

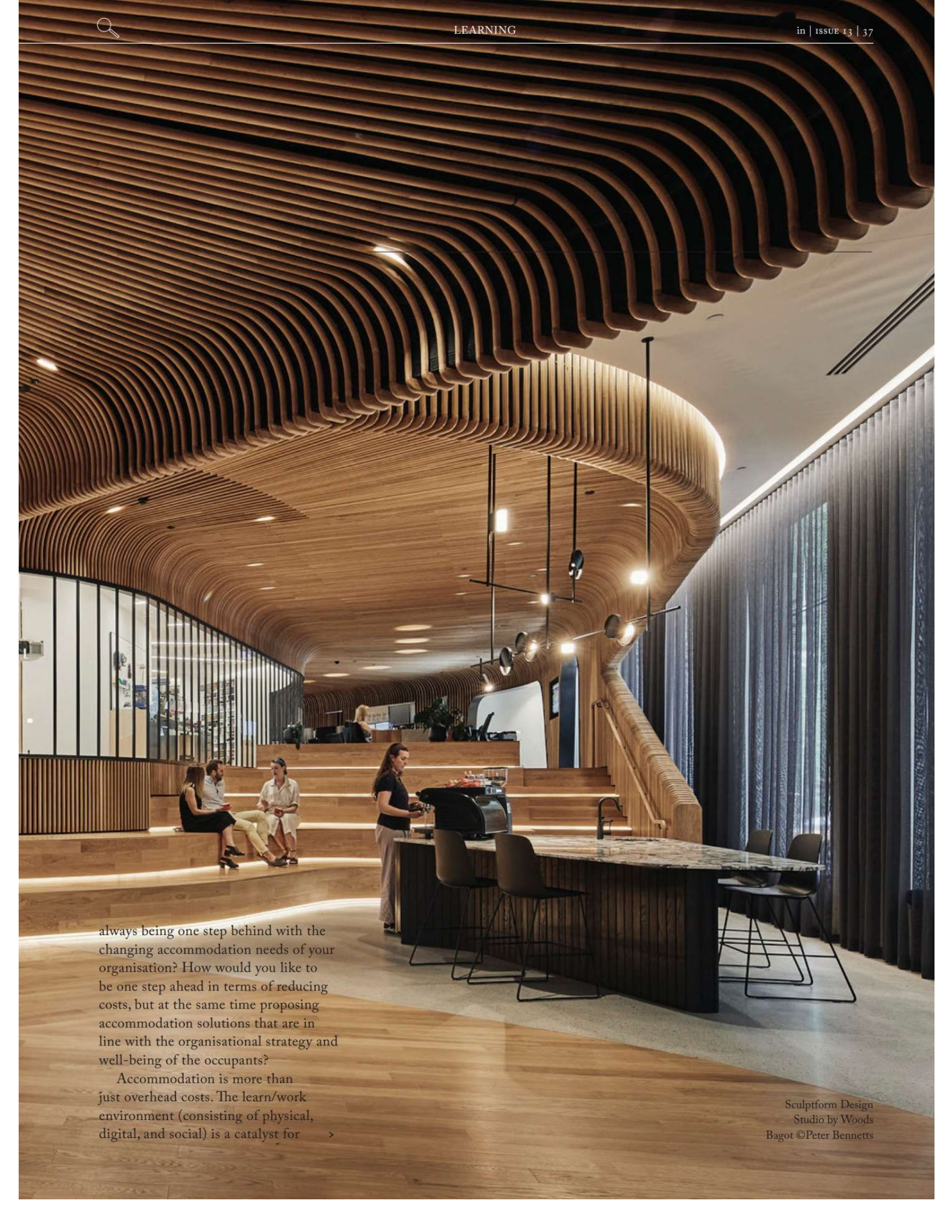
Creating a great learning environment has a number of strategic benefits for organisations and individuals

