CREATIVE FUTURES

OPEN PLAN

Martin Mills:

I think our environment is incredibly important. I think if we were in a conventional office building we would be a completely different business. I think for the kind of business we are and for how I need to interact with the people that work for me, and vice versa, I think is really important. Not to have doors, not to be walled in. My desk is in the middle of the office and I can see and hear everyone. I think it's important to be approachable, I mean having said that, I'm conscious that I intimidate people, because I am who I am; and you know, I can, I try not to, but some people try to, you can establish a force field around your desk even if you don't have walls. So it's perfectly possible to give off do not disturb me vibes if you don't want to be disturbed

Chris Bunch:

Both of our founders worked for Google, who have obviously been an exceptional innovator in cloud computing and generally in the, the technology space. Everybody knows Google as a, a fun place to work where smart people want to go and work, and that's very much something that Cloudreach has tried to replicate to an extent. Everybody, and that includes the two gentlemen that founded the company James and Pontus, will hot desk and that means we'll get to sit next to different people on a daily basis. It does mean we can also work together in project teams without restrictions where needed, but more importantly it just encourages that free flow of information and discussion. I think we probably all seen offices in the past where there's lot of people, lots of glass booths, lots of offices, lots of discrete people sitting at their desks, on their own phone, silently tapping away, that's not how we want to work, that's not how you foster innovation.

Monica Parker:

Businesses tend to want to follow other businesses in what they believe is best practice. What some businesses will do is say, well, Google, I want that, give me a Google office. And you can give them that space, you can give them a break out area and say: "Oh, well there's your bean bag chairs and your whiteboard and your video game, now go create, go be innovative". And that fact is, is that if you haven't actually given people the freedom and the empowerment to feel comfortable using that space because of what would be called a "present-eeism culture" or this idea that you have to be seen

at your desk to be working, then people aren't gonna feel free to use that space, and it's not gonna end up facilitating what outcome you think that it might.

Dave Coplin:

One of the things that concerns me about open plan offices is they're not in themselves conducive to creativity in the way that I would define it. The noise that's generated in those environments -- The e-mail notification going, the phone ringing, somebody talking loudly about last night's Coronation Street, whatever it is. And so you can't get to that mental state where you can really be thoughtful and creative about what you're gonna do.

Chris Bunch:

Certainly some of our engineers, if they're working on a challenging programming algorithm perhaps would like some peace and quiet. However we provide everybody with noise cancelling headphones that they can put on should they wish to escape from some of the noise, and the hubbub of the office and equally people can work from home.

Dave Coplin:

Open plan offices go back to the '50s and '60s, came over from West Coast North America, and they were brilliant. At a time when you had no collaboration tools or anything like that, if you wanted to get a project team working together, brilliant. Stick 'em in the same room, in the middle of the floor, they'll talk to each other, fantastic, be great. Well fast forward to today where we do have great collaboration technology and we do have the ability to work from different spaces, we're still shoving people into the middle of the floor.

Jane Henry:

Some people argue this is good for creativity but in fact, although some people are happy in open plan offices, introverts often hate them. They hate the noise and they work better with more privacy. So this kind of environment doesn't work for everybody.

Dave Coplin:

There's other little really interesting dynamics where, you know, the sense of open plan it kind of makes people feel like the antelope on the savannah in Africa because they're vulnerable. Nobody wants to have that really whacky, creative idea because maybe the herd won't like that or maybe the predator will pick on them. So, you know, I'm probably overselling that picture but it just doesn't help with that sense of creativity. So I think what started out as being a great idea, to help people collaborate, actually now constrains people in how creative they can be, because of the distraction, because of the noise, because of the sense of vulnerability that you get.