

New Workspaces

»Stop starting – start finishing« is a very powerful credo for your agile organization. What does it really take to get this agile mindset started and implement it into your organization? We know from experience: you need authorized, autonomous teams who have a joint work time with a certain rhythm. People with knowledge and experience of agile tools and methods to support the teams. And ideally, every team has its own project space to work in.

by Christina Duller and Julia Jantschgi



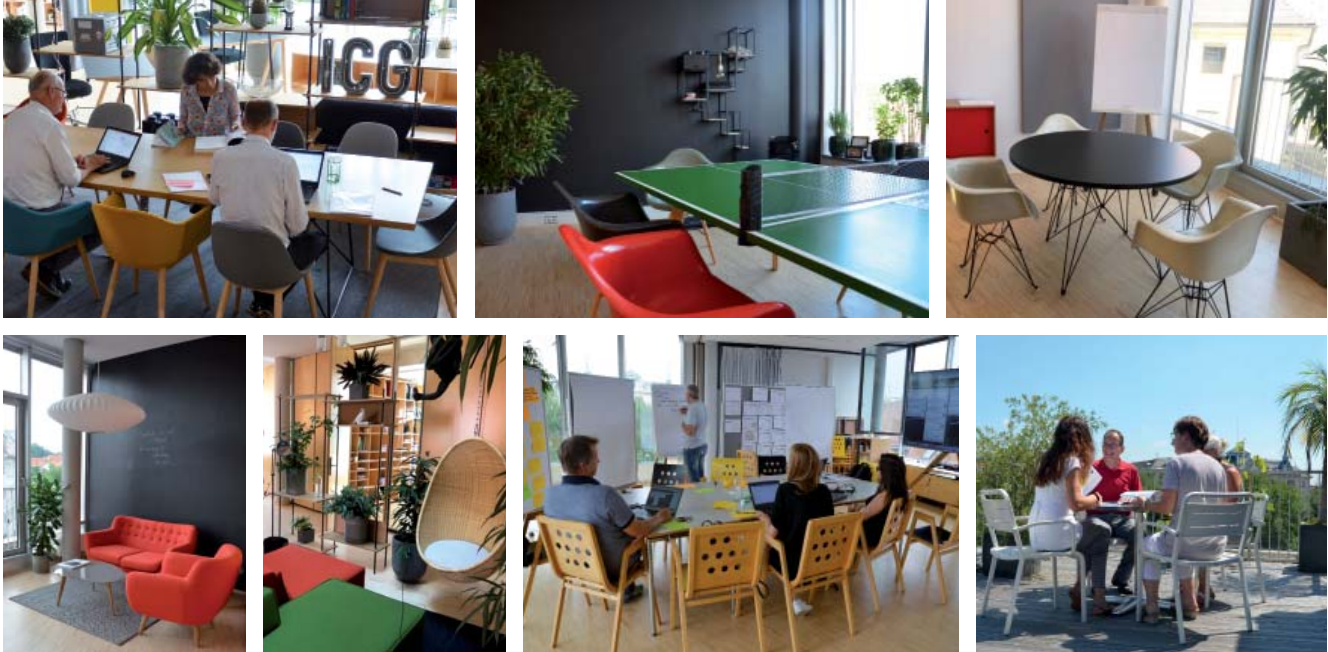
Annie Kerguenne

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Annie Kerguenne, a leading Design Thinking expert from the renowned HPI in Potsdam, supports our view. Read on to learn what Annie told us about the impact of space and how we at ICG just recently turned our own office into an agile and inspiring environment.

What is one of the most promising starting points to successfully transform an organization from your expert point of view?

Annie Kerguenne: If you want to change the way people work and interact, space design is one of the most impactful vehicles to support that. Human beings belong to the species with the highest skills of adaptivity; we naturally adapt our behavior to our environment. Just observe yourself and your physical reactions on a crowded tram in comparison to a free space like a park or rooftop terrace. Meeting rooms with big tables have a similar effect. They hinder the attendees movement and support a hierarchical, passive mode of communication. If we want to be agile in our work and interactions, we have to build spaces that encourage agility, cooperation and activity. It should be easier to interact in those spaces and harder to stay passive. It should be more fun to build on the ideas of others than protect an individual idea. It should be more natural to get inspiration from other areas and raise your views above ►



your market segment. All of these behaviors can be supported by space design.

