

ANALYZING THE SUCCESSES AND FAILURES OF COLLABORATIVE AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH BUILDINGS AT UNIVERSITIES

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Since the early 20th century we have seen a progression in economic production methods, from Fordism, to Post-Fordism, to the current knowledge based economy. Today's economy is trending largely towards technology and creative industries, with Richard Florida's claimed 'creative class' leading the way. One way in which these industries display their creativity is through architecture. There has been a rise in the use of open concept offices, where the goal is to promote a fun, social and free environment for workers, with the end result being greater productivity. This phenomenon also exists in research buildings at universities. Universities have been hiring big name architects to design bold, modern buildings for their researchers. This paper focuses on two research buildings; the Northwest Building at Harvard and the Bellini Building at McGill. Each building has been designed in order to foster collaborative thought, with the goal of having increased serendipitous occurrences. There has been very little written on this subject, making it easy for architects to make unchallenged claims on the impacts of their projects. The purpose of this paper is not to critique the design of the buildings on their aesthetic appeal, rather to shed light on whether these projects are successful at sparking creativity and to develop the tools by which we can assess the extent to which they meet the architects' claims of being collaborative, innovative, and creative spaces. I argue the current trajectory seems too oriented towards permanent, inflexible, glass and steel structures that provide only limited re-arrangement of workspace, ultimately limiting creative freedom for scientists.

