How can you design your collaborative workspace with anouk ...

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Murielle Machiels

Murielle Machiels

Have you ever wondered why people find it so hard to come back to the office, they got used to working in really nicely designed workspaces their home or the garden. And no, some companies forced the employees to come back to the office that are gray that are sterile, not warm, and then wonder, why don't people collaborate more? Well, today I'm talking with an expert in collaboration and innovation, and hook funnel. She's an expert in workspace design, but she's also an expert in the new way of working because of course, how you want to work, how you want to collaborate needs to be translated in your workspace as well. And so I learned today that you can design to help create a safer environment, you can use design for people to collaborate more and innovate more. So be sure to listen to this episode about how can you design great workspaces for more connection for more authenticity, for more collaboration, and innovation. I'm Muriel co mum and educator, I used to work really hard and sacrifice important things to me until I lost my motivation. Fast forward past many failed attempts and lessons learned. And I found a way to reach great results while working less. Today, I'm obsessed with helping other leaders build meaningful lives. So each week, I'll be sharing inspiration to change your life and organization. This is rebel leader with a heart Hello, how are you? Good. And you? Great, great. Nice to have you here. Thanks, very hot topic, a topic that a lot of companies have questions about. And that is how to design a team for more collaboration and more connectivity. But on not only design the team, but also design the workspaces for that. Yes. Maybe you can explain a little bit who you are.

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Yes, I can. Absolutely. Thank you. So my name is Vinod, I'm originally born in Amsterdam, I'm Dutch. And I came to Belgium in 1992. So a lot of years ago, 30 years ago in meanwhile, and I have since always been very interested in analyzing how people work. And 12 years ago, we started the agency triple. And what we do is we transform the way companies work. And we bring alignment between the values and the strategy, and the way people internally behave,

collaborate together, and how the design is implemented. So we really make occurrence in between these three pillars. And yeah, maybe something like what we preach, we practice what we preach. So what we say on the outside, we bring it to life on the inside.

Murielle Machiels

Wonderful, wonderful and a very hot topic, especially since the pandemic because across the world, the way we work has changed and it has changed forever, there is no going back to every one full time at the office. Now, what we now see is that most organizations, they allow the hybrid way of working with usually, but still with the ID that they still want to force people to come two or three days to the office. And what I hear then from the employees is that a lot of them are frustrated, because statistics show that I think it's approximately 20 to 30% would like to work full time remote 20 to 30% would like to work full time from the office. But the big majority would like to work both. But what happens now is that in a lot of organizations, people are forced to come work at the office, and then end up spending almost a whole day in virtual meetings at the office. Yeah. So I don't know if it's your experience as well. And if that's a question also, how can you help organizations to really have this? I think we call it activity based collaboration, where people come to the office, to collaborate, to innovate, to brainstorm, to connect with each other, but not to spend their All day behind a computer in a virtual meeting. Okay, thank

you for for the introduction. It's correct that we have. There has been a movement. And it's all I always like to analyze what we've been doing and where we're going. And what the pandemic has brought as an insight. Before the pandemic, I think many companies moved to an open space, which was a very large space where people were working in tables that were aligned, and very large. Just before the epidemic, I think it's interesting to analyze that what people felt at that time is some sort of tiredness because they couldn't really concentrate at the office that good. While the, the open space was meant to enhance collaboration, and what we saw happening is that there were two conflicting activities taking place in the same environment. So two people who want to interact or ask each other questions stay up to date, they will be talking to each other. And next to that space, somebody wants to concentrate. And so when we saw happening is that the open spaces became way too quiet. I think many times we, for even these open spaces, which were mostly a one size fits all layout. We talked about that it was an activity based work environment. And then, people were asking, Can I please work from home because I can't concentrate. And then came the pandemic, and we were all forced to go home. So I think the sense or the feeling, and I think it's very important to speak, we have this feeling of the open space, as we knew it was this one size fits all, and all these benches aligned next to each other. It felt like a production site where you come to produce, and then you leave. And there was this sense of frustration of tiredness, I want to finish it off, but I can do it. And then we were all forced to go home. And people I think, for the first time experienced a real activity base because we live in a house, which is activity based. So we have a kitchen where we cook, we have a garden where you can sit outside and enjoy that. You have a bedroom, bathroom, living room, working room or whatever. And I think what you see is what happened is that people are the first time they sent what it is to take own responsibility to choose where am I going to do it? Because nobody saw what you were doing. So they experienced that freedom. And that alone? Yeah, that we're alone? That is definitely true. But in the beginning, I think people enjoyed that freedom. Yes. And then came an isolation feeling. I think all of us together

