

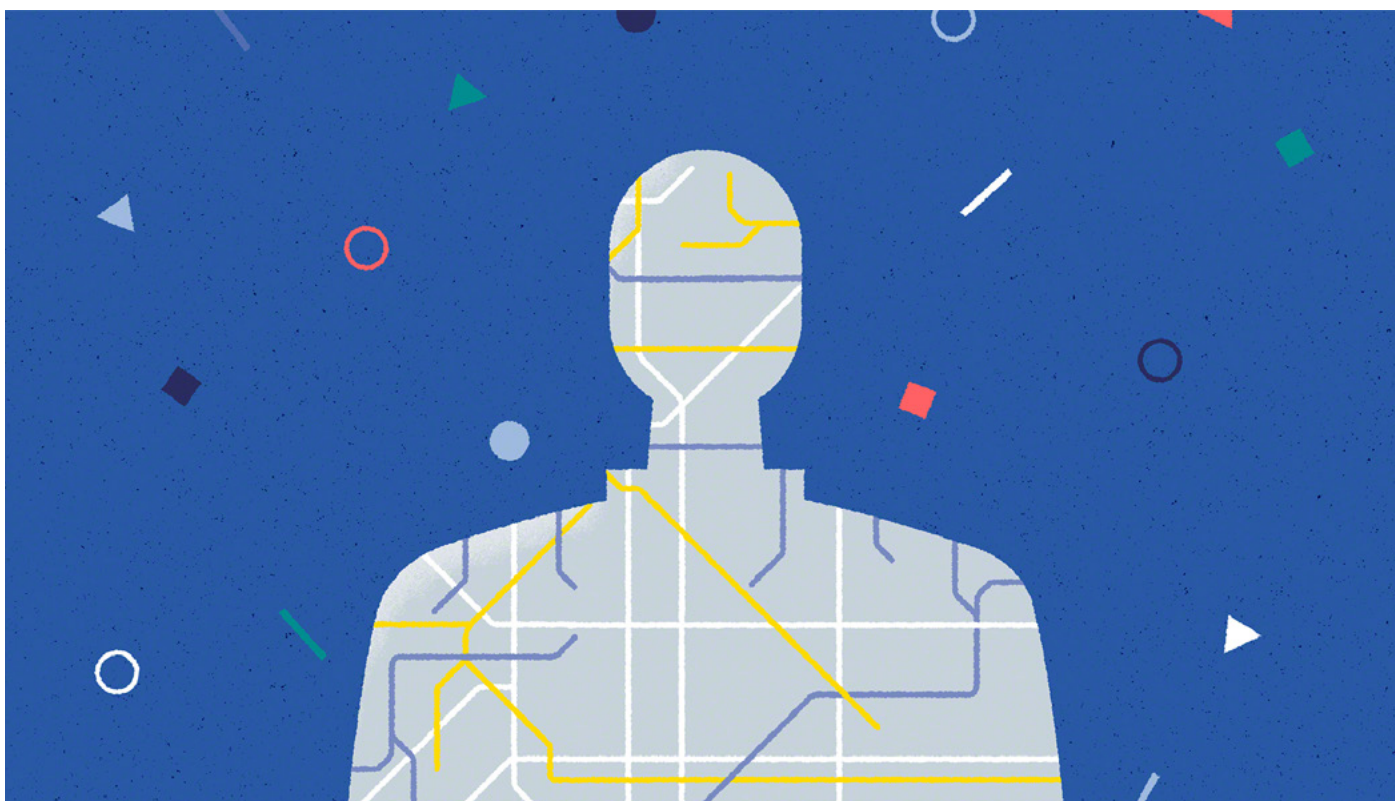
Creativity at Work



We live in an age of innovation, where business survival depends on constantly reimagining and disrupting the status quo. A mind-boggling 11,000 businesses are started every hour around the globe, all of them attempting to make their mark and topple, or at least challenge, current market leaders. Amid relentless competition and increasingly connected and demanding consumers, one skill has rapidly become a vital differentiator: creativity.

