

London Tech Week: Harness Creative Potential

We've all been in a meeting where people failed to participate. One person runs the agenda. One person writes on the board. Everyone else occasionally checks in but also checks email, text messages and does other work. Conversely, we've seen what can happen when someone is passionate about a project. Energy and inertia can often be sparked by a creative idea. That's when something big can happen.

It's this search for more passion and less passivity that brought together four experts for a panel at [London Tech Week](#). The panel on how to harness the creative potential of people and organizations consisted of Ryan Gavin, general manager for Microsoft devices, Madelyn Hankins, Steelcase director for the UK and Ireland, Phillip Ross, founder and CEO of UnGroup and Cordless Group and Leif Huff, executive director and partner at IDEO. Here's a glimpse into what they talked about.

REFRAME CREATIVITY

Hankins began by explaining why organizations need to reframe creativity from a soft topic to a core business issue. Creativity is not just for musicians or writers, she explained. To be successful in the future, workers at every level and in every role will require the ability to generate creative ideas and solve problems in unique ways. Creativity fuels innovation and, therefore, growth.

Ross co-wrote "The Creative Office" which explores how creativity can manifest in our environment. He referenced the famous quote subscribed to Winston Churchill, "We shape our buildings and, in turn, they shape us."

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WINSTON CHURCHILL

"Most offices I walk around feel like a morgue and are devoid of activity and energy," says Ross. "They've got the mix wrong. Desks are empty, but people claim they can't find meeting rooms." He says we need more space for groups and individuals to be creative. He sees the whole allocation of space changing inside the workplace.

STIMULATE CREATIVITY

Different stages of the creative process require different types of environments. The Maker Commons supports the socializing of ideas and rapid prototyping. These spaces encourage quick-switching between conversation, experimentation and concentration.

Where do you get your best ideas? For many people, it's anywhere but the workplace.

"We have to create environments that stimulate creativity. It's the unexpected that's interesting," says Ross. The office can be predictive, ordered and repetitive. He advocates for a heterogeneous approach, not one-size-fits-all. A variety of places can each stimulate a different kind of creative reaction.

Ross believes no one should have a desk. If people have an assigned desk, the inertia to sit at that desk is too great. He sees value in activity-based clustering where spaces are designed to enhance four creative activities; collaboration, communication, contemplation and concentration.

DESIGN FOR CREATIVITY

Hankins and Gavin shared the new project Steelcase and Microsoft collaborated on — Creative Spaces. The collection of interrelated spaces integrate place and technology to prompt the creative process. This ecosystem of spaces allows people and their information to move fluidly from place to place to best support creative behaviors.

The Ideation Hub is one of the Creative Spaces designed by Steelcase and Microsoft. It supports generative collaboration sessions and promotes the fluid interaction between people, ideas, tools and technology.

Instead of viewing technology as a utility, Gavin suggests using a different lens. Technology can be transformative. Consider the large-scale Surface Hub, for example. It encourages people to stand, participate, work shoulder-to-shoulder and easily integrates remote participants. Add the Surface Hub to a room thoughtfully-designed to encourage standing postures, proximity to the technology and privacy from distractions and, now, space and technology are working together to augment and optimize idea generation and information sharing.

At IDEO, Huff spends his days working with clients to use design-thinking to harness creativity and create innovative solutions in today's volatile business climate. It's expensive and a waste of resources, he said, when meetings don't accomplish anything or encourage people to engage. It's important to provide the environment and technologies that don't hinder progress and allow people to move between spaces to find their moment of creativity.

"People aren't buying a piece of furniture or a computer," says Gavin. "They are buying cultural change." All of the expert panelists expressed an excitement around the transformation going on right now in the world of work. By designing environments that consider space and technology in a holistic way, people will win by having better places to do better work.

To learn more about creating the conditions to support creative work, read The Creative Shift in the latest issue of 360 Magazine.

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