today, we have to be careful is that people who experienced these both worlds, when now saying you have to come back to the office, and they come back to what they knew they will automatically that frustration will be felt as being bigger? Yes, definitely. Because they have experienced. Yes. And so I don't say that everybody has to change, of course, everything because that may be a major investment in time and in finance. But I think it's important to say what is the sense of the office? Why do we want to come to the office? What does it make that doesn't make sense to come to the office? When are we coming to the office and to keep cohesion in the team? How often do we have to come? And if we see each other? What do we do? I think in our world, and I don't know really why but I think it gives

some sort of strength or foundation to people to live in a black and white world where it's order this or it's that. And I would like to invite people to go more to the gray. Because I today here very often that the office only is for connecting and collaboration. And if I listened to people, why would you come to the office, we have many people who say because I like it to go there even while working alone. And so I think it should be a bit of everything and that we should the experience of being able to make your own choices should be implemented in that world where there is a little bit of everything. So if you analyze all the activities that people do in an office, and then you create the diversity but the real diversity of work spaces, and work environments where you have spaces where there's really this spiritual calmness where you're not connected, where there is this space where there's really very dynamic and very high level of energy coming from people interacting with each other, and all that is in between. So there you will have individual and collaboration environments. So I think I would say, Let's dare to go to gray, and have black, white and gray, and then let people choose what they want to do. But imagine together, what is making sense for us and what is useful for us to do or valuable.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah. And when I compare it to that, because I also work in a co working space. Yeah. And from the start, even before the pandemic, I really loved that space, because you have all these things. So I go there, I might have a couple of meetings online where I and then I can isolate myself to have these meetings, or I choose where I sit, sometimes I feel like I want to have a lot of connection. And then I sit near the reception where I know that a lot of people pass through and I can chat. Sometimes I need some calmness because I need to, to really move forward with some projects, and then I go sits really at the back somewhere a little bit more isolated. And it's true, it's it's part of what I like there because it also creates the mindset for every activity that you

absolutely, absolutely. And I think it's important to that we understand that behind every activity, even though the activity might be the same, the person behind the doing the activity, they're not the same. And we are all different. And so therefore, I think it's very important to create this diversity for inclusion of people. And that we again there to go into the gray zone where it's less black and white, where it's less only introvert to extrovert I think there is a whole lot more to us as people and and I think the way a triple o the way we use the love day of design to really bring a soul back into the office. The environment as we know it today is used

by very sterile materials. Gree agree yeah, gray again, we don't yet. But there the gray is, I think not the most positive of gray. But the materials we'll use is is yeah, they're they're mostly made of some sort of plastic so that it won't be damaged or it can take fire but then the soul that is there is kind of cold and distant. And so if we want to connect we have to create safe spaces. So the way we work with our clients is really to create on the one hand a safe environment to dare to interact and to dare to be authentic. And on the other hand if you create a space that feels safe, they safeness that I dare to speak to somebody and so then everything falls into these places.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, that was that was going to be my next question. Because yeah, creating a safe environment is crucial today in our complex fast world, we need teams to solve problems and teams function best when you have the safe environment Yeah, but how what is the design then of a safe environment compared to the design of unsafe environment?