One of the first to predict the rise of creative thinking was Tom Kelley in his book, *The Art of Innovation*, where he said creativity was becoming a centrepiece of corporate strategies and initiatives. This view was a break from the previously popular idea that being changed, in isn't something that anybody can be, but a characteristic you either have or you don't. Artists, designers and advertising professionals were the "creatives"; but not those who worked in finance, technology or HR, for example.

However, that has all changed, in the last few years, as a variety of factors have combined to push creativity into the spotlight and to the centre of the business agenda.



Increasing complexity and ‘wicked problems’

In organisations around the world, hierarchical structures are breaking down, replaced by deeply interconnected, constantly shifting networks, linked by innovative technology. Decision-making and control are now more distributed, with employees required to react and respond rapidly to constant change. The ever-shifting business landscape has also given rise to a deluge of so-called ‘wicked problems’, involving incomplete, contradictory or changing information. Problems like this can only be solved through new ways of thinking.

Intelligent machines

Meanwhile, huge leaps forward in artificial intelligence technology promise to fundamentally change the nature of work, either by enhancing or replacing human-beings. Research by McKinsey suggests that half of today’s work activities could be automated by 2055, with repetitive and process-based roles the first to go. For employees, this looks likely to mean a greater focus on those creativity skills, where humans retain an advantage.

Evolving expectations

The rise of creativity is also being driven by new generations entering the workplace with different demands and expectations than those before them. So-called Millennials and Generation Z have grown up surrounded by technology, such as smartphones and social media, learning skills like coding and multimedia content creation at school. Our own previous research shows that younger employees expect greater choice, control, comfort, purpose and self-expression in their careers – creativity is a key part of that. From an organisational perspective, the case for creativity is clear.

But how do employees themselves feel? To find out, Steelcase undertook a survey of nearly 5,000 employees across six of the world’s biggest economies: France, Germany, Japan, Spain, the UK and the US, to provide an insight into their views, opinions and perspectives on creativity. What does creativity mean to employees in different parts of the world, different sectors and demographics? Do they see themselves as creative?

And how do they see workplace creativity evolving in the future? Here we provide an overview of the findings, discussion of what they mean for employers and some practical steps that will help employees and organisations fulfil their creative potential in the years ahead.



About the report

The Steelcase Creativity at Work Report explores the attitudes of employees towards creativity in the workplace. The findings provide unique insight into how employees feel about the meaning of creativity, their own creative skills and aspirations, and the barriers to creativity. The research was carried out by Harris Interactive, on behalf of Steelcase, in August 2017 as an online-based survey.

The sample consisted of 4,802 working adults in six countries around the world: France, Germany, Japan, Spain, the UK and the US.

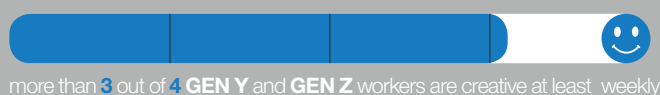
OUR DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY IS SHIFTING



WORKERS ARE GETTING CREATIVE



GENERATIONAL DIVIDE



Executive summary

- **Our definition of creativity is shifting:** The meaning of creativity shifts across individuals and demographics, with a range of definitions given by respondents. The highest percentage of respondents (61%) hold the more modern view that creativity means solving problems in a new way. While a significant number (40%) also see creativity as being artistic, it appears a more contemporary definition is taking hold in many workplaces; creativity isn't just for the artists.
- **Workers are getting creative:** In support of the business and societal case for more creativity in the workplace, nearly three quarters (74%) of employees say they are flexing their creative muscles on a daily or weekly basis - while just 14% say they are never given the chance to express their creativity. Yet it seems many workers aren't happy with the amount of creativity currently involved in their role, with more than half of respondents (55%) saying they would like the opportunity to be creative more frequently.
- **Creativity predictions:** Looking to the future, the majority of employees (85%) believe their role will require the same level of creativity or more. Only one in seven (15%) predict their role will require much or slightly less creativity in the future.

