment, it is essential to understand that the processes at work are not significantly different to those that drove our hunter-gatherer ancestors hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Over the past few decades, we have learned more about what this means in practice. Learning is not merely about having our brains filled with information, but the development of ideas, application of information, contextualisation and collaboration with others.

It is also about personal development. Learning allows us to better understand the world around us and ourselves.

An effective learning environment will not merely provide us with competency in a subject, as it once did, but the ability to learn a skill and know how to apply it.

This is particularly important in a fast moving world in which we have to adapt to new challenges constantly. The boundless nature of skills is a pre-requisite for life in the 21st Century. This active approach to learning must be reflected in the physical environment.

This is not to say that traditional, passive environments are not needed. Just that we also need to provide active, collaborative surroundings to allow people to learn in new ways.

Spaces.

A learner centred environment encourages people to become independent learners, ultimately in charge of their own education and others should they collaborate.

Engage

Learner Centred

The shift in the use of physical space towards more active and collaborative learning models is inevitably reflected in its design.

The most obvious manifestation of this is the shift away from rooms in which desks are arranged in lines facing a tutor towards more relaxed and collaborative settings. This format is rooted in the outmoded models of learning from the past.

A team based environment on the other hand, is learner focused. It may consist of circular tables or soft seating.

It is unlikely to focus its attention on the 'front of the room'. Teams of students work collaboratively with the instructor working as their mentor or guide.

It is likely that technology will support this idea. Rather than having a single projector operated at the front of the room, wireless networking enables everybody to act as a presenter, either projecting work from their own device or sharing it remotely with others. In this scenario, the instructor is able to guide learning via their own laptop or tablet.

Spaces

Learner Centred

Spectrum of choice

Learning is social

Hybridisation of spaces to support multiple activities

Individual

Community based environments are essential in the context of what we now understand about how people learn.

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Collaborative

Community based environments are essential in the context of what we now understand about how people learn. These are the settings that can create positive feedback loops of development for those people that use them to collaborate.

Mistakes or a lack of understanding are not punished as they had been in the past, but treated as a chance for individuals and the group to improve. This encourages personal development and the formation of new ideas.

Although on the surface these may look somewhat like traditional classrooms, the processes involved and the culture represented are very different. This change in focus should be evident in the design of the room.

As it is in a business setting, this could include focus on the centre of the group, not its apex. This should emphasise that the contributions of all members of the group are valid and not just those of the instructor or the extroverts of the group itself.

Share

Collaborative

Inclusivity

Group cohesion

Sharing of knowledge

Community

Everybody needs time to acquire and develop the knowledge they need to support their ideas, creativity and interactions with others. Focus is essential.

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Think

Focused

The traditional setting for focused work was often the library or a private room and these remain essential, often providing us with a model setting for such work. These settings are inherently rich in the information needed to acquire a deep and broad knowledge of a particular subject or discipline.

This is particularly important when it comes to contextualising knowledge. By providing the context for knowledge, offering different sources of information to enrich the learning process, and settings that allow for focus and critical thought, students should be surprised by what they can learn and discover, not the interruptions of neighbours or devices.

Focused

Our natural circadium rhythm focus is essential to influencing how we learn

Private study

Focus is essential

Privacy

The process of assessment, both continuous and test based, should also be reflected in specific types of learning environments.

Evaluate

Assessment

In a modern context, this is most obviously manifested in the chance to offer students feedback and guidance on their work and development, based in part and increasingly on the data that their work generates by itself in real time.

Formative assessments of this type typically work best with direct, face to face interactions. This might include feedback on reports, papers or work in progress. Often, these will take place on a one to one basis and in private. The setting becomes about the interpersonal relationship between student and instructor and should be part of a continuous, if not intrusive, process of monitoring and development.

Summative assessments, on the other hand, take place at the end of a period of work and often in a single hit. These are the tests and exams that may be specific to a particular course or as part of nationally agreed assessments for qualifications. The exam room, with its constraints on interactions and interruptions remains the closest remaining adaptation we have of the traditional didactic model.

While formative assessments are one of the most obvious manifestations of the changing ways we learn, present day use of summative assessments proves that some things never change, if only because there is no better way we have yet discovered.

Spaces

Assessment

Face-to-face interactions

Teach

Flexibility of room layout

Technology based examinations

Projects.

University of Warwick, UK

The University of Warwick is located in Coventry, England, and was founded in 1965 as part of a Government initiative to expand access to higher education.

Boss Design was tasked with assisting the University in establishing an area for collective working for their students on a daily basis. A variety of collaborative furniture was used.