I think when we analyze buildings, office buildings, we come to the conclusion that most buildings are some sort of rectangle. And in the middle of that rectangle, you will see the the technical spaces, which is closed because there is the fire staircase or any other stuff or toilet. So that is a closed box. If you look at the energy of a building, the energy of a building comes together in the center or the energy of space comes together in the center of the space. But if you have in the center of the space, a technical block and that you cannot go there so you have this rectangle with a block in the middle what we see happen is that people walk around it and if you kind of in the middle position analyze why we did that we did it to put a workbench rectangle perpendicular on the facade, so the light is in a right way or an ergonomic way falls on the on your table, which of course is important. But next to that you Have a walkway walking around. So people are walking around all day long. So I think I would invite the real estate world to think about what is already the energy and the sizes that I create. And so in in squares, or organic environments, there is way more energy already in the architecture itself. And from there, I think it's important to create human scaling and small environments. I think today, environments are way too long, way too big. And the human person if your telephone rings, and you're in an open space with 50 desks, I mean, I wouldn't dare to answer the phone, I would feel very awkward, kind of who is hearing me Is this safe. So I think it's important to work with the people as well. So I think there's something about the form, and to sense the energy in buildings. And then the uses of materials, it's the same for the glass walls of meeting rooms. Funnily enough, we make everything glass. And I think, again, from this perspective, saying we need to be transparent and transparency brings connection. But what we see then is that everybody puts a film on the glass wall, because it's unsafe, because when you're in a meeting, you don't really want everybody to see what you're doing. And then I always ask myself, but why did you put them all that glass? Because it's more expensive. It's less acoustic? And I think it breaks. Yeah, it breaks the connection, and it brings a lot of coldness and distance again. So yeah, we kind of always analyzed that. And I think some sort of organized scales helps to connect as well. And have was wonder why we keep these the typical furniture or ceilings that are these squares, and that everything is removable. So we would like to invite companies to create a fixed environment instead of one that you want to change all the time.

So if you imagine the space that is fixed, but allows agility, and so people are flexible, and they move, I think then you get somewhere, and then the connection or the cohesion is created by rituals instead of an assigned desk.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, yeah. And I always wonder, because when you look at your home, how you make it warm and cozy. And then why do we make office spaces? So cold? Yeah. Sometimes, yeah, there are some pictures on the walls. But the whole thing is very cold. Absolutely. Never design our house like, never office spaces are designed.

Absolutely. And I think that was interesting. When we had this whole period of COVID. In the beginning, of course, everybody was at home. So you could see that those who said, Okay, you can see my house, you would see a different type of layout behind. And now we're in this hybrid period. So you can really tell from the, from the scenery behind somebody online, whether he's at home, and you can feel a soul when they're at home. And then when you see the office layer, you're like, Oh, you're at the office, you can tell immediately. Yeah, buddy. So yeah, so it's, yeah, I have that same same idea. It's like, why, why did we do that? Why, and what I think is always interesting is that people continue to do what we've always done. And why don't we dare to say just stop? And let's think of what we have done? And should we continue doing that? And does it make sense? The same as giving everybody an assigned desk? I mean, if we don't imagine the impact that that has, or that system has on the connectivity, or the silo creation within an office, I think many things do a lot of harm to teams and to companies. And then yeah, I think it's valuable, kind of to step back and say, Okay, what have we been doing? What are we doing? Does it make sense? Should we continue to do so? Or is it maybe waste? And should we stop it? And then I think energy starts to flow between people within a company and the serendipity that you can implement into companies by by accident, get people connected, or bumping into each other. And then innovation creativity goes up now. Yeah.

Murielle Machiels

And that's what I also like about the co working space silver square, and I think you designed it. We did designed it. Yeah, it's it's so beautiful and so nice. I even get inspiration for designing some things. In my place. Yeah. And so you like going there? Because it's beautiful. The people are nice. You have all these possibilities whether you want to brainstorm, collaborate, concentrate, or you really need a meeting room. And I often said, why don't we design our offices, like the co working office design. But I guess there is a cost. So now we have all these, all these companies out there, they realize that their offices are not adapted anymore. I think that that bit of consciousness is there. And there were statistics, I think 67% plan to redesign their office spaces and also reduce them because they don't need as much anymore. So how, how can you start doing that in a way that doesn't cost you millions from the start? Can you do that also, in an agile way?