BARRIERS TO CREATIVITY

Organisational process & workload rank as the top two barriers to creativity



#1 Organisational process



#2 Workload

COUNTRY DIVIDE

Most frequently creative today: Germany



83% of German workers are creative daily or weekly

Least frequently creative today: Japan



46% of Japanese workers are creative less than monthly or never

Creative desire



Japan and France have highest share of workers who want to be more creative



Germany has the highest share of workers who want to be less creative

CREATIVITY PREDICTIONS

How much creativity will your job require in 5 years?



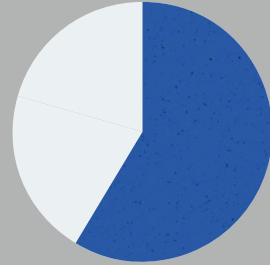
Expect the **same** or **more** creativity required in the future 85%

Executive summary

- **Barriers to creativity:** Organisational process (37%) and existing workloads (36%) are seen as the biggest hindrance to workplace creativity, according to the findings; with over a third of employees saying one of these limits their ability to think creatively as part of their role. Uninspiring work spaces (20%) and outdated technology (20%) were also top factors.
- **Generational divide:** Generations Y and Z report higher levels of creativity and more creative ambition than their older colleagues. Perhaps counter-intuitively, they are also the most likely to predict that the amount of creativity required in their role will decline in the coming five years. Views also diverge on the key barriers to creativity, with younger workers reporting that heavy workloads and uninspiring work environments are the biggest problems, while for Baby Boomers and Generation X, organisational process is the greatest concern.
- **Country Divide:** There's a sense of catching up. The countries where workers report doing creative work least frequently – Japan and France – also have the among highest percentage of workers who want to do more creative work. Alternately, countries who already report the most frequent creative work (Germany, United States) are also most likely to want the same or less creativity in the future.
- **What can employers do?** Employers can overcome some of these issues and encourage creative thinking and behaviours through: giving employees the opportunity to develop their creative confidence, nurturing creative confidence, creating an emotional connection through the designing of the workspace so that it inspires and sparks ideas in staff and creating/developing an fluid ecosystem of zones to support the different phases of creative thinking.
- **What can employees do?** Individuals also have a part to play in understanding how creative processes work and how they can boost their own creative juices, by getting moving, connecting with nature and changing their attitude towards failure.



WHAT DOES BEING CREATIVE MEAN TO YOU?



61%

of workers say it's solving problems in a new way.

Findings in detail

1. Our definition of creativity is shifting

What does creativity mean to you?

One of the most fundamental challenges of introducing more creativity in the workplace lies in grasping what creativity actually is, who has it and how it manifests itself in a professional environment. Traditionally seen as the gift of 'creative geniuses' and artists, leading thinkers, such as Tom Kelley, have reframed creativity in recent years as something that exists within everybody, not just the gifted few. Meanwhile in his book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Richard Florida argued that creative work is not exclusively about artistic pursuits but rather a focus on generating new ideas and solving complex problems. But are these perspectives shared by employees?

In fact, the research demonstrates that employees' understanding of creativity is shifting, with the most common definition of creativity defined as solving a problem in a new way, aligned with the more contemporary view espoused by Kelley and Florida. Many employees also believe creativity means expressing yourself in a unique way (44%) or positioning ideas in a different way (43%), while 40% continue to hold the traditional view that creativity means being artistic.

Employees in Spain are the most likely to take a more modern view of creativity, with 68% saying for them it means 'solving problems in a new way', and less than a quarter (23%) seeing it is an artistic trait. Employees in the UK (52%) and Germany (47%) are most likely to be of the latter view, which is also more common amongst women than men (44% vs 37%).



How creative are you at work?

Creativity is an increasingly essential factor in organisational success, so it is encouraging for employers that nearly three quarters of workers (74%) say they are creative on a daily or weekly basis. That leaves just 13% who claim they are only creative at the most once per month, while just 14% say they are never given the opportunity to flex their creative muscles.

The most creatively active country surveyed is Germany, where 83% of employees say that they are required to be creative either every day or every week in their job, followed by the the US, where this is the case for 82%. At the other end of the scale, Japanese workers are currently the least creative in the workplace, with just 54% saying they are required to be creative at least once per week and nearly a quarter (22%) reporting that their job doesn't require any creativity.

