

Planning Our Environment

Tour of the AI Environment

This is the room where we do our group process work because it allows us to work big. We can get about 15 to 25 people here. Back there, the wing, that's all the way down to standard. When we have an event in here we videotape it. In the bigger spaces, we have multiple monitors. Cambridge is the most extensive—20 monitors. To present information in multiple channels has more impact. Also we need the videos for documentation.

You can stack the chairs six to eight high. And they're real lightweight.

Some people argue the standard chair is an unstable configuration. You start slouching into a C position, compressing your organs. You straighten, and there's pressure on your back. The 90 degree configuration does not respond to the way your body is structured. You can sit in these chairs here for two, three hours and not get uncomfortable.

This is the more traditional work area. I go from task to task and like to be at draft table height. I work with an ensemble of furniture. The kiosk you can build to any configuration. We're prototyping accessory pieces. Module one: all kinds of files. This can have a documentation station in it. The computer on top, the accessory drawer underneath it.

Almost all the furniture is designed out of experience. Someone gives us feedback after using it. We respond.

This one started as a documentation work station. We decided we wanted a full-size computer on it, but it should still be compact.

And everything is sized to go through doorways. Everything is compact and moveable. This piece is being revised so it's all one unit.

The first wing we designed, we built a model. You could never get near it because of the wings of the ergonomic chair. They kept pushing the desk away!

All the furniture is built in Kentucky, by a third-party shop. And by our own shop in Glasgow. We've never been in the retail market, we've worked with corporate clients and kept capacity to that level. But we're not in the retail market. We don't want to become a humongous manufacturing operation.

We need our own capacity because we can prototype articles that way and because we want the process and the economics to stay linked. And also to promote communication between design and manufacture.

L3D's Demo Environment

Client: We're interested in using the room you were in as an experimental center.

Pat: You can always change the space around, leave it attractive but have it work. This table—in seconds you can dis-assemble it and put it up against a wall. A

piece can go away and something else can come out. Pretty lightweight. One problem you might have is theft. These things are easy to carry off.

Client: Are the walls stackable?

Bill: The rolling L will open to 120 degrees, then you can bring it in so you have 120 degree pockets, or put two together and get a cross. They collapse to the size of one 8-foot wall. This is a little gallery for food. Here's the cube office system, a tinker toy system. You can make a whole office out of it. There's lots of storage here. With the computer revolution, we've increased our ability to create paper by a factor of 10.

We have two areas to explore: what is it that we can do in the existing lab that you're using as a prototype for the ultimate building. We want to look at that space and how we can configure it to maximum advantage. Second: We want to push out to that space and look at the requirements for it and backtrack from that to the existing space.

Client: We need to come to some kind of decision about whether you want to loan us some equipment to put in there as a model. We need to think through how we want to use that space and do it in a way that meets our current needs. Second, we provide a demo of ideas for flexible space that could be carried over to new building.

Bill: I think we've committed that we're going to get involved in some kind of process together, but we're not going to define that today.

Client: Next week is spring break. We need to come to some decisions today.

Bill: Let's focus on the existing space for now. I suggest people come up to the board and write down things you know you want to see there. Then focus down and take a look at, over the next two weeks, what can we supply? I don't think we have any of the wall-mounted work walls. We can put some rolling stock in there.
(Bill sketches the room.)

Client: Could the collaborative area be broken down? And does that conflict with the idea of having permanent individual spaces?

Bill: They wouldn't be permanent. Someone could bring in a dog for a few days.

Pat: It's hard to train people to come in and say, Oh, I can move furniture. And to train people not to get mad when their stuff is moved.

Client: We have a lot of equipment. It would be easier to move the furniture than to move the machines. And also, the jacks for the computers are on the walls, the ceiling.

Bill: There's some stuff that's going to have to create the armature; that's probably the big pieces that you have, and the other things will move around them.

Client: The hallway out here is the department's. Right now there is furniture, a couch. The other piece is over here; we still have this half-room. We haven't got the official OK to keep it, but it's heading that way. It's fairly big, but it's not as nicely finished. This meeting room is also a shared resource with the department. That is managed by the department. We do have some access to that. There are some alcoves here that were supposed to be for some sort of display. Facing the outside.

Bill: When you're doing your demos, you'd like to have that viewed. When you're doing a demo you want to fill the space with the energy of the demo.

Client: That means when a demo's going on nothing else is happening.