I think you can all but I think that for every every company, their offices, of course, is different. And you can. So each start point, of course, is different. For an ecological and financial reason, we always reuse as much as we can. But if you want to change the atmosphere, and go from more from sterile look and feel or and go to more ambiance or soul, just putting a sticker on the wall won't make it. So sometimes you have to be kind of radical, if you really want to create this space, it's kind of the same. If you look at at restaurants, there are some restaurants where we just love to go. And when you go there, there's something happening to the group that you come with. And then it there's this match of saying we're talking, we had this great time, there was all this energy. And if you would go with the same group to another type of restaurant where it feels cold, the light is too white, and I have this collage or whatever on the floor. You're like, Hey, that was the same group. But I didn't know there was something it was just not working that well. And so I think there is, of course, first of all analyze, what is the environment? What we have? What is the energy of the building itself? And then what type of materials or things should I have to take out to bring in the soul? And so that's, I think what we did, if you look at Silver square, I think we took away everything that looks like a traditional office. And we kind of said, Okay, let's try to make a cookie, where you have a soul and then we build a place. Yeah, and we put little things, but on the right spot, and maybe in the right way, and then we let the humans create the rest. So yeah, I think it's a difficult question to answer, because not all companies are the same. And I think that if you want to build something with your people, I think it's important to give time as well to people to do it. And to imagine together, we've strongly believe in the power of the crowd. So we always work together with all the layers of the company, we work together hand in hand with them, they will become the designer of their own space. So we kind of they challenge us, we challenge them. And we dare to open the doors that are sometimes kept closed. And then yeah, give time to process. So yes, there is sometimes a financial aspect to that, if you want to go from a traditional kind of layout that does not really bring or attract people anymore. Kind of think, Okay, what should attract? And where do we are? And I think many companies are as well, in these zonings where I think definition there is already no so in the in the zoning and I would say maybe decide to leave there and go into town where there is a soul where that law mobility dues where you can come with a bike or train and give give people more than just an office space. So they have the possibility to maybe be on the ground floor. I mean, I think ground floor is connected to the gardens is connected to life. There's people outside. So maybe we'll think of that and be daring.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, yeah. No, nice. And when you start you say you don't only look at design, you do design is only one part. Yeah. You also help the organizations with their team design or design of off the way we're going to work.

Yeah, absolutely. So what as I said, the values and the strategy really is where we start from And then we analyze, okay, what is the perception of the culture today? And where would we like to go? Which is the strategy and the values most of the time. So we kind of great gap, or see what is the gap in between the two. And from that we create the concept. And then it's human centric design. So the change, and the culture that we would like to see is always leading and design is always following. And I think in offices that we see today, it's more of a

design centric design, where we design the layout, and then we say, Okay, we have people come there, and I think it should be the other way around. So it's A Human Project instead of a design project.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah. Yeah. Like, like everything at work with strategy and value. It's not the posters on the walls don't make the difference. It's how people live them and experience them.

Yeah, absolutely. And it's, it's funny, always, when you in the beginning, companies were maybe profit only, and then became the importance of having a purpose and having values saying, okay, the way we do it is important as well. And, but I think companies maybe are kind of struggling with that whole issue. And to make that really brought to life, I think we should do more than, as you say, put the values on the wall in the meeting room, because most of the time people have kind of no idea if they're five values. And the first two they know and then they start asking, do you remember what what was the third one again? And I'm like, well, then it's maybe not as, as honest as that, or, you know, that vulnerability behind that. These values are maybe not as Yeah, in line as man, what we preach is what we would we would we do as well. So it's, I think that's important. And I think today, way more than than before, since COVID. Everybody has this wake up call. It's like, what am I doing? Why am I doing this? Do I want to continue to do this for the rest of my life? So I think the companies who are who are straight in that manner so authentic, and meaningful? Yeah. And I think that's the struggle today. Yeah, the teams that were in the company before COVID are not the same people anymore. So yeah, as you say, I think that's that's extremely, you know, this authentic TC and as well, like, what does this value mean to me? And how do I feel to these values? And I think we're more into that. And I think the next generation is very much into that mode. I mean, they don't buy it anymore. These marketing stories and beautiful things. They want real stuff. Yeah, exactly. I think, yeah, I think it's an invitation. And I think sometimes change hurts. And people need a very big bank to, to realize that there is a real need for change.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, yeah. And then when you talk about design, what I also teach people is sometimes you have like, the management team, who's at the top of the building, really like the top of the pyramid, and the parking spaces that are reserved for the directors, but not for the other employees, while they would like to have empowerment in their organization. So this should also be part of the absolute thinking process