Understandably, there are large differences between employees in different industries, with traditional 'creative' sectors, such as marketing and PR and education coming out as the most creative at work, with 88% saying this is a daily or weekly requirement for them. In contrast, administrative workers have the least requirement for creativity, with 23% saying this is not a skill they're able to make use of in their role.

Younger generations report the highest creativity levels at work, with 88% of Gen Z saying they are required to be creative at least weekly, followed by 77% of Gen Y. This is compared to just 70% of Gen X, suggesting that employees now entering the workplace are more confident and proactive in maximising their creative skills.

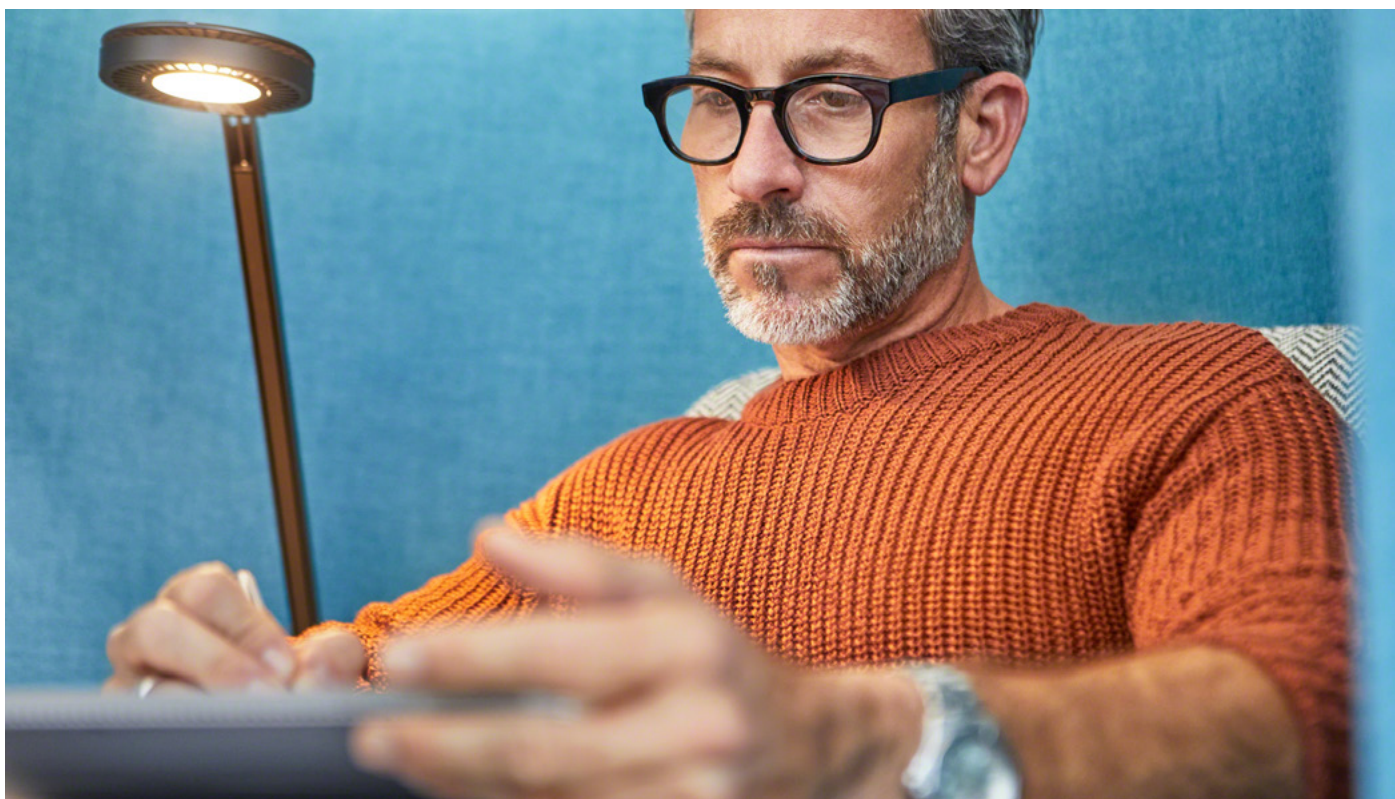


2. Workers are getting creative

Creative aspirations

While many employees are already enjoying regular opportunities to be creative at work, over half the respondents (55%) say they would like the chance to be creative more frequently than they do now. This is highest for workers that are currently the least creative in Spain (62%), Japan (60%) and France (57%), while those countries that are currently creative most often, Germany and the US, have the least creative ambition, with 44% and 52% respectively say they would like to stretch their creative powers more.