Based around one simple unit, Cocoon provided the solution for team meetings, collaborative tasks, or a base for the day, fulfilling breakout area needs. Cocoon provides an intimate, comfortable and private environment for the user. Modular seating was a great addition to the project, allowing the University to take control of their space, offering the opportunity to easily rearrange layouts to suit working needs.

Reading Library, USA

With a want and need for elegant, classic and premium furniture, Reading Public Library in Massachussetts enlisted Boss Design to create the perfect learning environment.

Albany armchairs and sofas were specified to provide exceptional comfort and style, supporting longer periods of individual reading.

Patterned Diana chairs were chosen for touchdown and breakout areas, adding a touch of sophistication whilst complementing the interior.

Highlighting the need for more private and quieter spaces, Cega swivel seats provided a modern twist to the library, emphasising the importance of individual learning.
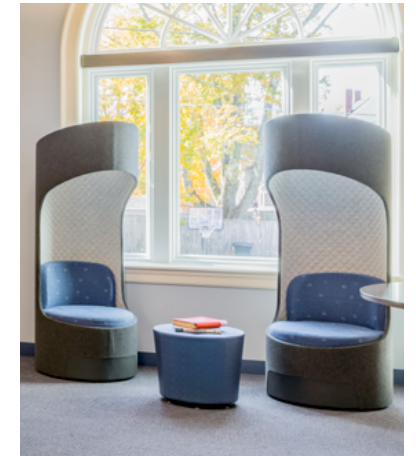
Projects

University of Reading, UK

The University of Reading embarked upon a £4.4m revamp of their library with the aim to improve communal study areas, ensuring that those seeking a quiet area to revise are able to do so with minimal distractions.

Boss Design looked to their state of the art Vista Pods to fulfil the requirements of the University.

The acoustic Pods, which have unrivalled success across a range of open plan offices and workplaces, can be utilised to provide a separate environment which contains loud working groups - without affecting the area around the Pod itself.

Boss Design also supplied soft furnishings to compliment the workspaces, choosing the Arthur high back seating collection.
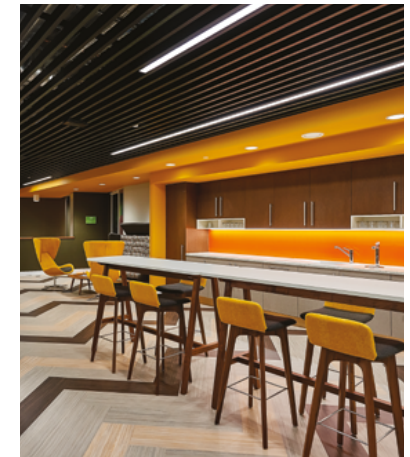

Projects

ESC Catapult, UK

ESC Catapult were looking to create a balanced environment for learning and working at their central offices in Birmingham, England.

Furniture had to be suitable for informal meeting areas, but also flexible enough to provide privacy when the need arised.

The Entente booth and Marnie high back chairs were specified to facilitate both individual and group learning.

Agent high tables and high stools were used to help initiate meetings in breakout areas, alongside Albany sofas for a comfortable learning space.

Cass Business School, UK

Cass Business School, part of the City University of London, aimed to create an elegant and professional working space to attract executive clients and students.

A prioritised need was to transform their existing breakout areas, using vibrant colours and sleek styling to create a space suitable for both individual and collaborative working.

Soft seating specified in these areas included Cega, Kruze Lounge, Swing and Dick chairs. Their individual, eye-catching designs combine to create a striking yet comfortable lounge space.

Tokyo chairs were selected to create an elegant and inviting executive boardroom, with Loop stools used to facilitate flexible working needs.

Training Rooms

At Boss Design we understand training rooms. Learning activities are essential for the expansion and growth of your business, with the comfort of learners key to future success.

From formal, executive meeting rooms to informal, more flexible spaces, we know how to create a space that captures your culture, branding and imagination.

We offer a diverse range of products, including ergonomically advanced task chairs, media units and modular soft seating, as well as forward-thinking tables that offer power and connectivity. Our state of the art office Pods can provide privacy in open-plan spaces.

From vision to concept, we can help you achieve your perfect learning environment.

Conclusion

Throughout our history we have never had a better opportunity to create outstanding learning spaces.

We have never known more about how people learn or had such powerful technological and cultural tools at our disposal to help them do this, in the ways that suit them best. Clinging to old models of didactic learning that have their roots in the past is simply no longer effective.

As in all walks of life, the settings we create should reflect these new norms.

They should acknowledge that different people learn in different ways, and offer students a variety of learning types and spaces in which study can take place. Settings should reflect the complex processes that take place over a period of learning and provide the bridge between the digital and physical worlds of learning.

Above all, learning environments should foster creativity and personal development, build strong relationships, look towards the future and offer learners a sense of pride in what they do and the settings in which they do it.

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