WORDS - RENÉ STEVENS

# Lessons learned

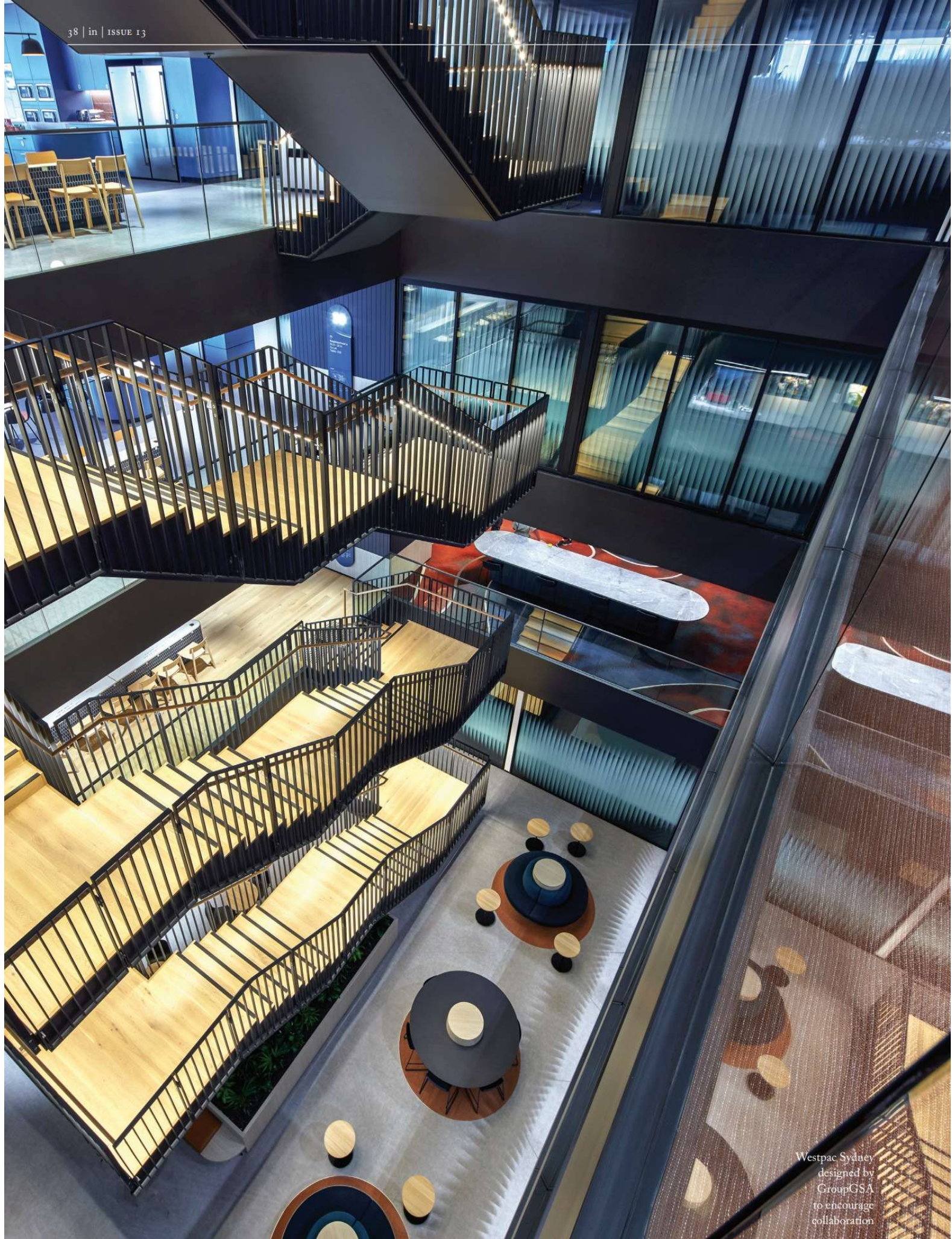
**I** Is the learn/work environment just a space with a roof where people study and work from nine to five, or is it a means that can contribute to the organisational strategy and human health & wellbeing? The latter can certainly be the case, but then several business perspectives must be taken into account.

As a real estate/facility manager, do you know that frustrating feeling of

A photograph of a modern interior space, likely a learning or work environment. The ceiling is a prominent feature, composed of numerous curved wooden slats that create a rhythmic, undulating pattern. The space is lit with warm, recessed lighting and pendant lights. In the foreground, a long, dark wooden bar with a marble countertop is visible, with several black chairs tucked under it. A woman in a black top and light-colored pants is standing behind the bar. In the background, a group of people is sitting on a wooden bench, and a whiteboard is visible. The overall atmosphere is warm and collaborative.

always being one step behind with the changing accommodation needs of your organisation? How would you like to be one step ahead in terms of reducing costs, but at the same time proposing accommodation solutions that are in line with the organisational strategy and well-being of the occupants?

Accommodation is more than just overhead costs. The learn/work environment (consisting of physical, digital, and social) is a catalyst for >



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collaboration

people's performance and wellbeing and therefore has a strategic impact. It is an important asset in the value creation of an organisation.