Creative drive is again greater amongst younger employees, with 61% of Gen Z and 60% of Gen Y hoping for the opportunity to be more creative in the future. This compares to 51% and 45% respectively for Gen X and Baby Boomers. From an industry perspective, sectors that are already perceived as creative are also the most driven to take on increased responsibilities in this area. For example, 61% of marketing and PR employees would like to be more creative in the future, compared to just one in five (17%) finance professionals.



The future is creative

With their own creative ambitions and the macro skills trends evolving, over three quarters (85%) of employees believe that their role will require the same level or more creativity in the future. In contrast, just one in seven (15%) predict their role will require less creative thinking.

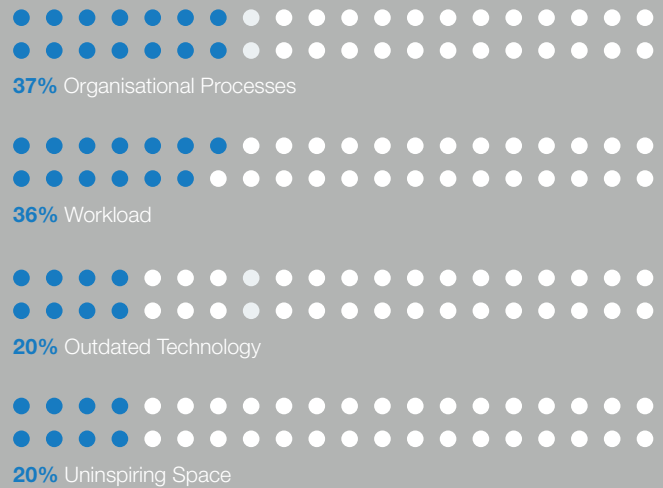
Employees in Spain and Japan see the brightest creative future ahead of them, with 87% and 86% of respondents anticipating the same or more creativity in their role. At the other extreme, just 81% of German workers share this view, indicating that many believe the pace of creative change won't be as fast as some commentators are anticipating.

There are also some unexpected divergences between different age groups, with Gen Z most likely to predict their role will involve less creativity in five years' time, a view held by over a quarter of respondents (28%) in this demographic. This is significantly higher than in other age groups and almost twice the number of Gen X workers who feel the same (15%). Gen X and Baby Boomers are the most likely to believe their role will involve more or the same amount of creativity in the future, with 87% and 83% respectively holding this view.

Healthcare workers are the most optimistic about rising creativity in their sector, with 46% saying they believe they'll need slightly or much more creative thinking in the next five years. They are closely followed by IT and engineering workers, where 42% believe this will be the case. However, it's worth noting that engineering workers are also the most likely to say that their job will require less creativity in the next five years (21%), suggesting two extremes of opinion.



BIGGEST BARRIERS TO CREATIVITY



3. Barriers to creativity

As organisations demand more creativity from employees and employees in return expect more creative work, it's vital that the workplace is designed and organised to support this change. Some organisations are simply not set up to encourage and support creative processes, as Kim Dabbs, Director of Applied Research and Consulting at Steelcase, has commented: "...the same mindset and practices which help make large organisations well-oiled machines, can often be the main barriers which stifle the innovation and creative processes."

This perspective is reflected in the findings, which show that the biggest barriers to creativity are organisational process or existing workloads, indicating that employees aren't given the time and space they need to be creative, or that creativity isn't prioritised by the organisation.