Absolutely. In it's true, if you if you look at a traditional work environment, the hierarchy is felt in, in design. I mean, the CEO has the best office has the most square meters, the most the best view the most Windows, the better plans, a real desk with real wood, and the rest is imitation. And so it brings the gap, it makes a gap felt or experienced in real time, all the time.

And so if I hear a CEO say, oh, but my doors always open, you can they can always enter. I think that sometimes we don't realize how people feel and that they just don't dare to come in. And I think the all intentions are most of the time really good. But sometimes we forget to what is the perception on the other side of what we're doing. And I think there's yeah, there's so hierarchy will always be there. And that's I think is okay, but if you have it felt in that hierarchy has access to more than I on a functional basis. I think we can do better. And I think that if a CEO needs to concentrate or an employee in So concentrate, it's still two people concentrating. And yeah, I think so for each activity, you make the best choice. And I think we can give that environment. And I think by that, it's not that the roles will change. But the sense of hierarchy or the feeling, and the downside of that hierarchy will will believe. And you think there you have more connection, and then people there to ask a question to the CEO, which today, I think it's lonely because many people don't there. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Yeah. And I think that this fear is felt in the type of design. I mean, if you look at style, it's, there's fear in that. I think so. So I can understand that people just don't there. And they remember when we were in, in the COVID. In March, it was beautiful weather. And I think people for the first time experience, I can work maybe even from the garden. And how fun is that? So and then today, we go back to an office where everything all the windows are closed, and we can't open them. And so yeah, I think it's I think it's difficult as well, for companies to today. I think it's very interesting, but I can understand it's very difficult at the same time.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, yeah, it is in the because it's a I often say it's 180 degree change that we have to take. If we want to be successful in the in the hybrid sphere.

Yeah, definitely. And I think there's another thing if I if I hear you say the hybrid, I think many meetings are in hybrid way. I would advise not to do that. I think yeah, I think the remote

Murielle Machiels

or everyone here, but hybrid is the technology is not known yet for hybrid

mode. Yeah. And I think it's true, true. And I think on the same hand, it's maybe it's not necessary. I think what we see today is that people come to the office on the Tuesday and the Thursday, and Monday and Fridays and Wednesdays become kind of taken care of house or or kids and and longer weekends or less traffic, which I understand, of course, on the other hand, I think for leadership or teams is very complicated to really get connected. And I think that if we have a space where you want to go to and that the office is the place to be, and there's more than just working there. I think we will get out of that massage of saying I mean, teams today on Wednesday, having a meeting all together, people just can't manage it anymore. So we get to this hybrid. And then you get the first row class is the ones are in the room and one's online. Are they really listening? Are they really there because you I would feel disconnected as well. If

I would be online and the rest is in a room. It's not the same. So you are disconnected. And and then I'm just asking, so why are we doing this? So I think it's an invitation as well, to people to say, Okay, let's look at my agenda for this week. Now, how am I organized my week? And then say, Should I still keep all these team meetings back to back and, uh, to go from one to the next. And this this, this sense of I can't even breathe in between. So I would say let's stop that. And say no to a lot of meetings and say let's start all over again. And then think okay, when do we get together physically? And if we are physically Are we in a room with them with a big table in the middle? We now for clients are creating campfire meeting rooms where there is no Wi Fi and no screens. And it's just sitting around the campfire to connect. Yeah, and so I think that makes sense. And then say if I get together, I really connect with people and not have three people hanging in in a corner somewhere in that room as well. So it's

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, and that also create connections. And when I give workshops I always ask okay, I don't want any tables. I just want the chairs. Yeah. And so yeah, you can have one or two tables in the back if you need to wait something but and so people sit in a circle. Yeah, definitely. And it creates already a bond that you usually don't have, because usually you have like the table in between you creating the disconnect.

