

BEING IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE



With its executive team spread across four countries on three continents, leveraging technology to achieve more immersive experiences was a vital requirement for Steelcase's new Leadership Community space. Focused on learning, the team decided to use Cisco's iRobot Ava 500 to explore ways remote team members can replicate the critical experience of being in the physical work environment.

Gale Moutrey, vice president of global communications, is among the first to experiment. From anywhere in the world, thanks to advanced mapping and an easy-to-use remote control, Gale, who is based in Toronto, can move her robot in Grand Rapids, Mich., anywhere in the building to attend meetings or have hallway conversations as if she were actually present in the physical space. The mobile videoconferencing technology enables a more natural way to be with her executive peers and the teams she leads.

Overall, she describes the experience as "liberating." Even with the best technologies and exceptionally well-designed spaces, videoconferencing can limit the natural, seamless interactions that are crucial to effective teamwork and collaboration.

In contrast, reports Moutrey, her iRobot has given her "the ability to have serendipitous interactions and be personally present without being physically in the space. I like to leave some unscheduled time in my calendar so I can take my robot to the cafe where I can visit with anyone there."

Is it a little weird to be Steelcase's first Robo-sapien? "Only at first, and then the technology disappears because the quality of the experience is there."

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