The Creative Footprint: The impact of physical space on workplace creativity
Alison Williams
SMARTlab, University of East London
London E16 2RD, UK
alison@creativitysyntax.com

ABSTRACT
This poster puts forward the concept of a physical creative footprint which is specific and necessary to individuals’ and groups’ creativity in the workplace. The impact of physical space on people’s ability to be creative in the workplace has been largely neglected by the creativity research community. This poster, based on doctoral research findings, goes some way towards redressing the balance. The poster posits that identifying one’s own creative footprint and that of others is an essential part of optimum workplace creativity. The necessary elements are explored and an approach to identifying one’s unique creative footprint is set out.

Author Keywords
Creativity, creative footprint, physical press, workplace creativity

ACM Classification Keywords
A.0 GENERAL
General Terms
Human Factors

INTRODUCTION
When asked to describe the circumstances surrounding getting and developing creative ideas at work, respondents talk about, among other aspects, the physical settings for their creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Massimi et al 1988). There is, however, little research that addresses this directly. In her review of the literature pertaining to the links between the physical work environment and team creativity McCoy (2005: 170) states: ‘Much significant and important research discusses the context of creativity as the psychological and social environment, but it stops short of considering the physical environment as creative context.’ This accords with the classical four Ps of creativity: people, processes, products or outcomes, and press (Mouchiroud & Lubart 2006) where press is predominantly seen by the creativity research community in terms of the social and cultural environment within which people are creative.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
The research findings presented in this poster look at what happens when the definition of press is expanded to include the physical environment that presses upon an individual or group. Findings on the nature of this physical press are brought together with findings on activities (and their implicit spaces) that stimulate and sustain creativity, leading to an argument for a concept of a creative footprint specific to each individual or group, affording the possibility of creativity in the workplace.

Research interviewees reported four aspects of physical press or environment that they found important, of which the first three were the space itself, its characteristics, and its affordances. The final aspect was the emotional impact that physical space can have on people. From the first three of these aspects it is possible to posit that:

physical press comprises a specific space, its characteristics, and its affordances.

Although there was a remarkable degree of overall unanimity in the activities reported in the research interviews as stimulating and sustaining workplace creativity, the combination of those activities and the places in which they took place varied from person to person and from situation to situation. What supported one person’s creativity might be seen differently by another: for example, one interviewee finds that being alone in a very busy public space helps creative disconnection while another finds such places full of chance creative connections, and a third finds those spaces destructive to creative thinking; and yet another person may chose to be in such a space not because it helps their creativity, but because they know that it works for the person they are meeting. People use the same space in different ways

1 Gibson (1977) defines this as “the affordances of the environment are what it offers animals [and humans], what it provides or furnishes, for good or ill.” Csikszentmihalyi (1975b) also touched on this when he said: “Artifacts contain behavioral instructions in that they define the reality in which the physical organism is to operate. Often they contain explicit directions for action – such as norms, regulations, and laws.”
depending on their preference and the preferences of those they are with.

The findings also showed that for creativity stimulating activities people use different spaces at different times depending on the situation and the task. Each person could therefore be said to have their own unique creative footprint: what works for one person may not work for another, and may indeed have a severely negative effect.

**CONCLUSION**

The research findings, including a definition of physical press, underpin the concept of an individual’s unique creative footprint, where he or she or the group have a specific pattern of elements of physical press that stimulate and support their creativity in a variety of situations and for a variety of challenges and tasks. The findings also support the argument that it is possible for people to identify and implement their unique creative footprint.

**REFERENCES**


