Tech Talent Beacon

How data-driven tools helped put a company's culture change into hyperdrive

Walk down Boston's Seaport Boulevard and you'll see a mecca for young professionals. Open air restaurants and green space invite people to linger after work, eat and play. Redeveloped in 2010 to attract innovators, the Seaport now hosts leaders in tech, biopharmaceuticals and finance — all fighting for the more than 150,000 students who call Boston home each year. Surrounded by schools like Harvard, MIT and Boston University, the unemployment rate is a dramatically low 2.9%. Boston is a microcosm of what organizations face everywhere — the need to find and keep great people.

High-tech innovative software development company PTC is 34 years into making and engineering product management software for manufacturers. Leaders wanted to compete aggressively for the highly-skilled talent around them. Their previous headquarters in Needham, Massachusetts, 45 minutes outside of Boston, was not attracting prospective candidates. Recruits would visit and admit they just didn't want to leave the city or deal with the commute.

The company also saw that people working in traditional cubicles had kept them siloed. Their way of working was stifling creativity, collaboration and, ultimately, innovation. As part of a push called PTC 2020, they sought a more collaborative, flexible, open, fast-paced and innovative culture. They decided to leverage a move to the Seaport district as a large step toward transformation, igniting collaboration and fueling innovation. Besides the location change, PTC also moved from all private offices and owned workstations to a 100% free address workplace. Even the CEO gave up his assigned desk.

"When we first talked to people about it, the sky was falling," says John Civello, VP of real estate and workplace. "The open plan has a bad reputation. We were fighting against the fact that some companies haven't done it in the most thoughtful way. So, we tried to be very purposeful. Now, when you ask people, they would never go back. By changing our space, we were able to put our cultural goals into hyperdrive."

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JOHN CIVELLO | VP Real Estate and Workplace, PTC

A BIG MOVE

The company moved from 320,000 square feet in the suburbs to 200,000 across seven floors in the tower that bears its name in Boston. PTC needed new tools to manage the experience for its people to succeed in shifting its culture while implementing a new mobile work strategy in a high-cost location:

New space management tools — According to Civello, real estate managers had been "flying blind" when it came to space usage. Interns would count people periodically. With a tighter footprint, PTC needed to know how space is being used to make quick changes when necessary.

New wayfinding tools — PTC's previous space didn't have any way to identify if a room was booked or for people to find places to meet. People had to stand up, yell and walk around looking for the people and places they needed. With a new space and a new workplace strategy, employees needed help to identify available spaces throughout the day.

New collaboration tools — PTC was encouraging new meeting behaviors. They wanted less scheduled, time-consuming meetings and more on-demand, quick problem-solving conversations. They needed easily-accessible collaboration tools in meeting rooms and in the open plan, as well as on-demand room scheduling devices.

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Discover how a Smart + Connected Workplace can enhance the employee experience.

PTC worked with Margulies Perruzzi Architects to design the seven floors in their new headquarters. Steelcase and Steelcase dealer Red Thread helped them implement a holistic solution which included both furniture and technology. By integrating Steelcase's Smart + Connected tools, PTC was able to leverage data and technology to support space management, wayfinding and collaboration.

Just like the diverse areas that make up the city of Boston, the new space was designed with distinct "districts" on each floor to accommodate all the different kinds of work people do throughout the day. Team neighborhoods included 750 seats for 1000 employees while cafés, informal lounges called "hives" and private enclaves gave people other ways to connect, feel a sense of community or find some focus time.

With easily-accessible collaboration tools, as well as on-demand room scheduling devices such as RoomWizard, PTC employees can have more spontaneous, quick problem-solving conversations.

NAVIGATING CHANGE

PTC spent 18 months preparing people for the move. They subsidized public transportation for commuters. They created a mock-up space so people could get used to a free address workplace. They even had downtown restaurants cater meals out to their Needham location to get people excited about what downtown has to offer. When they officially moved into their new space in January 2019, a suite of integrated technology solutions helped employees and leaders navigate life in their new home.

