Culture + Talent

Fast Forward

Room as Team Member

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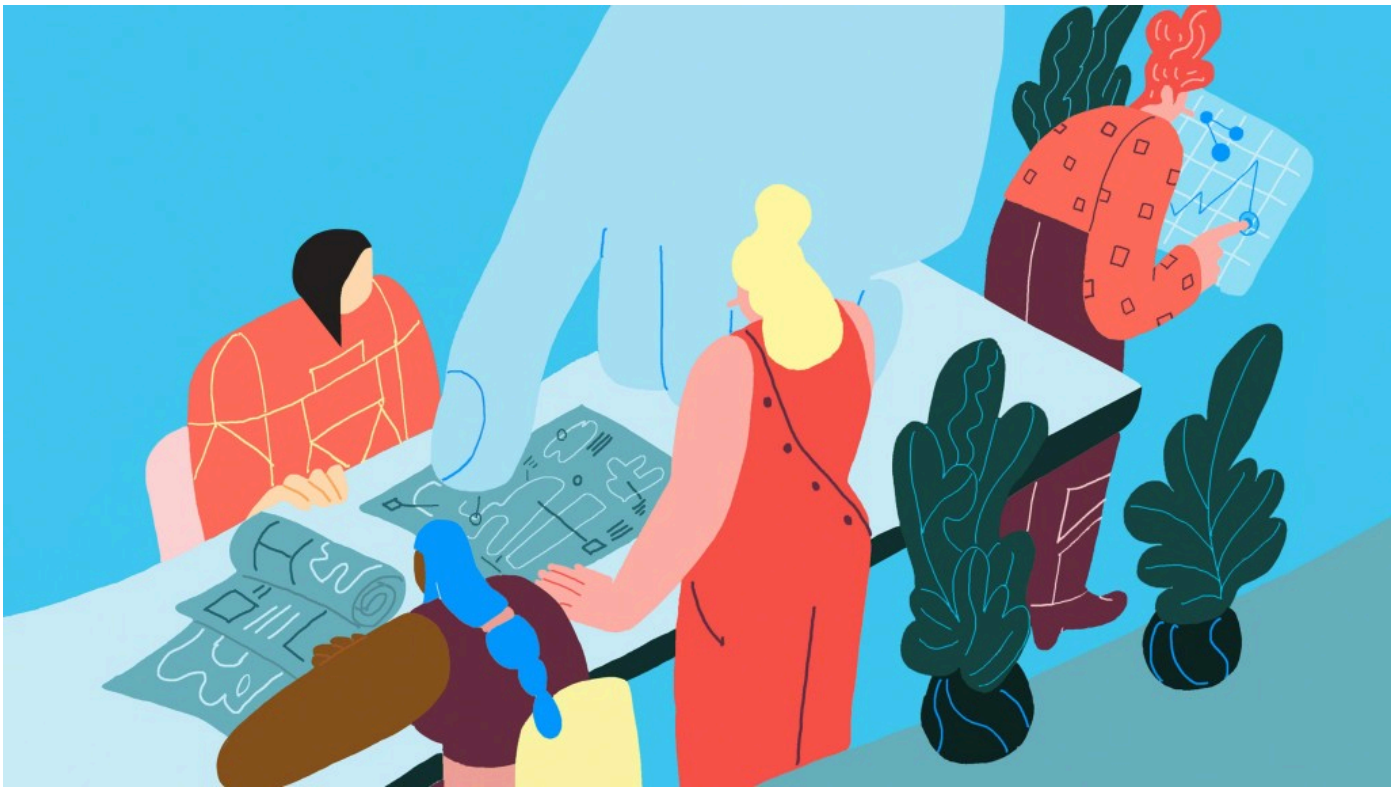
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If you can imagine space as a participant on your team, you may be curious as to how that spatial persona will interact with you and your colleagues. At the far edge of this frontier, we can envision the development of environmental systems that operate like friendlier, more benevolent versions of Hal 9000 from Stanley Kubrick’s classic “2001: A Space Odyssey”: artificial intelligence platforms that, while not sentient and emotionally developed in a human sense, can detect our moods and impulses with facial-and-speech-recognition software and brain-reading devices. When we’re losing energy and drifting off in a meeting, they nudge us to get a drink or eat a sandwich and refresh ourselves.

In the immediate future, we see the growing popularity of digital personal assistants, such as Cortana and Google Assistant, and smart furnishings, in the workplace. Imagine a conference table equipped with microphone arrays and speech-processing software, which comprehend and summarize conversations happening around it. Through such integrated, intelligent systems linked to the cloud, a room will be able to anticipate the needs of the team within it—bringing up past documents or project logs, for instance, or encouraging equal participation by nudging quiet team members to share their opinions.



Privacy standards will need to evolve, of course. As rooms begin to listen to us and data becomes easier to harvest, the security and privacy of employee information will become the concern of every organization. Europe recently has taken the lead in digital privacy by establishing the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which lays out sweeping individual rights over your personal data. Controlling digital stimulation by providing places for privacy, rest and rejuvenation in the physical workplace also will become increasingly important.

Many open questions remain, but what can be said is that the age of robots has arrived. Bots, virtual assistants and other software agents will act as human proxies, not only querying data but asking questions and accomplishing tasks. Space will become intelligent and conversant. Where’s that year-end report? “Right here,” the tech-embedded room will say. “I’m happy to walk you through it if you’d like.”

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