Culture + Talent

Moving to Munich: One Employee’s Story of Change

The Steelcase Learning and Innovation Center in Munich communicates a new set of cultural values to employees.

Read 5 mins

By Christian Neubauer, Steelcase Project Manager, Global Product Development

Change management is tricky. As a global project manager for Steelcase, I used to split my time working from Rosenheim, Germany, Strasbourg, France and home. About one year ago, I moved into the new Learning and Innovation Centre (LINC) in Munich. The move meant a new rhythm for my family of five. My travel time to work is now 90 minutes each way. Yet despite more time commuting, the change in culture, impact on teamwork and exposure to customers is bringing a new kind of energy to what I do. I wanted to share the story of my experience at the Munich LINC. It started well before the doors opened.

It’s one culture in Munich. It’s about connections.

CHRISTIAN NEUBAUER | Steelcase employee

Roughly one year before I ever stepped foot in our new building in Munich, I was one of the employees invited to participate in a series of workshops conducted by Steelcase Applied Research + Consulting (ARC). The ARC group is usually called upon to help our customers turn insights and research into action and results. This time they were helping us. The goal was to understand our current experience at work, identify opportunities, pave the way for change and explore how our individual needs related to the company’s priorities.

When I worked in Rosenheim, people sat together based on their function — marketing over there, sales over here, etc. It was an amazing space. Yet, something was missing. It didn’t perform in a way that facilitated the constant iterations and connections we wanted to make. During the ARC workshops, I tried not to get bogged down by the details. I prepared myself for a new kind of space, but I didn’t envision what it might look like. Instead, I shared what I wanted; more teamwork and collaboration, the opportunity to quickly connect with people in our organization as well as customers and the acceleration of rapid prototyping.

360 REAL TIME PODCAST

Former Steelcase President and CEO Jim Keane discusses how the new LINC will impact strategy and culture for Steelcase employees and create business results for customers.

Of course, I was anxious about this big change. Yet, as I left these sessions, I felt more excited than hesitant. Having bounced from one location to another, the different places I had been working — they all felt like Steelcase, but, at the same time, had different cultures. I looked forward to being part of the team that helps shape our new culture in Munich.

After months of observations, gathering space measurement data, reviewing surveys and doing an in-depth culture assessment, the employee experience team came up with five principles to inform the design of our new workspace; empowerment + trust, experimentation, collaboration, authenticity and belonging. (Read more in Creating the Link Between Learning and Innovation.)

Because I live outside Munich, I had the benefit of seeing the space before employees started to move in and I could see how much had changed. I knew as people moved in, the space would continue to evolve.Recently, more nods to nature have been added -— more natural surfaces and greenery. What's remarkable now is how it performs for those of us that work there. We have so many choices when it comes to where to work. I use different areas during the day for individual, group or paired work. I change my location throughout the day frequently.

There are some days I start by having a coffee (I use my train time for email, calendars and agendas), and others where I jump right into a meeting or a customer visit. When I grab coffee, I might stay at the barista space to connect with someone I bump into. I also find myself stopping in one of our three separate staircases to share a quick update with a colleague.

Our technology in the workplace also gives us powerful options for connections. We have video conferencing rooms and other tools like the large-scale Microsoft Surface Hub. Remember how I wanted to quickly connect more? It's actually happening.

Another big difference from my old workspace is how my project team functions. Now, we gather around a certain location in the building instead of having each function sit in a separate area. Today, our engineers, project manager, designer and marketer sit next to each other to make faster decisions and help each other when problems arise.

The Munich LINC will redefine the way we learn so everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner at any point in time. Innovation is about trying new things, a willingness to take risks and pushing decisions down into teams. It's a journey. I don't think anyone would suggest we're all the way there yet or that the building only makes all the difference. It does set a new tone and communicates a new set of cultural values to everyone that works there. I see people starting to feel at home and make use of the space. Everyone is still exploring, trying new things and building new rituals. It's going to take another year before we're settled -— but I think for a cultural change, that's fast.

When people ask me what I think about the new Munich LINC, it comes down to pride. I am proud to work for a company with the conviction to make such an investment. Having this environment -— seeing people walk by the building and look inside the windows -— there's pride in wanting to welcome them inside and share our story.

Christian Neubauer is an interior architect who joined Steelcase in 2005 as a local product manager supporting the DACH sales team and dealer network. In March 2011, he worked with the brand new Integrated Technologies Group. Now, he’s a project manager for the global product development and launch team in Europe, the Middle East and Africa. He and his wife are the parents of two girls, 6 and 3, and a newborn baby boy.