Other highly influential factors include working in an uninspiring space (20%), outdated technology (20%) and a lack of guidance and permission to be creative (19%). Japanese workers are the most likely to say that their creativity is stifled by the design of the workplace (25%), Germans by outdated technology (25%) and French workers by a lack of guidance or permission (26%).

Analysis of generational demographics also throws up some differences of opinion. For younger workers - those in Generation Z and Y - existing workload is the biggest barrier to creativity (33% and 38%), while for the older Generation X and Baby Boomer employees, this is replaced by organisational process as the most significant factor (37% and 35%). It is also worth noting that workspace design is a more important factor in creativity for younger workers, particularly those in Generation Z, of whom 26% say this is an issue, putting it on a par with organisational process.

Beleaguered education workers are the most likely to say that their existing workload is stopping them from being creative (41%), while traditional 'creatives' in the world of marketing and PR are the most likely to say they're held back by organisational process (45%) and outdated technology. Meanwhile, administrative workers are the most likely to claim they're stifled by working in an uninspiring environment (23%).



4. Building a creativity culture

If the workplace really is to become the hive of creativity that has been predicted, there is clearly some way to go. The research suggests that many employees don't understand how to be creative and are lacking in confidence to express and stretch themselves in this way. Many are also impeded by organisational processes, along with a shortage of time, space and permission to think creatively.

Overcoming these barriers begins with accepting that creativity doesn't just happen; it needs to be encouraged and supported in the context of a creative environment. Businesses today are frequently too focused on efficiency and ROI and too nervous about unpredictability to give employees the freedom to be creative. Creativity is an inherent human capability and a process in which anybody can engage. But employees need the right conditions, along with the time and mental space to allow it to flourish.

Neuroscience tells us that creativity requires both divergent and convergent thinking, so as to generate numerous ideas and possible solutions, before assessing these and deciding on the best to pursue. Divergent and convergent thinking are expressed through different external behaviours, which employers must actively and positively encourage. The creative work process is fluid and often messy, involving frequent dead-ends and failures that become part of a learning cycle. Building a creative culture therefore requires a change of approach and perspective at all levels of an organisation.

Through our work in this area, Steelcase has developed an actionable framework of how employers and employees can help to build a creative culture and environment:



Employers

Nurture Creative Confidence

A high proportion of employees would like the opportunity to be more creative, so one of the first steps is to harness this, by building a culture of self-expression and improvement. All employees should be empowered to tackle complex problems regardless of hierarchy or position. Allowing equal access to spaces, tools and technology encourages equal participation, while technology such as large-scale computing devices allows everyone to contribute to and interact with content. Employers should also get comfortable with risk-taking, building a culture where employees ask for forgiveness rather than permission for trying something different. As Tim Brown has commented: "If you want a creative organisation that is great at innovation and problem-solving then you need them to take risks. If they have to get permission to take every risk, including making a mess of the wall or whatever, then the chances are they're not going to be taking risks over the things that really matter."

Factor creativity into the process

Named as one of the biggest barriers to creativity, organisational process is an area that clearly needs to be addressed if employers are to foster a more creative culture. In large organisations, some level of structure and process is inevitable and necessary, to ensure productivity, quality and consistency. However, where possible, employers must ensure that 'creative time' is also factored into these processes. Leaders have a role to play in setting an example of how creative thinking can and should be incorporated into day-to-day tasks, while HR tools such as inductions, training programmes and annual reviews, can be harnessed to communicate the role that creativity plays in the success of the organisation and to encourage and reward creative behaviours.



Create an Emotional Connection

Organisations can help support creative thinking, while building an open and trusting team culture, through ambient inspiration and thoughtful design elements. As part of this, a focus on posture and proximity provides for physical and emotional comfort, affirming the importance of individuals and helping to foster a warm and nurturing environment. Some design strategies to achieve this include:

- Biophilic design, using different patterns, colours and textures, helps to bring the outside in, energising, relaxing and stimulating inhabitants.
- Displaying a variety of meaningful objects and accessories around the workplace can help to spark off creative thoughts. Take this one step further by allowing employees to personalise their own space.
- Also consider posture relative to the work mode, allowing employees to shift position and posture throughout the day by providing a variety of seating and standing options. This allows employees to sit, stand, perch, lounge and move, as the mood takes them.
- Create natural boundaries with screens, walls, furniture, even plants, to create new and interesting zones for creativity

