

PICTURES OF THE DREAM OFFICE

- Photo safari in Copenhagen Municipal Authority

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Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and Sports are in the process of moving to new facilities. In the meantime, they have experimented with a new office layout. As part of the project Work Space Design, a number of experience visits have been arranged - based on the photo safari concept. These experience visits, together with other development activities, have provided input to new working forms within the new physical frames. In this paper, experiences with the method based on the case of Copenhagen Municipal Authority will be presented.

Experiments, New Office, Photo safari



1. Introduction

The photo safari method has been developed by Danish Technological Institute, Human Resources Development as part of the centre's work with ambitious principles for enterprise and work development. This work has been elaborated in a research cooperation on Sustainable Work Systems (Banke, P. & Holsbo in Docherty, P., 2002). The idea is to make the initiative for an improved work organisation, among other things by involving learning theories and methods. Thus, photo safari is about establishing a learning space in the meeting between various people and workplaces,

which can be called network learning. (Andersson, R. et al. 2005, Nørskov 2002 in Human Resources Development 2002).

The photo safari method is built on the basic idea that another angle and a new view on every day work processes is beneficial in order to be able to see new possibilities for changes. By now, it is a common perception that 'new eyes' and fresh impulses are good for bringing innovative thinking to a workplace. One of the tested out methods for gaining new inspiration is to visit other enterprises. However, one of the weaknesses of this 'visit method' is the difficulty of holding on to the ideas and experiences, one is presented to. At the same time, it can be difficult to hold on to the joint focus, which limits the possibilities of continuing to work with the experiences back at the workplace - and thereby also the possibilities of implementing a goal-oriented innovation.

The aim of the method is that the visitors as well as the visited enterprise will see and understand work processes, cooperation and enterprise culture in a way enabling them to discuss conditions at the enterprise that are otherwise considered matters of course. The method opens up to reflexion and considerations as to why things are done the way they are, and whether there might be better ways to prepare cooperation or production.

As a newcomer at an enterprise, one sees things with fresh eyes and therefore naturally questions things that are considered matters of course by others having been with the enterprise for a long time. The photo safari method offers a tool to maintain this wonder and the potentials for change that lie within it.

2. Objectives

2.1 Maintain one's wonder by means of the camera

The basic idea of the photo safari method is that a group of workplaces or institutions visit each other in order jointly to focus on problems which everybody are interested to continue working with back at the workplaces.

The photo safari method makes use of the experience of many - that the senses are sharpened when one is 'looking' for something. The hunter can recount that the alertness is much sharper when walking the field with the gun than without it. In the same way, many have had the experience on vacations where they have brought the camera for a whole day to get some good pictures to capture good and characteristic things from the vacation. Suddenly one sees things that are characteristic for the place, the season or for the companionship or the interaction in the co-travelling group. It is the same kind of intensification of the senses which is the aim with a photo safari at workplaces.

The objective of the method is that the visitor as well as the visited workplace will see and understand work processes, cooperation and workplace culture in a way enabling them to discuss conditions at the workplace that are otherwise considered matters of course. The method encourages reflexion and contemplation as to why things are done the way they are and whether cooperation or production could be designed in better ways.

Therefore, the host - as far as possible - must put on a receptive position as regards the visitors' ideas in order thus to learn the most of what is seen by 'the strangers'. Furthermore, the visiting workplaces must consider how to make use of the photo safari experiences as a basis for an action plan for the further work 'at home'.

3. Methods

A photo safari has six phases.

In *the first phase*, it is determined which themes shall be focussed in the photo safari. This process is implemented before the actual photo safari in a cooperation between the workplaces or between a possible consultant and the workplaces.

In *phase two and phase three*, the actual photo safari is implemented consisting of an introduction and the implementation of the photo safari. The task is to take pictures illustrating some already determined themes. These are described based on inputs from the visiting workplaces and based on changes having been implemented at the hosting workplace. It can be situations inspiring them in relation to their own situation, or situations illustrating conditions where they think their own workplace could inspire the hosting workplace. The participants walk around at the workplace, talk to the employees and the managers, observe, reflect and take pictures. It has proved that the task of having to illustrate some determined themes offers a good and tangible basis for the photo groups. At the same time, a natural platform is made for a close contact between the visitors and the employees at the hosting workplace. It feels natural to ask questions or to ask someone to demonstrate something that is wanted for a picture.

In *phase four*, each group prepares a presentation of the impressions gained during the visit with special emphasis on replies to the themes that were initially decided to be in focus.

Phase five consists of a presentation of pictures with comments and the possibility for a broader discussion in plenum. This will normally take place at a following meeting. After the feedback, there will be a general discussion of change methods, and each workplace may sit together and prepare an action plan of how to make use of the impressions of the visiting day.

In *phase six*, decisions and activities are followed up. This can for example take place three months after the implementation of the photo safari.

4. Results

4.1 The case of photo safari in Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and sports
Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and Sports participated in the project Work Space Design concentrated on an intervention course in spring 2007.

The objective of the Work Space Design team's intervention in Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and Sports is - in cooperation with their own project on new working forms - to facilitate and give input to the employees' and the management's joint layout and design of a new work organisation within new physical facilities. Together with a number of other administrations, they are moving to a new and larger office building. In the meantime, they have experimented with a new office layout including an open plan

office, in which persons who have not previously had close working relations are placed together in order to enhance knowledge sharing. The new work organisation should be characterised by efficiency as well as a good working environment/job satisfaction. The work organisation and the production flow must be supported by - and reflected in - the physical surroundings.

