

Ideation nation

Businesses turn to interior designers to create spaces that foster creative thinking

By **MICHELLE CATER RASH** THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Early last year, when Calloway Johnson Moore & West received the contract to redesign the interior of the McColl Building, home of the Kenan-Flagler Business School at UNC-Chapel Hill, the Winston-Salem architecture firm faced a challenge.

The business school had a very traditional look and school officials wanted the space to remain very functional for education. But campus leaders also were concerned that students weren't using the building as much as they could, turning instead to small coffee shops and bookstores for group meetings and to kill time between classes.

Instead of challenges, the designers at Calloway Johnson saw opportunities. They didn't just update the inside of the building, they revitalized it using a new design trend called "ideation."

Ideation, a new corporate buzzword, is the combination of the words idea and generation and means the bringing together of people to create new ideas and to think about things in a new way.

As businesses look to foster interaction and teamwork, more of them are looking for interior design space that will easily allow groups of people to meet in more casual, relaxed atmospheres in hopes of boosting their creativity and their comfort.

So more and more interior design firms are looking to design for ideation, a topic that will be one of several breakout discussions at the Design, Art and Technology Symposium being held later this month at UNC-Greensboro. (See related story, page 15.)

"Where do ideas come from? How do we support getting the best ideas? What does that space look like?" asks Kathleen Warner, an interior designer with Winston-Salem architecture firm Calloway Johnson and the leader of the Kenan-Flagler project. "People just don't sit in cubes and generate work. They need to interact."

Ideation spaces in many ways get their inspirations from coffee shops — little couches and arm chairs clustered around small tables, WiFi access readily available. The furniture is usually easy to move about so it can be configured and reconfigured as needed to accommodate groups both large and small, says Warner, who will be speaking on the subject of ideation at the symposium later this month.

Functional design

In the business school, designers gathered small groups of chairs and couches throughout the building for both planned and informal meetings. The building also has several small conference rooms that hold just six or eight people for group work.

There are also e-mail access portals throughout the building as well, where students can stop to quickly check their e-mail without booting up their laptops.

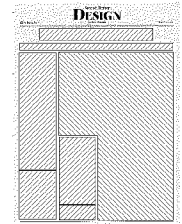
While loose and flexible spaces were once only found at creative firms, those creating these kinds of workspaces say more corporations are looking at incorporating them into more formal settings.

For example, Calloway Johnson also designed the interiors of Lowe's Corp. headquarters in Mooresville. The five-story building has a large, spiral staircase that goes through the center atrium to help create an open space and facilitate movement and interaction between people in different departments.

While its efficient for most workers to still be in cubicles, the space in the atrium has lounge furniture in little clusters to create places where people can go and talk.

And Workplace Strategies, a Winston-Salem interior design firm, is working on designing space in Charlotte to be shared by Wachovia Corp. and the Babcock School at Wake Forest University with ideation in mind.

While those plans are still in progress, the 60,000-square-foot facility is expected



to have spaces ranging from casual lounges to hold six people to state-of-the-art classrooms that can seat 80 and be quickly reconfigured for small group discussions, says Peter Marsh, a principal

PLEASE SEE **IDEATION**, PAGE 16 with Workplace Strategies and one of the speakers on designing for ideation at the symposium.

Experts say it's hard to give tips on creating the perfect ideation space, since personalization is key and what works well for one company may not work well for another.

Most designers start the process by having meetings with company employees, not just the leadership team but the average employees, to find out how they use the current space and their opinions on space needs. Understanding the culture of the company is key.

Once the space needs and uses have been determined and designed, there

are things that can be done to help draw employees into the ideation space. For example, the colors should be warm and inviting, brighter and bolder than you might find in a traditional office, says Jessica Dauray, owner of Elements of Style Interiors, a Greensboro design firm.

Adding natural light through windows, bringing in plants or even adding a fountain or other water feature also can help create a space that will draw employees into it, put them at ease and help free up the creativity, she says.

The most important thing, designers agree, is to create a wide variety of spaces to meet a wide variety of needs.

"You're trying not to impose a one-size-fits-all mentality on the user and you find that the user will gravitate to the space that meets their needs," Marsh says.

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COURTESY CALLOWAY JOHNSON MOORE & WEST

Winston-Salem architecture firm Calloway Johnson Moore & West used 'ideation' to design the interior of the McColl Building on the campus of UNC-Chapel Hill. The technique, which means bringing together people to create new ideas and think about things differently, has become a growing trend as businesses look for ways to encourage new ideas from their employees. "People just don't sit in cubes and generate work. They need to interact," says Kathleen Warner, below, an interior designer with Calloway Johnson Moore & West.



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Printing imperfections present during scanning

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