Build a Fluid Ecosystem

Employees should also be supported through the different stages of creative thinking with a fluid ecosystem of zones, ranging from individual exploration to social connection, co-creation and evaluation. Providing a variety of spaces, technology and tools helps to support individuals and teams as they cycle through the creative process, while giving them the freedom to choose where and how they find their creative spark. Spaces should be located intentionally, inviting people to interact, supporting the flow of information and experiences. A combination of the physical and digital encourages employees to visually explore multiple solutions by experimentation and engagement with integrated technology. Cloud-based technologies in particular enable this, so that work can move with people as they transition through different locations and creative phases.



Employees

Individuals also have a part to play in developing and nurturing their own creativity at work. Some useful tips include:

1. Following creative 'processes': Build an understanding of how creativity 'happens' and the benefits of following a process that supports different modes of thinking. Choose where you work and with whom based on where you are in the creative process, from individual focus work to generating and socialising ideas.
2. Get outside: Exposure to nature releases endorphins that improve your mood and put you in a more creative state of mind. So, if you're lacking in inspiration, make sure you leave the office regularly, or choose to work in an area with natural sunlight and views of nature.
3. Move around: Movement is proven to stimulate the brain, so going for a walk, running or taking part in some other kind of exercise should help get those cogs whirring. Alternatively, try lying down as it reduces the flow of the 'fight or flight' hormone norepinephrine, helping you to absorb and connect ideas.
4. Seek out stimulating inspirational environments: We are more creative in spaces with high ceilings, or a far-reaching view. Find spaces that inspire you with their design and that facilitate the kind of work you are doing, e.g. group, collaborative work, or individual focused work.
5. Make a mess: Disorder is good for creativity, often generating new ideas and opportunities and helping you avoid predictability. If you feel more creative working with piles of paper rather than an elaborate system of organisation, then go for it.
6. Embrace mistakes: If you have an idea, you can only know if it will work by trying it. Don't be scared to be brave. As Tim Brown has said: "...you sort of have to seek failure at some level, to seek those moments when the world is not how you thought it was and that you then have a new insight about it. That is your new idea and then you move forward again."



