

Designing Better Futures: A Global Challenge

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The paradox of today is that while technology offers the promise of connection, social isolation and loneliness are increasingly recognized as a public health problem. The need for belonging transcends borders, industries and communities. Feeling seen, heard and valued is not just a personal aspiration but a cornerstone of thriving workplaces and vibrant communities.

A Platform for Innovation and Connection

The Steelcase Better Futures Community is where employees, dealers, community partners and customers come together to address today's challenges. The initiative's centerpiece is the annual Better Is Possible Design Challenge — a full-day, in-person global workshop. The event brings together people dedicated to making positive change in their communities. These Changemakers, as Steelcase calls them, gather worldwide for creativity and collaboration.

Led by local facilitators and guided by design thinking principles, participants brainstorm, prototype and share solutions to a global challenge that changes yearly. In 2024, the issue was belonging, and the challenge participants addressed was: How might we foster a sense of belonging where everyone feels seen, heard and valued in the workplace and the world?

Design Thinking: A Framework for Impact

Design thinking is central to the Better Is Possible Design Challenge because it is a human-centered approach to problem-solving. It is a strategy that seeks to understand challenges from multiple perspectives. Participants are encouraged to think beyond the "quick fix" and instead aim for more long-term, impactful solutions for today's complex problems.

"Having this time to think, collaborate and create is priceless in a world that (for the most part) is reactionary and transactional," said Maggie Lancaster, Executive Director of the Grand Rapids Children's Museum, of her experience at this year's challenge.

Design challenge participants in Munich create a prototype based on an idea generated during the workshop.

The Global Reach of the 2024 Challenge

This year's challenge spanned 15 cities across North America, Europe and Asia, growing from 12 cities in 2023. Participants were united by a desire to make a difference in the world through connection and shared learning.

Kim Koeman, Director of Impact at Steelcase, shared how belonging became the 2024 focus: "Belonging is something everyone can relate to, regardless of background. It is a topic that transcends industries and cultures, and it felt especially relevant in today's societal context. Bringing together a multi-stakeholder group made it even more impactful."

Birgit Köbl, representing the ReDI School of Digital Integration in Munich, shared how “some of our student participants initially felt hesitant, wondering if they belonged in a space with professionals. But by the end of the day, they were engaged, confident, and inspired, realizing their voices mattered in these conversations.”

The ReDI School’s mission is to provide migrants and marginalized locals free and equitable access to digital education, making the topic of belonging particularly poignant to the student participants. By the end of the day, the group had developed the idea for a physical board in the school where students could share messages of encouragement, ideas and community events. “The board will serve as a central space to foster connections and help everyone feel included,” Köbl explained. Most importantly, they learned the methods and mindsets to tackle social issues together.

Other workshop themes centered around fostering a sense of belonging by designing spaces that respond to people’s unique needs, enhancing onboarding experiences for new employees and creating comfortable forums for people to share feedback with each other and their organization.

The Power of Collective Action

The Better Is Possible Design Challenge exemplifies the power of gathering a global community to address pressing issues. By providing a space for shared learning and connection, the initiative strengthens relationships and leaves participants with a renewed sense of purpose and community.

“This is not just about a single day,” Koeman emphasized. “It is about building networks, learning together and inspiring action that continues long after the event. We are helping Changemakers bring these principles into their work and lives.”

Join Us in Designing Better Futures

Together, we can do more to build belonging and address the loneliness paradox. With social isolation breeding loneliness and challenging our sense of community, we all need regular, meaningful connections with one another.

As Steelcase continues to expand the Better Futures Community, the opportunities for collective impact grow. Whether you are an employee, a partner or an individual passionate about creating change, there is a place for you in this journey. Learn more and join the movement by signing up for updates at the [Steelcase Better Futures Community](#).