Each floor hosts two Steelcase Live Map displays where people can quickly reference a monitor to see in real-time which spaces are available and find a place to work. With more than 150 RoomWizard scheduling devices throughout the space, people can now book rooms on demand and easily scan nearby rooms to see what's available based on red and green indicator lights. For quick connections, media:scape lets people gather round, plug in and display content in the open plan. The tools are so simple, they require little training allowing for wide adoption.

Tom Salvoni, director of infrastructure and architecture, says he uses the Steelcase Find app everyday. "I can go directly to my iPhone and book a room as I'm wandering around. If I need to have an impromptu meeting or schedule something quickly, I can just go on this device and book a room instantaneously," he says.

More than 1,400 Steelcase Workplace Advisor sensors feed an easy-to-use dashboard Civello's team checks daily. He may need to evaluate a space issue, want to see how a major annual event held at a nearby convention center impacts attendance or see how people take advantage of summer Friday hours.

"It's amazingly powerful. My whole career in corporate real estate, we're always guessing. We're always trying to figure out the real capacity and occupancy of a space," Civello says. "With this data, we have it in real time and can analyze it and run reports. It lets us have very different conversations."

Now, when people let Civello's team know they need something to change, he can check the data and enter into the discussion with a more complete picture of what's going on.

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The data delivered by Workplace Advisor has already helped the real estate and facilities team make better use of the space.

The Steelcase Smart + Connected Platform works with Office 365 and other cloud services to offer a seamless user experience for wayfinding and booking.

AN INTEGRATED AND SECURE SOLUTION

The data from Workplace Advisor feeds Steelcase Live Map, Steelcase Find app and RoomWizard to offer a seamless user experience. Being a leading tech comp-any, PTC understands the importance of that better than most. "If the selected technology had a lot of different functions and features, it would feel very disjointed to our employees. It was important for us to have an integrated suite of tools to give us a single way to present to employees how to interact with the space," says Abbas Faiq, chief information officer.

Faiq also highlighted his confidence in the security of the tools and data. "We did our due diligence. I had my security team look at different aspects of data management, personal information, how it was going to be stored, who had control over it and who had access," says Faiq. "We're confident in how robust the security is — there's nothing more important to us."

A TWO-WAY PARTNERSHIP

Technology companies are used to listening to their customers, incorporating feedback into product roadmaps and issuing updates in frequent cycles. As PTC and Steelcase have worked together, real-life feedback has been invaluable.

One example—PTC wanted a custom update for Steelcase Live Map so they could see neighborhood level seating availability. Steelcase worked with them to make the update. Now, anyone can see how full a certain neighborhood is based on color shading and the update is available for all of its customers.

"Every vendor we do business with says they're partners. With Steelcase, it feels like they are working alongside us. They helped us through implementation and they're still helping us," said Salvoni.

TURNING INSIGHTS INTO ACTION

Seven months into move-in, PTC employees are settled into their new space. Walk around each of seven floors and you'll see people working in neighborhoods, cafés, lounge spaces and enclaves.

"We've gone from people saying, 'An open office environment won't work for me,' to really enjoying the space," says Diane Young, VP of global benefits and HR programs. "Employees feel more empowered to connect with their teams and leaders."

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In one instance, a team said they didn't have enough space. But, the data showed the space was never occupied more than 50% of the time. The problem was people were leaving their belongings at their desks when they were somewhere else, so people mistakenly thought a desk was taken. By helping to adjust behaviors, the issue was easily resolved.

In another case, a manager, who traveled often, was advocating for his team. He kept hearing they didn't have enough meeting space. It turned out the problem was "phantom meetings." Data showed people were booking spaces, but not using them and failing to cancel the reservation. New Workplace Advisor features allow for Auto Book and Auto Release. So, if a room isn't in use, the reservation system will automatically release it after a certain period of time. And, if you walk into a space, it will book it for you on demand.

"We feel like it's been success all across the board. We've done two pulse surveys with employees and the feed-back has been great. People love the openness and natural light," says Civello. "We know we have a higher close rate with prospective hires. And, the feedback from our customers who use our space is fantastic. All of these feedback loops reinforce our strategy. I'm a big advocate of expanding what we've seen here in Boston globally."

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