The learn/work environment can be compared to a rainbow spectrum. The seven colours of the rainbow are always present in white light. However, the spectrum is only visible through the refraction of light at different angles. For example, you can only see the contribution that the learn/work environment can make to the business strategy if you look at it from an integral business perspective.

#### BE DISTINCTIVE

Organisations try to take up a distinctive competitive position in the force field of the market. What makes your organisation unique from the competition? The trick is to make this visible and tangible for both employees and students in the learn/work environment.

Look at the supermarkets: they all sell the same premium brands. They try to distinguish themselves not only with price and house brands but also with the design of their accommodation. Dare to stand out and leave out 'me

## “ What is the effect on people's behaviour and what message does the environment communicate?”

too' accommodation. The pursuit of accommodation in line with the market is usually only motivated by costs. Moreover, "market conform" usually stands for "market uniform". So-called market-compliant buildings do not appeal enough to the user's experience. They focus on the large middle bracket, they are functional for many, but distinctive for almost no one.

#### FROM PRICE TO VALUE

The learn/work environment represents the second or third cost item on

an organisation's budget and has a significant impact on the largest cost item: staff. The learn/work environment influences behaviour and process adaptations. Therefore, focus not only on reducing costs but also on increasing value. Do not only look at the amount of the rent and the annual operating costs but also look at the intrinsic value that the learn/work environment offers to the organisation.

The intrinsic value is a personal (subjective) estimate of the value to the stakeholders. The price is "only" the market price at which something can be bought. The key question is not: "what is the price?" But rather: "what is the effect of accommodation on people's behaviour and what message does the learn/work environment communicate to the market?" And so how does accommodation provide added value for the organisation?

#### IMAGE BUILDING

When marketing its products or services, an organisation pays a lot of attention and care to create a strategic and distinctive competitive position. Brochures, website, (job) advertisements and corporate identity are coordinated >



to communicate a congruent, desired message. Depending on the type of organisation also the location, layout and exterior of its building(s) can be used in communication. After all, how one is accommodated says a lot about the organisation; just as clothing says something about the person wearing it.

In addition to being functional, clothing is primarily a means of communication. There are “dress codes”. Think of slogans such as “dress for success” or “dress to impress”. With the choice of clothing, you implicitly indicate with which group you want to be associated. A building can confirm or shatter the desired image. So know what your accommodation radiates and what you want to radiate.

Accommodation is thus much more than a functional shelter, it is also a stage in the current experience economy. It makes tangible what you stand for as an organisation. There is a sense of pride when you belong somewhere, and the learn/work environment is an important part of that.

#### INTEGRATE INSTEAD OF COORDINATE

The learn/work environment can be seen as a collection of square meters with a specific quality of use and price. In that accommodation, business processes are carried out by employees. These components can each be coordinated independently. However, we can also compare them with gemstones and precious metals: very valuable, but even more valuable when we integrate