But that's again, as you say that that's architecture that helps or doesn't help. Definitely, absolutely. And I think we many times underestimate that. It's the same of having a one to one with your leader. And if he would have his own desk and you come at his desk, it gives an old different feeling or discussion. If you would go to a meeting room that looks much more like a living room where it's shared space and it's not his or hers or you go for a walk. So I think the whole The impact of design is enormous on how people feel, how they behave and how they experience working. Yeah,

Murielle Machiels

yeah, I completely agree. And now I'm moving and I'm moving closer to my co working as well. And I know I will love to I have a podcast meeting, I do it from home. Yeah. Then after the podcast, I worked with my co working and I go there for a couple of hours. And so for me, it won't be like one full day at the office or one full day at home. I like combining both. Absolutely. I need to talk to people. Because when you're alone, yeah, it's great. It's flexible when you work from home. But you also have darker thoughts, because you, you can't really just share something with somebody spontaneously, where attention is then immediately released. And your thoughts change, that when you're alone, and you've had a meeting, bad meeting, and you're still alone, you will you stay with that tension, negatively impact your thoughts that you bring with you in the next meeting?

That's correct. That's correct. And I think, yeah, that's very important. I think if people start feeling that, and so there's, it's not only intellectual, but also in the emotional and we dare to

feel. And in line with that choose, where do we go? And I think it's, again, an invitation to maybe allow to every week to be different, and every day to be different, instead of these fixed home working days. Because you never know, every week I think at the office is different. And every week, the work you do. Var there is a variety there. And so yeah, allowed this kind of more. Yeah, different agendas, different weeks different. Yeah,

Murielle Machiels

exactly. And when my team and I, we need to brainstorm or we want to solve something complex, then we get together for the physically. And but otherwise, we all work from wherever we want to work it does at home, it can be co working.

Absolutely. And it can be outside. I mean, many, many things. If you change environments, and you even go now it's really beautiful weather, go with your team outside sit in the park, and you will see that it really brings new ideas. I mean, you really feel your your, your mind changing when you move environment when you move. For many companies today, we're really creating. There's one one client that we're working for, they have an enormous Park, almost 30,000 square meters. So it's really big. And they ask us, can you create an outdoor space where we can work, connect, play and interact together? But it's only outside? Yeah. And and so I think that the next phase is kind of, yeah, that that that thing as well. And so that we understand that, for people to be creative and to get energy. It's important to change atmosphere to change. Inside Outside cold, warm, loud silence. So So that brings energy to people. Yeah.

Murielle Machiels

Okay, it was really nice having this conversation with you. Yeah. Where can people find you?

We are in nuclear on the facility, waterflow, nine to five to be correct. And we have met plezier, which is our own Contin. And so we have opened our offices to the outside world. So you can always come we're open every day with Dizzy and we're just next to

Murielle Machiels

that. Yeah, and

online. online@www.we are and then three times oh, dot

Murielle Machiels

B. Okay, great. We'll put it in the show notes.

Thank you. Well, thank

Murielle Machiels

you very much. And it was a pleasure having you here. I'm sure a lot of people got great ideas from it. I hope so. Yeah. And they need it. We need really need more energy in the workspace.

Absolutely. Thank you very much.

Murielle Machiels

Yeah, you finished another episode of rebel leader with a heart. If you want more, go to rebel leader with a heart.com For show notes and past episodes. If you love the show, subscribe, leave a review and share it with a friends The more the merrier. Thanks for tuning in and have a great week you rebel leader with a hearts