What do you consider the biggest impediments in traditional spaces when it comes to agile working?

Annie Kerguenne: There is nothing wrong with traditional spaces – if people are allowed to hack them. Just skip the chairs, cover the desks with whiteboard paper and use the windows as whiteboards. Things can be transformed very quickly in a way that agile working is supported. Everybody talks about agility and innovation – but when it comes to changing spaces and furniture, obstructive corporate identity rules are set in stone. A perfect block for space transformation and participation of people who have the biggest intrinsic motivation to start a new way of working. Summed up, there are no wrong spaces; just wrong rules.

What do you consider to be the core elements of agile spaces?

Annie Kerguenne: From my perspective, there is no »one-size-all« recipe, but some guiding principles.

First, flexibility of the furniture is key. It supports the switch of different work modes for the team. Second, participation of future users while designing a space helps to obtain valuable insights about their needs and increases the motivation to use the opportunities afterwards. Last but not least, the new spaces must be integrated into the existing culture. Otherwise, the spaces will be abandoned after the first hype and turn into »Post-it & Lego« departments, losing all of their effect.

Is the »paperless office« an obvious contradiction to working in a creative mode?

Annie Kerguenne: No, not at all. Paperless office means that I stop printing and avoid physical files. Collaborative creativity needs physical artefacts to get the intangible ideas out of our individual minds and into a collective tangible space. Prototyping material and visual communication are the key to high-performance teamwork processes. We should therefore not be too strict about the »paperless office.« Use it where it makes sense within the process of agile work and transformation.

Thank you for your time!

The new Austrian ICG office

A lot of what we have learned from Annie's insights corresponds with what we as ICG experienced when redesigning our office in Graz recently and when supporting our clients in similar processes.

Reflecting on intense meetings with heated discussions, we experienced how important iteration is for such a process. Redesigning a workspace brings up a lot of emotion amongst those affected and has a huge impact on their behavior. User participation in a carefully planned process avoids big pitfalls. By redesigning our own space, we gained a very valuable lesson. We know first-hand that there is no recipe for the perfect agile space. Best case: an agile space is created in an agile way, with a lot of trial and error, stepping back and reflecting, learning by doing and iterating.

Concrete lessons from our own process

The redesign and renovation of an office is such an immense project that even if you do it in an agile way, it needs a well-thought-out roadmap which does not include details, but a timeline of what to do when. Not only will this roadmap give guidance; but it will also save money, time and energy by avoiding doing things twice. A roadmap along with a defined budget right from the start will facilitate decision-making along the way. It can be painful to have to let go of many great ideas that you will just not be able to implement due to budget limits. Even if you have the attitude of »just do it,« don't think you can do everything by yourself – there are reasons why there are experts for everything: acoustics, color design, plants, etc. Talk to these experts – or at least someone experienced with renovations – early on and tell them about your plans. You will get a lot of advice and tips that will make your project run more smoothly. Timing is also an important issue. It needs to be realistic. The project team needs to carefully consider when the time has come to communicate schedules to the rest of the staff. It is nerve-racking for everyone involved to read that planned actions are being postponed over and over again.

As with any project, the redesign of an office needs a well-balanced core team and a project manager with a lot of power and stamina. We had such people on our core team and are so glad about our happy ending. ●

10 tips for designing an agile space

- 1 **Room concept:** make sure to learn what the users need and customize the concept accordingly.
- 2 **Home base:** make sure that everyone has the feeling they have a home base even if you consider shared desks.
- 3 **Networking:** open up the space where it makes sense to create room for exchange.
- 4 **Flexibility:** when furnishing the room, look for flexible elements (on wheels, vertically adjustable, ...).
- 5 **Identity:** create a feeling of »we« by integrating artefacts that make your company special.
- 6 **Creativity:** offer elements like flipcharts and pin boards as well as workshop materials to be taken freely by everyone.
- 7 **Well-being:** make sure to create an atmosphere where people will feel comfortable by using plants, offering libraries with great books and magazines and installing good lighting.
- 8 Don't expect everyone to be happy from the beginning – many people need time to adapt their behaviors.
- 9 Create areas for different working situations like quiet areas, chat areas and dialogue spaces.
- 10 Create the »we feeling« for the whole and make people proud of their common space.

Prototype every idea of yours to check whether it works how you imagine it.

