

Microsoft and Steelcase Launch Partnership in Asia Pacific

Microsoft and Steelcase team up to help workers unlock their creativity in Japan through a range of spaces designed to support creative work and foster engagement.

The future of work depends on innovative ideas, creative thinkers and a highly engaged workforce. In countries such as Japan, China and India, the ability to attract and retain highly-skilled and sought-after talent has significant challenges: a shrinking workforce, a drive for workstyle reform and the inability to find workers with the right skills. At the same time employers are rethinking strategies to attract and retain talent, while technology is growing exponentially. A drive to refocus innovation in increasingly complex conditions is causing a macro shift toward creative work.

Steelcase and Microsoft joined forces to begin thinking about the challenges organizations and people face as they try to engage in more creative work. As part of an ongoing relationship, the two organizations announced they have worked together to develop Creative Spaces — a collection of technology-enabled work spaces specifically designed to support the creative process.

“The Future Is Creative” knowledge panel in Tokyo included (L to R) Mike Peng, managing director of IDEO Japan, Takuya Hirano, CEO of Microsoft Japan and Gale Moutrey, vice president of communications for Steelcase.

During a recent expert panel in Tokyo titled “The Future Is Creative,” Mike Peng, managing director of IDEO Japan, addressed the importance of not only generating good ideas, but being able to act upon them within an organization.

“Unless we have a creatively capable workforce, we’re not going to find the way to meet today’s challenges,” says Peng. “For many years, analytical thinking has always been touted as the best type of thinking for an effective and efficient organization. But, as challenges get more difficult, the only way we can respond is through a more creative process.”

Creativity is not just for artists or people who’ve studied under someone deemed creative. The ability to creatively solve problems is an innate human quality everyone shares. The question is: How do organizations help unlock people’s creative potential?

Steelcase CEO, Jim Keane, and CEO of Microsoft Japan, Takuya Hirano, came together in Tokyo to announce the partnership between their two companies in Japan.

“When I was speaking with Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft, I learned that Microsoft’s mission is similar to ours — to help organizations and individuals reach their full potential,” says Jim Keane, CEO of Steelcase. “We began to talk about how our companies might work together to help our customers reach the next level of productivity.”

Neuroscience has helped us understand the creative process needed to successfully generate ideas and move them forward. Instead of a process-oriented organization that emphasizes preciseness and conformity, the creative process is iterative and cyclical.

“Creativity requires group work as well as individual reflection time,” says Gale Moutrey, vice president of communications for Steelcase. “It involves different modes of thinking, both convergent and divergent, as well as working in a variety of ways depending on your task.”

Creative Spaces is an interrelated collection of spaces designed with the right tools and technologies to support all five stages of creative work — focus, shoulder-to-shoulder collaboration, prototyping and experimentation, ideation and respite.

“It’s amazing how much thought is going into the spaces to let people work in the most natural way,” says Takuya Hirano, CEO of Microsoft Japan. “I witnessed the power of the technology and office furniture combination. It’s very impactful.”

Hirano relayed an all-too-common story. Thirty percent of people who came to a regular meeting he held were often seen doing other work. By changing the space to include a standing-height table and adjusting the distance to the Surface Hub, meetings ran shorter, people started participating and many ended each session by standing up near the Hub and working together.

Creative Spaces help people optimize the technology and the technology allows people to optimize the environment. The result is a seamless and more productive experience at work.

Research tells us employee engagement is an issue worldwide. The [Steelcase Global Report: Engagement and the Global Workplace](#) looked at 20 countries and found only one-third of employees described themselves as highly engaged. The findings went on to suggest [Japan](#) suffers from the most disengaged workforce with just one percent of highly engaged employees and 61 percent disengaged, nearly double the global average.

The report is the first of its kind to explore how the workplace impacts engagement. It found a strong correlation between highly engaged people and those who reported high workplace satisfaction. Specifically, people wanted choice and control over where and how they get their work done. Creative Spaces offers people a range of spaces, some designed for individual work and some for group work, some with fixed technology and some with mobile technology, to give people choices over the environment that best supports the kind of work they need to get done.

[Creative Spaces](#) are now on display around in the world in New York, Chicago, London and now Tokyo, scroll through the photo gallery below to see the initial five spaces. To learn more about the creative process and how the environment can help, read [The Creative Shift](#) in the latest edition of 360 Magazine.

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