

## Investigating Art + Design Incubators as Places of Co-creation

### RESEARCH TEAM:

Newton D'souza, PhD., Chair and Associate Professor, Department of Interior Architecture, Florida International University, Miami

Asha Kutty, PhD., Assistant Professor, Department of Interior Architecture, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Tania Rengifo-Torrado, MIA, Adjunct Professor, Department of Interior Architecture, Florida International University, Miami



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### PURPOSE OF STUDY

Current demands for places of collaboration have generated a variety of new place types facilitating the free exchange of ideas, learning of new skills, and innovation. Art+ Design incubators are one such place type designed to facilitate a cross-pollination of artists, designers, and entrepreneurs. Since most art/ design schools do not provide formal training in business or marketing, these incubators train artists in branding strategies, business planning, marketing, and the remaking of artistic products. By using a mixed method technique, consisting of experiential sampling and activity mapping, the study conducted a deep dive into one such incubator, specifically, the Ratcliffe Art + Design incubator in Miami. Given the importance of co-creation in today's workplace and learning environments, findings from the study of these incubators can be applied and have deeper implications on the evolving workplaces of tomorrow.

### RESEARCH SUMMARY

Current demands for places of collaboration have generated a variety of new place types that facilitate free exchange of ideas, learning of new skills, and innovation. Art+ Design incubators have emerged as

facilities intended to foster a culture of co-creation between artists, designers, and entrepreneurs. While a direct correlation between facility space and creativity can be evasive, the goal of the project was to investigate the potential of Art + Design incubators as places of co-creation.

Using a case study in Miami, a research design of mixed methods was used consisting of journal documentation, activity mapping and focus groups. The journal documentation identified creative activities within the incubator; the activity mapping documented the locations and movement patterns of users associated with creative activity; and focus groups provided general insights into creativity and collaboration within the incubator.

The study of Arts + Design incubators suggests some interesting implications for the workplaces of tomorrow. It demonstrates that design features play an important role in materializing the aspirational goals of an organizational work culture. The openness of space was considered both an asset and a liability. As an asset, it afforded seamless interaction, variety of furniture configuration, and access to unobstructed daylighting. As a liability it created a sense of "being on display" and other privacy/ intellectual property concerns. Informal gathering spaces and threshold spaces, such hallways, the foyer, and the kitchen, were found to be important assigned formal spaces. Lack

of dedicated spaces created a lack of ownership, and overtly curated spaces were considered disruptive to the “messy” nature of creative thinking. Important environment-behavior attributes such as autonomy, control, adaptability, image, identity, and flexibility were important considerations, along with acoustical comfort and access to space. In general, the incubator needed to be an inspirational space that projected optimism.

## KEY FINDINGS

- *Openness* is both an asset and liability within the design of incubator spaces.
- Threshold spaces are as important, if not more important, than assigned spaces.
- Optimism and inspiration are important considerations in the design of incubator spaces.

## INVESTIGATING ART + DESIGN INCUBATORS AS PLACES OF CO-CREATION

### BACKGROUND

Recent demands for collaborative spaces have led to new place types including business incubators (e.g. Y Combinator), start-up accelerators (e.g. Techstars), co-working spaces (e.g. WeWork), maker spaces (e.g. MIT maker workshop), online forums (e.g. Kickstarter) and temporary spaces (e.g. Hackathons). In this context, the Art + Design incubators have emerged as places aiming to nurture a creative class into social entrepreneurship. Integrating art and business, these incubators involve a multidisciplinary group of stakeholders, lending themselves as an ideal case study for co-creation.

During the industrial revolution, driven by efficiency and optimization, the notion of *intelligence* was a primary qualifier of workplace performance.<sup>1</sup> It was not until the 1950s that *creativity* was considered

a legitimate subject of study. In a keynote to the American Psychological Association, Guilford advocated for *divergent thinking*, defined as the ability to produce multiple, equally valid responses to a given problem, rather than *convergent thinking*, which leads to one identifiably correct answer.<sup>2</sup>

Creativity is increasingly being addressed in a multidisciplinary and collaborative context.<sup>3</sup> Creativity is no longer an individual pursuit but requires collaborative thinking between multiple disciplines. How does this connect to the purpose of the study – “design features play an important role in materializing the aspirational goals of an organizational work culture”?

