Q+A: Creating the Next Evolution of the Workplace

New IoT workplace solutions will allow organizations to spot changes to work patterns in real-time and create solutions that best support people.

Recently, Steelcase president and CEO, Jim Keane, introduced <u>new IoT solutions</u> for measuring and improving the workplace at Microsoft Ignite 2017. These efforts are designed to harness big data to improve people's day at work and help them be more productive. As Keane indicated, it's just the beginning. Behind-the-scenes development is already underway on what's next. Steve Sanders, general manager of Smart + Connected at Steelcase, heads the team responsible for helping create the <u>next generation of the workplace</u>.

360: What is Steelcase's vision for the next generation of the workplace?

Steve: It's all about creating a great experience for people at work and helping people to perform at their best. The future will empower people with more choice and control in the workplace. It will also require organizations and leaders to have more accurate, real-time information about how their spaces are being used. By understanding how people use their space, organizations can determine if the space is being used in the way it was intended, or if people are looking for something else to help them do their best work.

360: How do some of these Smart + Connected solutions work and why can they lead to a competitive advantage?

Steve: We know people and places are an organization's greatest assets. Yet, only 54 percent of office space is used and more than 37 percent of people are not engaged at work. If organizations can do a better job using costly real estate and engaging their people, then they'll have a more productive team.

We've been working on ways to harness big data to help leaders understand which of their spaces are being used and why. We're able to layer Steelcase insights on top of the data to see what amenities are in the most used spaces and how companies can adapt their spaces to better serve their people. These space measurement solutions empower organizations with continuous, real-time data for ongoing insights as well as periodic, episodic information to inform big decisions. This data is then used for a companion mobile app, Steelcase Personal Assistant, which will help workers find the people and spaces they need, and, in the future, will encourage them to offer feedback about what spaces are effective and which ones need improvement. For more information, see Smart + Connected Workplace.

360: Is this technology a way for us to help create a more responsive workplace?

Steve: Absolutely. A responsive, adaptive workplace is ready for whatever changes people and the business will go through in one year, or five years, or more. With the speed at which change and disruption is taking place today, it can be hard to know what an organization will look like in a few years.

Already, we know the one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work. Today's creative problem solvers aren't supported by sitting in the same desk, next to the same person, all day, every day. Instead, they work on cross-functional project teams, with fixed and mobile devices, and sometimes they need a meeting for individual or team privacy, while other times they need the energy and collaboration that comes from a more open environment. That means organizations need an interrelated collection of spaces to support their people. It becomes really critical to know if you have the right mix of spaces and if those spaces need to change over time as work processes and teams change.

This technology lets you spot changes in work patterns as they happen. Leaders don't have to wait for issues to bubble-up to the top. Whether you're preparing to make a capital decision or want the competitive advantage of noticing when changes start happening with your people, having data interpreted in an easy-to-understand way will help inform smarter decisions.

360: How do you see the Internet of Things (IoT) developing within the workplace?

Steve: We like to talk about data helping people have a better day at work. True IoT solutions will offload time consuming, repetitive tasks that cause frustration at work like when you can't find a room that fits your needs, or you can't locate the colleagues you need to keep a project moving forward.

Sensor-enabled technology will give meaningful information to leaders and facility managers to make improvements in their workplace. In addition, this data will find it's way into the hands of people — giving them more control over how they manage their time and their work. Steelcase Personal Assistant, which Jim Keane introduced at Microsoft Ignite 2017, will be a mobile app that puts the power of big data into the pockets of employees. People will be able to use the app to find the rooms and people they need to do their work. As our team develops additional enhancements to the app, in the future, people will also be able to rate the space right in the app — providing a real-time feedback loop identifying what works well and what doesn't.

360: Steelcase space measurement solutions are available now. Personal Assistant is on the immediate horizon. How will you build on these Smart + Connected environments?

Steve: This is a big part of the reason we chose to build on the Microsoft Azure IoT platform. Azure is known industry-wide for its security and reliability. It's also infinitely scalable. Think about it like the operating system on your mobile phone — every 60 to 90 days you receive an update with new functions, enhancements and improvements. As we roll those out, Azure will allow us to easily update the Smart + Connected workplace for people and their organizations.

Featured Products