



Innovate or Die trying

Think outside the office



If you want to physically take workers away from the environment that's been causing their stagnation, consider the Chicago based Thinkubator. Here there's an atmosphere founder and President Gerald Haman says is conducive to novel thinking. Owned and operated by innovation training and development firm SolutionPeople in Chicago, which Haman also heads, the facility includes giant chair sculptures, disco lighting, a sound system, a professional karaoke system and a rooftop sun deck with panoramic skyline views of the city. "Many people focus innovation and creativity training on what happens inside of people's minds," Haman says. "I've found that it's also important to pay attention to what goes on outside of people's heads, thereby looking at the physical environment."

The goal, he stresses, is to make sure participants feel comfortable, inspired, and stimulated. To do this, the venue was created with what Haman calls the "four Ps of innovative environments:" the personal space, partnership space, public space and personal computer (PC) space. Each of these areas, he says, serves a key purpose in the creativity process. The wide-ranging view of Chicago that can be seen from the "public space's" rooftop sundek for example, helps employees accomplish what Haman refers to as "blue sky thinking," or thinking that emphasizes new possibilities rather than limitations. The partnership space enables participants to break up into small work groups or "innovation dream teams." The personal spaces allow workers to relax and concentrate on challenges individually. The PC space gives companies the option of incorporating learning software, such as an electronic version of Haman's KnowBrainer brainstorming card deck tool, or other computer programs, into their session.

The creative exercises conducted at the Thinkubator also can be revealing of workers' personalities. Haman says, for instance, you can learn a lot by enabling people you've only known in an office setting to sing karaoke. "We've found that the people who are willing to sing karaoke," he notes, "are the ones who are willing to take risks and generate more ideas." -M.W.

