



Interview with Kim Marc Bobsin

THIS IS HOW OFFICE PLANNING IS CHANGING AFTER CORONA

Company premises are becoming communication hubs and brand statements

The Seel Bobsin Partner architect office was responsible for designing the new company head office for Euler Hermes in Hamburg. Planners and visionaries Gunnar Seel and Kim Marc Bobsin are another two of the Office Pioneers who feature in the book of the same name alongside our Chief Executive Officer Michael Cappello, in which they describe their vision of the future workplace.

It was clear that the work philosophy of König + Neurath and sbp exhibit significant parallels. We chatted to Marc Kim Bobsin to find out how sbp plans office environments and handles floor space, and we ask him about the corporate culture that defines his team's work.

K+N: Have companies really been looking more closely at their corporate cultures in the past few months? And has this changed the planning approach?

Bobsin: We're observing that companies are thinking a lot about what approach to take in terms of space and structure for the future. However in many places there's a widespread perception that the priority is to find long-term solutions and to get that right first time if possible. However we think it's better to create more flexible and adaptable approaches, to be more adventurous and ready to learn from any mistakes. That doesn't fit in with every corporate culture, and as a result many companies find it a challenge to make these changes.

K+N: Can you see a trend towards involving employees in office planning more? Are things developing towards more democratic decisions?

Bobsin: Where workspaces are concerned, we rarely carry out a project without involving the employees. It makes projects more complex and time-consuming – but on the other hand it ensures higher acceptance and also guarantees that the actual needs are met. But the intensity of participation varies between the projects, sometimes quite significantly, and this always depends on the culture practised at the company.

K+N: What are things like at the moment and what matters more in the design of office buildings: a representative image or a needs-oriented working environment?

Bobsin: Of course orientation to need still looms large. It's just that those needs are examined more closely and checked to make sure they are future-proof. Since we only develop individually tailored solutions, it is standard practice for us to find out the requirements at the beginning of the planning process. We listen very carefully before we start, to find out where a company's coming from and where they want to go.

In future less floor space will be needed because of increasing hybrid structures, and I think this will result in a realignment of the functional and atmospheric design of corporate buildings. They will be no more than communication hubs and brand statements – which will serve both to improve the employees' communication and creativity with each other, and also to reinforce their identification with the company.

K+N: How has corona changed the design of offices: is floor area in companies already being reduced, or is it used in a different way from before?

Bobsin: Projects that were already in the planning phase are very much under scrutiny at the moment: in some cases floor area has been reduced – where the lease agreement permitted. Admittedly in some cases that's a kneejerk response to a financial situation rather than the result of a thorough analysis of the actual future viability of that floor space. Often it's just a matter of reducing the direct workspace areas. We also advise against being too hasty about reducing special atmospheric spaces and workstation areas with particular sojourn quality because that's usually what constitutes the added value of a space.

K+N: What effect is the new "virtual era" having today on the planning and design of office buildings and premises?

Bobsin: Despite all the digital change processes, our actual main focus has stayed the same: personal dialogue with customers. These days content and participant number are the deciding criteria for how things are agreed, and above all where: on site or off site. Many processes are streamlined and accelerated as a result. Business travel is under closer scrutiny now. General project communication has increased in intensity and frequency though, and this constitutes a significant aspect within the project.

K+N: What are sbp's central values, and what corporate culture do you practise in the architects' office?

Bosbin: sbp stands for flexibility and diversity. More speedboat than pleasure cruiser. More science lab than admin office. More warehouse than boardroom. So the best way to describe us is a healthy mix, because we combine so many work styles. So our own facilities are very flexible and adaptable. Not only do we need interaction for our creativity – we also need plenty of physical materials and furniture around us all the time.





from left Gunnar Seel and Kim Marc Bobsin

” We represent flexibility and diversity. More science lab than admin office. “

Kim Marc Bobsin

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