The intervention consisted of a number of workshops prepared by means of the research group's visit to the workplace and also work with various materials for registration of work tasks and forms of cooperation. In the midst of the course, a photo safari was arranged.

The photo safari in Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and Sports was arranged to be included in the course at a time where Leisure and Sports was well in the process of mapping out how they consider their layout to work today in relation to solving their work tasks.

At one workshop, the employees in three groups had work with the 'dream office' for Leisure and Sports. They phrased ideas as to how their cooperation and task solving were to take place within the new framework, based on formalized models for the office. Based on this work, the groups selected a number of themes for special attention during the safari visits at other workplaces (physical surroundings, possibilities for team work, design of work places etc.). The themes were selected in a manual, which the participants brought along for the visits.

The groups visited four workplaces that had all been in a process of designing a new office layout. The employees at Copenhagen Municipal Authority, Leisure and Sports participated in the photo safari visits in small groups, where they looked into differences and similarities between the characteristics of their own workplace and what they saw when visiting the others.

At the subsequent workshop, the group presented their findings to each other. Each group looked into what the other groups had noticed during their visits. It was discussed why there are differences in what one has seen, and tangible ideas for a new office layout. Some of the pictures and themes captured by the groups during the visits are shown below.



Fig. 1 The atrium has mail shelves for everyone and the - a natural meeting point



Fig. 2 Architects hold ad hoc work meetings - layout supports it

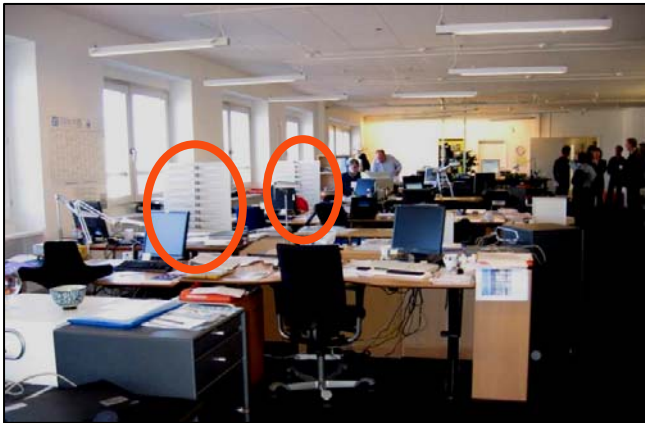


Fig. 3 This group emphasized that there was too little space between the employees - illustrating it by highlighting the screens that protected from noise and chair movements from the office neighbours.

5. Discussion

Photo safari – integration in future projects

In this case, the use of photo safari proved to be an eye opener for the participants in order to see new possibilities in the current ‘work spaces’. The experiences on using the photo safari methods invite to a further elaboration on how to integrate the method in various development processes and consultancy assignments within work environment, and how the method could be further developed. One idea for developing the photo safari could be to include photo safari in a process where a relay runner is sent from employee to employee or from enterprise to enterprise. An example: An enterprise network will work with activities to reduce absence due to sickness. At one enterprise, they start taking pictures of conditions that create ‘state of the art’ concerning what determines sickness leave. Hereafter, the next link in the chain will take over and is thus creating a chain of associations communicated in pictures. At one time, the chain will be ended, and a discussion is conducted as to where the camera found new motives and where new angles occurred and what perspectives it gives for the discussion on presence and absence. Probably, a lot of other ideas on how to further develop the method photo safari can be developed.

The questions one can put regarding a future development of the method can be:

In what other types of development tasks on work environment could the implementation of photo safari make a difference? Could this form of method be used in work environment consultancy to the enterprises in connection with supervision and consultancy tasks? What would this take as regards development of cooperation forms between the system of work environment consultancy and the enterprises and development of competencies among the work environment consultants?

6. Conclusion

The photo safari is a method not only based on the technique of representing job-related tasks by camera, but also the profound and structured way of using it in a series of workshops and preparatory meetings. It is based on a mutual and genuine exchange of ideas and experiences between a dedicated group of companies.

The strength of the method is to create awareness, reflexion and exchange of ideas between the visitors and the visited. There are a number of advantages in the implementation as such as well as in the subsequent discussion, but also in relation to a broader communication and a longer development perspective, there can be gains. Below are stated some of the most essential experiences from the method.

- *Communication.* Pictures are used which, in this context, where the theme was correlation between physical lay-out and work forms, was a suitable communication form. The participants communicated their messages in a conspicuous and efficient way offering the opportunity for a good discussion between colleagues having visited the place and those who had not, because the tangible starting point was the spaciousness.
- *Implementation.* In the actual implementation, it was seen that the visitors experienced a positive reception, curiousness and openness while at the same time the employment of the camera gave a latitude for the knowledge collection. One gets 'something in the box', and because it is possible to return to the pictures later, there is no need to spend time putting down notes. That offers the latitude to 'keep one's ears open'.
- *Processing.* In the subsequent processing (group discussion and presentation at a workshop) the pictures were used to look into differences and similarities between the workplaces and also to offer tangible ideas for new development. In this case, the visits at the other workplaces was a good input to the process where the participants had looked inwards at their own processes and here got an insight into quite different ways to do things. Moreover, the mutual visits also had the effect that they became more keen on those conditions emphasized at ones own workplace which thereby became an element in the employee group's process of establishing a joint language around their new office layout.

7. Acknowledgements

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8. References

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