Having analyzed the creative process as a sequence of activities in time, D'Souza and *Dastmalchi* (2016) proposed a move away from the notion of creativity as one big creative leap (big- C(p)) orchestrated by an individual designer (the ‘aha’ moment) to one of smaller creative events (little- c(p)) emerging from an interdisciplinary team.<sup>4</sup>

D'souza, Kutty, and Mehrhoff (2016) studied 21st century learning spaces affording diverse forms of collaboration.<sup>5</sup> Findings suggest that designers should consider the following as a general strategy for developing and evaluating their designs:

1. Provide flexibility and adaptability in furnishing options for student autonomy and inclusivity
2. Consider a range of behaviors from informal collaboration to focused study
3. Provide access to amenities such as high-tech devices, restrooms, food and beverages
4. Provide good quality lighting along with visual and physical access to nature

When investigating the Ratcliffe Art + Design Incubator as a place of co-creation, the following research question was posited: To what extent does the incubator facility afford co-creation and what specific interior design elements or systems are correlated to co-creation?



*Interior image of the Ratcliffe Art + Design Incubator, Miami, Florida*

## METHODOLOGY

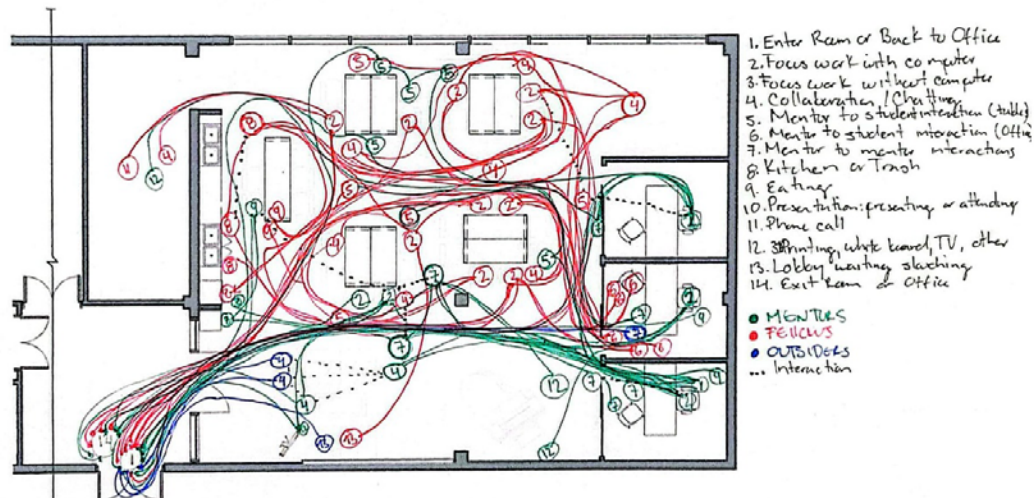
The study was conducted using a mixed method technique from data collected through activity mapping, journaling, and focus groups. Since student fellows participate in incubator activities on a semester basis, the peak activity of the incubator at the mid-semester was chosen for activity mapping. This general activity mapping lasted six weeks. The goal of activity mapping was to capture locations

and movement patterns within the incubator spaces that might be associated with creative activity. The activities were captured using cameras that were installed in strategic locations within the incubator to record the location and movement activities. The activity mapping was conducted retrospectively by the investigator based on the camera recordings. Observations charts were created to record instances of specific activities per day and respective behavioral observation notes were documented.

- Focus work happens on side tables
- Focus work happens for about an hour between social interaction (fellows, mentors, or break)
- Social interaction is consistent between fellow to fellow/mentor
- Long range Chatter/interaction are common
- Lobby space barely used.
- Most fellows spend about 3 hours on the incubator

## PART 2

Date: 10.12.21  
Starting Time: 13:34 - 10:10  
Ending Time: 10:16 - 14:43



- M2 (Middle Office) is the most visited - inside office - 15 mts average
- Most in-office interaction happens standing
- Kitchen used is mostly used to serve food and access water
- Kitchen space (high-table) is used for breakfast (morning time) and social interaction while taking a short break.
- Mentor to mentor/fellows interactions happens standing - no longer than 10 minutes
- Fellow to fellow interaction happens standing most of the time

Scanned with CamScanner

*One example of activity mapping, capturing movement patterns and denoting behavior*

Participants were also asked to document their activities through a journal to get more in-depth insights into their creative process. <sup>6</sup> These journals were restricted to a shorter timeline so a more micro-level analysis could be conducted. The journaling lasted three weeks. Participants were instructed to document specific activities they conducted each day, the time within which these activities were completed, and the extent to which they rated these activities as “high creative activity,” “medium creative activity” and “low creative activity.” These categories of creative activities were then converted into a raw score index.