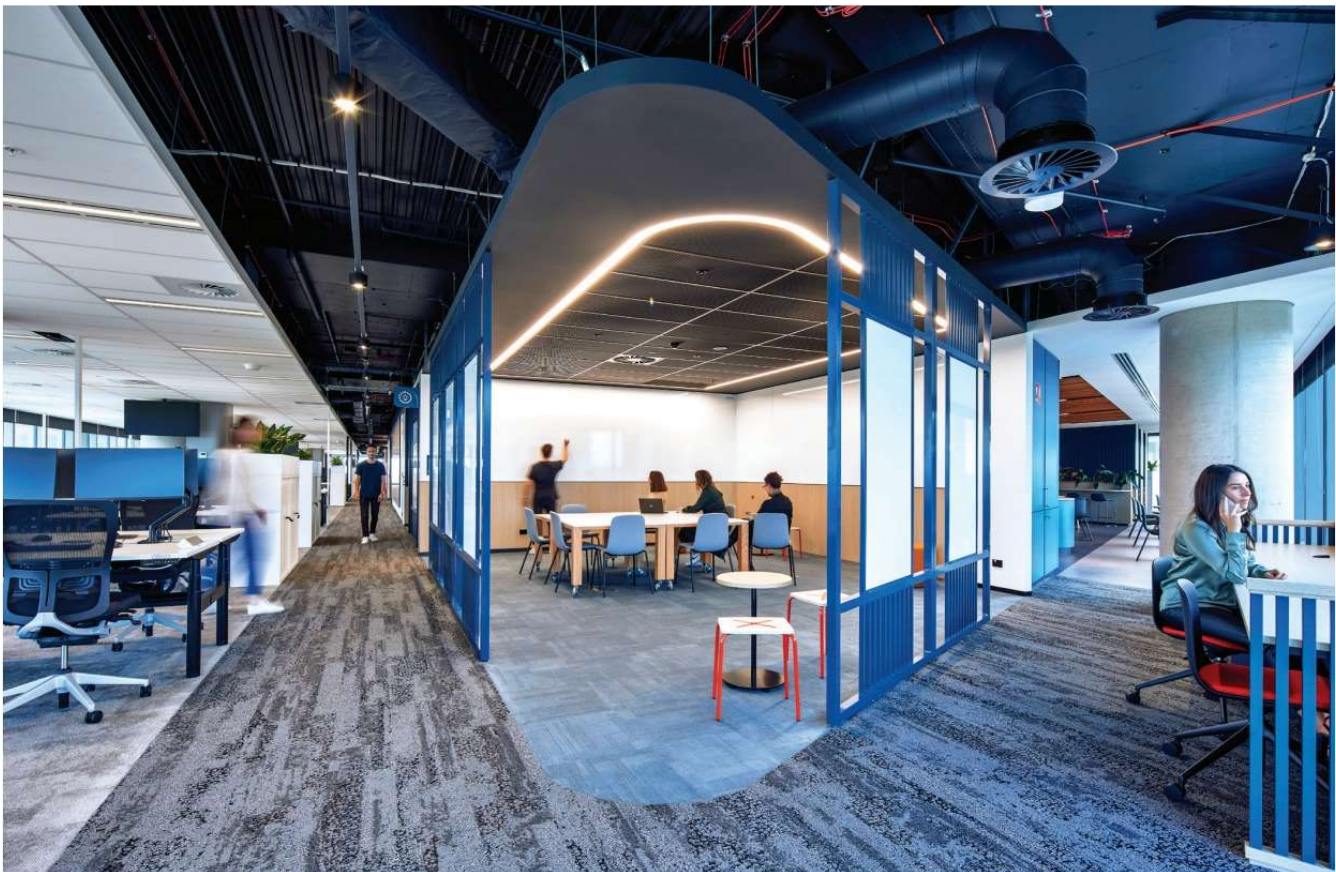
them into a jewel. The whole is more than its components. Integrating people, business processes and the learn/work environment will also lead to more added value in all areas. Accommodation choices are then by definition weighed up in the business framework of the organisation.

#### TEAM BUILDING

Learn/work environments are created for people to perform added-value activities, as employees or as students. It is mainly the so-called “soft” accommodation aspects that make the difference in otherwise technically and functionally equivalent buildings. Aspects that affect you as a person. That evokes emotions. Emotions such as feeling safe, feeling at ease, being proud, being accepted, and going for it together. They make the difference between “market-compliant” average accommodation and authentic accommodation that confirms and strengthens the corporate identity of an organisation.

Below

Westpac’s Sydney offices designed by GroupGSA





Soft aspects have to do with the experience of the learn/work environment. You usually don't see them, but you notice them. The perception of the space can make a significant contribution to how employees and students connect with each other. To strengthen team spirit and to be seen as an attractive employer. In other words, the accommodation is an employee benefit.

#### INNOVATION

Innovation is essential for organisations to position themselves to maintain or create in rapidly changing market conditions. Innovation arises because people challenge conventional knowledge or the dominant logic.

The accommodation can stimulate this by offering a learn/work environment that challenges for example a market conform me-too product. In a changing market, necessary reorganisations or realignments may be the order of the day. Accommodation is a means of inducing the desired behaviour and can even be the “straight

Above

Pingtan Children Library by Condition\_Lab  
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#### About the author

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jacket” to enforce the necessary changes.

#### MEET AND COLLABORATE

A building has natural network nodes such as the parking garage, bicycle shed, entrance, the waiting area in front of the lift, the lift itself, stairwells, toilets, coffee corners, canteen/company restaurant, meeting rooms, printing/copying areas, and smoking area. At these nodes, where people from meet, quick wins can be achieved by arranging them in such a way that they invite/stimulate a spontaneous introductory conversation. The chance of a follow-up conversation at the workplace, in a conference room or the company restaurant then increases. Mutual communication between employees promotes collaboration.

The seven business perspectives show how the learn/work environment can contribute to the organisational strategy and stay one step ahead. A rainbow is more than the sum of seven colours. The learn/work environment is more than the sum of location, square meters, quality and costs ●