Bill: Maybe this becomes the major collaborative space and down here you have some of the more project oriented space.

It's nice to have different activities in the space sometimes. I can be here working and hear the group process and make a comment. Sometimes you just want absolute silence.

Client: We have our individual spaces already outside of this room. I think as a demo it would be nice to show you can have a couple of things going on and can have walls that partition the space in various ways.

A lot of people say you're not using that space. We want to be able to show it's used in many ways at different times.

Bill: You want to make this space so attractive that people want to be there.

Client: I was there the other day and there were some undergraduates talking about a project that was related to mine and I started talking to them about it.

Bill: Often the serendipitous interactions bring whole new ideas and configurations. This area here has to become hot in some ways. This wall over here, we thought about using white board along it for project and display work. It's visible from the outside.

Client: Maybe we could put some posters in the hallway.

Bill: This wall here?

Client: People are using that quite a lot.

Bill: Over here we might have one of those rolling Ls, or two, and they can make a configuration with another straight wall like that. Or make four break-out areas. They're eight-foot long.

Client: We have a couple of tables under the horizontal screen. We could use something else. The square tables we saw.

Bill: Maybe you have a five or six panel sitting back like that.

Client: Why not use that curve as a way of dividing the room up?

Bill: You could have a serpentine like that. A three panel and two ones will be more flexible. When we get a scale drawing we can decide on the right combination.

Client: The nice thing about the walls is it breaks up all the rectangularity. It would be good to explore how we use the existing walls with this kind of system. We have a lot of wall space.

Bill: You have all kinds of options with a fixed wall. You can take this kind of wall and mount it on it. There's the snake wall. And then there's wing walls, with a fixed wall and two wings you can swing out. All the stuff can be on track. Not only this way but up into the ceiling. You can do guillotine walls that come down like the old blackboards in classrooms. Or on sliders from the sides.

Client: There are various purposes for the room. For experiments, but also to sell demos to others—for instance, the dean. I sit on this committee planning for this building. Many centers would like to be in this center. To showcase the possibilities that exist. The idea is open space in the middle, common space, similar to this lab but larger, where we would bring together three or four centers that are collaborating.

Bill: The whole furniture line is invented by people saying, Wouldn't it be nice if we had... We want to provide the armature, but we leave some things undone so the people can make the environment their own. Buying plants or a couch or whatever.

Client: How would we expand for a big meeting?

Bill: I would create a curve there, along the axis of that trellis.

Client: Flexibility comes with a price. To move things around so one group leaves and another comes in, these are a lot of social structures...

Bill: There is a component that says the teams using this space have to be responsible about it. Not leave it trashed out, respect people who are coming after you. You set up a culture or ethic around doing that. Usually, when we go in and do a space, the client is also going through a transformational program, part of that is learning how the environment is a facilitator of their work. It's easy to dismiss the environment when it's fixed. When it's more dynamic, it demands your attention and involvement. After the organizational transformation, you create a default map. After a period of time.

Next Steps

- Client: What do we need to do to wrap up today?
- Bill: Let's do a time line.
- Client: April 9, 16 and 21. The 21st is the mayor and the city. The 16th is the DLIDLC, which is the new building. The institute on the 9th. (We had an idea for citizens' corners that would be deployed in different corners of the county.)
- Bill: In two weeks we need to get to you some subset of the environment.
- Client: And we might want to order some things to get there on time.
- Bill: So that would be the first operating environment. That will happen on the 2nd or thereabouts. I'll have to look at what's in production and what's hanging around. We have to look at work walls and work furniture for our first operational environment. You guys need to look at what you can pull together.
- Client: Why don't you figure out what you can loan us and e-mail us?
- Bill: Some combination of work walls, some cubes, some tables...
- Client: A couch, plants, chairs, books and toys. Posters. Another good thing would be dog carts.
- Bill: For the three days that you have meetings we can loan stuff out of here until we can, over time, get more stuff in the space.
- Client: We can get 20 or 24 chairs.
- Bill: This is an evolution. It's not all going to get done by the first meeting. The other thing for us to think about, I need to get plans from you guys so I can play with some configurations.
- Client: I'll get you blueprints. I have concerns about having demo room be right in the front because it breaks things up. That smart board is a great display space.
- Bill: Don't wonder, do. And when you do, document. You need to build a knowledge base of what you're experiencing, what is and isn't working.

