



# The Bridge

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Being on my second tour people ask me what has changed in the HQ. In the beginning, I answered in a non-committal way. After two years and now filling in a different post, there are certainly changes in my day-to-day routine. Also, a simple calculation gives that a bit less than two thirds of the staff has left the building and been replaced by newcomers which had an influence on the dynamics of interpersonal interactions. The refurbished entrance hall is again open to impress visitors. Some procedures have changed, but not that much. So, at first I gave those general observations as the answer to the 'what-has-changed' question, but I started wondering what was really different. What did attract my attention?

I didn't alter my old route for coming in the HQ for another work day. Old habits die hard when there is no apparent reason to change them. Entering the building through the door near Legal, I pass 'The Bridge' on the second deck. This meeting space looks a little out of the ordinary and even its name is not like the others referring to NATO capitals. Yes, this is the real change, isn't it?

When I first saw the name, I directly thought it came from the nautical, historical connection of the "the forward part of a ship's superstructure from which the ship is navigated". The steering wheel in the middle certainly influenced this.

But as soon as I turn around, I see "Improving Today, Shaping Tomorrow, Bridging the Two" and think there may be another meaning. This room should be the connection between the present and the future. Of what? Just hold that thought for a moment.

In preparation of this article, I've looked up the meaning of 'bridge'. There are more than the two mentioned above. Just to name a few:

- "the upper bony part of the nose ; the part of a pair of glasses that rests upon it". "The Bridge" to support a better look into the future?
- "a piece raising the strings of a musical instrument". A place to enhance our effectiveness, efficiency?
- "a connection (such as an atom or group of atoms) that joins two different parts of a molecule (such as opposite sides of a ring)". A connection between individuals, branches?

The name "bridge" opens up a spectrum of possible explanations and it is yours to pick one. It's a promising idea, but does it really function as such. Let's have a look.

It looks different. With its fatboy-like seats, special blackboards, a small library of specialized books, there is no doubt that this space is not an ordinary meeting room. The open space places every meeting in a fishbowl-like environment that could be sensed a bit stressful: "The others are watching us, so we have to give the impression that we are working hard". Situated near the COS office and above the entrance one can easily feel the symbolic value of "The Bridge". That is what I observe very early in the morning.

During daytime, it's another story. I try to pass by to observe the biotope of this special meeting room. What I see is not what I expected to see. My sampling rate may be too low to have an unbiased opinion and I'm more than willing to adapt my view, but I can only conclude that most of the time the space is unoccupied. Nobody there. Sometimes I see people talking, chatting. Yes, we need spaces where people can chit-chat or where they have a quick meeting, but is that the purpose of "The Bridge"? I even saw somebody sleeping (a copy of the famous Google "napsules"?), or was the person meditating?

How do I see the real value of "The Bridge"? It should be the playground; a sandbox to test new, innovative ways to work together. A bridge between how we work today and in the future. I propose a few simple rules for all who use "The Bridge":

- For everybody. Whatever happens on "The Bridge", you're welcome. See something interesting? Just enter.
- Personal opinions. Leave your position, rank, and even your name at the entrance. You take only your personal opinion and expertise with you to "The Bridge". Everybody's opinion is important on "The Bridge".
- Be active. Being on "The Bridge" means you actively participate in whatever 'meeting' is going on. The open door policy does not mean that access is free. When you enter "The Bridge", you must participate as long as you're there. Don't worry, you may leave the place whenever you want. No obligation to stay.
- Inform and be informed. The person starting the meeting has to provide all attendees the necessary information to be able to participate. This can be by writing the topic on the blackboard, place an Info panel for all to read ... Of course, entering "The Bridge" means you know what is expected from you.
- Free to use. All ideas generated on "The Bridge" are free to use. There is no such thing as "my idea" in this zone.

Honestly, the thought to experiment with these rules crossed my mind. One day, I will go to the empty bridge, place a panel with some unusual problem statement written on it and start a brainstorming-like method by my own. I'm curious to see if somebody will join me? Or will I be left alone? What do you think? Will you participate?