While the activity mapping documented the activities and patterns of movements of users in relation to creativity, the journaling exercise documented creative events and was used to check whether there were association between creative activities and the incubator space usage.

Finally, focus groups were conducted to get general insights into creative activities within the incubator. Questions in each focus group included asking which places were most conducive to creative work, which places were not conducive for creative work, and the extent to which digital technology played a role in the functioning of the physical incubator space.



## KEY FINDINGS

- The “openness” of space was considered both an asset and a liability. As an asset, the “openness” afforded seamless interaction, variety of furniture configuration, and access to unobstructed daylighting. It also allowed an autonomy of walkability, in case someone needed to interact with others, and facilitated long distance conversations without having to move closer to their peers. As a liability, the “openness” of space created a sense of “being watched or on display.” Reservations were expressed on how openness could create intellectual property issues when a product is still in the process of being created and thus seen and/or emulated by others.
- High traffic was observed in the threshold areas, for example, in the phantom corridor between the fellow and mentor spaces. Because the mentor offices were physically “transparent” consisting of glass walls facing the fellow central spaces, this hallway acted as a private-public space of interaction and a shop-front display to the mentors.
- The transparency of the offices allowed the mentors to demonstrate their unique identity through personalization of display. The office space facade essentially became an active display where a number of promotional events occurred and an unsaid rule of “festooning” the spaces based on mentor personalities. Fellows expressed that the transparency and display allowed them to see the “human” side and unique personalities of mentors.
- The focus group findings indicate that most users expressed a positive image of the incubator in describing it as a space of connection, welcoming, eclectic, free and creative, thought provoking, inspiring, and facilitating professional development. Others considered the incubator to be underwhelming, too pristine for the “messy” nature of creativity.

- Important environment-behavior attributes, such as autonomy and control, adaptability, image, identity, and flexibility, were considerations as well as acoustical comfort and access to space. The incubator was in general required to be an inspirational space that projected optimism.

## LIMITATIONS

This research may not have captured all the transformational changes brought about by the remnants of COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the form of social distancing and the effect of remote work on co-creation. The study was limited in capturing digital interactions between mentors and students. Furthermore, the data sample was limited, and the amount of time spent in the incubator was constrained by student demands of fulfilling their course and degree requirements. Additionally, the issues of commute and location in a major metropolitan city, such as Miami, could have impacted access to the incubator and played a role in the findings. And finally, the use of cameras to capture activity mapping, while efficient, might have created behavior bias among the participants.

## NEXT STEPS

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the changes it brought created a new reckoning for the viability of intimate social interactions in the context of health and safety concerns. The remote work environment that came about as the result of the pandemic has triggered the use of a series of collaborative technological systems, such as Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Slack, and their impact on physical spaces of incubators need to be studied. Some sectors such as finance and technology are even questioning whether physical space might even be necessary, particularly as it saves real estate costs and commute time. We predict that in this context, the human dimensions of physical interaction and their role in co-creation will be tested.

## RESEARCH BIO

**Newton D'souza, Ph.D.**, is the Chair and Associate Professor of Interior Architecture, Florida International University. He has served as the Director of Graduate Studies at the Department of Architectural Studies, University of Missouri-Columbia. Having widely published in the areas of design thinking, AR/VR technology and environment-behavior. His recent book is titled *The Multi-skilled Designer: A Cognitive Explanation for Diversity in Architectural Thinking* from Routledge Research in their Architecture Series. He has received several grants, including the American Society of Interior Designers, FIU Tech Fee grant, and MU System Research Board award. He was awarded the 2014 Ernest L. Boyer International Award for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Technology.

**Asha Kutty, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Interior Architecture, University of North Carolina, Greensboro. She has previously worked as an adjunct instructor at Florida International University, and as an assistant teaching professor at the University of Missouri, Columbia. She earned a Ph.D. in architecture from the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, with a specialization in environment and behavior studies. She has published in the *Journal of Interior Design*, *Journal of Parks and Recreation Administration*, and has presented in conferences for both the Interior Design Educator's Council and Environment Design Research Association.

**Tania Rengifo-Torrado, MIA**, is an Interior Designer and a certified business coach. She received her Master of Interior Architecture from Florida International University and Bachelor of Art in Communication Arts. Currently, she serves as an adjunct professor at Florida International University.

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