Solutions

Creative Spaces

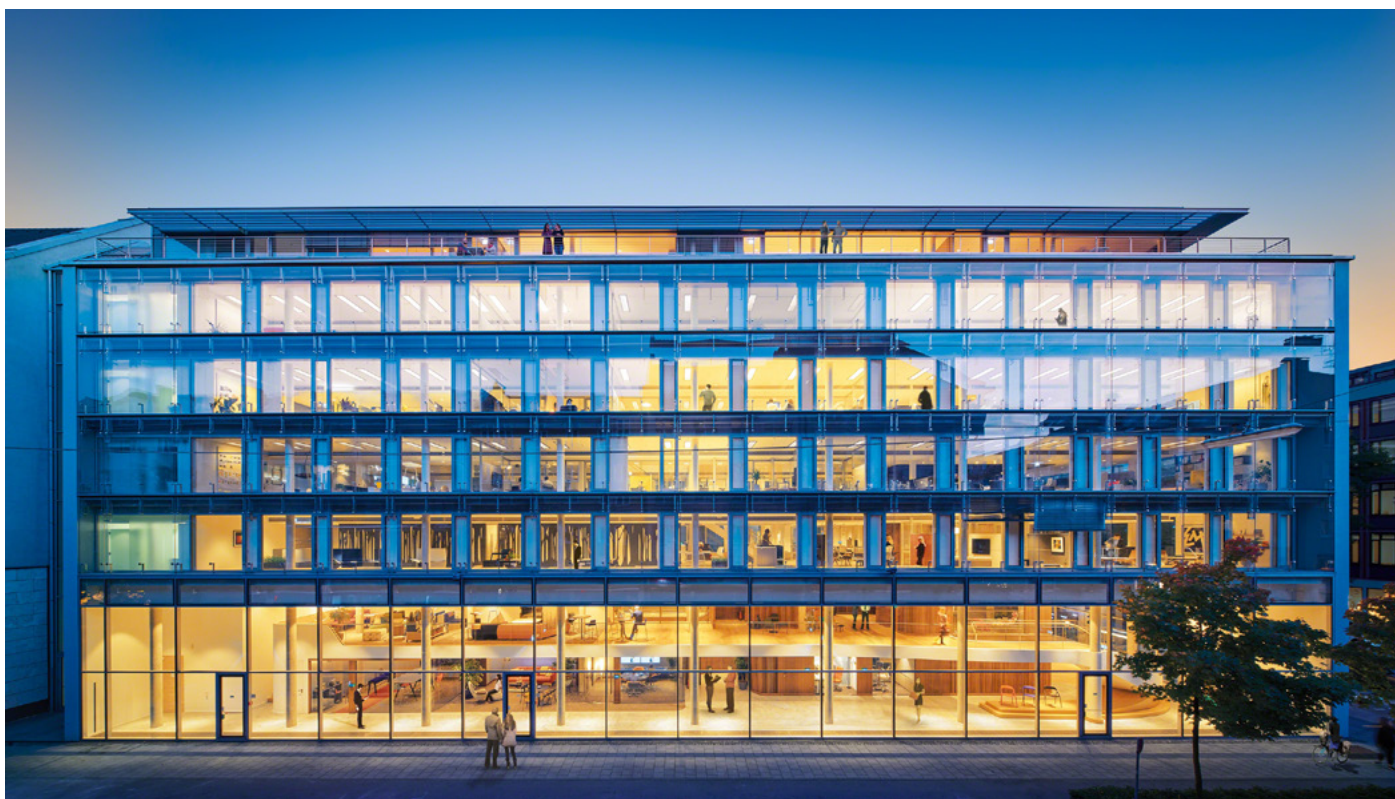
Historically, space and technology have been planned by completely different teams, with contrasting objectives. But this approach has often led to a disconnect in how the tools and environment interact, and the behaviours they stimulate in employees. Instead, organisations need to nurture a balanced ecosystem, involving technology that is both mobile and integrated into the physical environment, as well as spaces designed for individual “me” work and “we” group work.

Working with Microsoft, Steelcase developed a framework for how space and technology can work together throughout the creative process, with a Creative Spaces ecosystem incorporating five key spaces:

- **Focus Studio:** At the start of the creative process, employees need somewhere to research, develop and incubate their ideas before sharing with a group. This area should give them the space for individual creative work time, allowing them to get into flow, while also shifting to two-person collaboration when they need to. The furniture should support a range of postures, including both sitting and standing, to encourage movement and boost energy levels.
- **Duo Studio:** This area is specifically designed for one-to-one collaboration, which is an essential behaviour in creativity. The space should build trust, enabling employees to share and develop ideas shoulder to shoulder. It can also be supported with an informal lounge setting, for relaxation and reenergising following intense work sessions. Technology should be easily accessible to make collaboration as straightforward as possible.
- **Maker Commons:** Group work is a vital stage of the creative process, and this area should sit at the centre of your ecosystem, allowing employees to socialise their ideas and carry out rapid prototyping. The design should facilitate behaviour that switches between conversation, experimentation and concentration, with privacy created by moveable screens when required. Furniture should encourage a range of postures and movement to keep the energy high, while employees gather and play with new ideas.



- **Ideation Hub:** A high-tech destination, this is the perfect area for brainstorming involving both employees in the room and those located elsewhere, using a group screen to maximise connectedness and collaboration. The design should encourage active participation and equal opportunities to contribute, with stool height seating so people can stand up and move around easily. Acoustic privacy should also be integrated to prevent disruptions and enhance remote user participation.
- **Respite Room:** Finally, creativity requires balancing active group work with solitude, to both generate your own ideas and absorb those you have just heard. Having this space gives employees a relaxing cocoon away from their usual workstation, encouraging the mind to wander and making those 'eureka' moments more likely. Technology should make it easy to switch from searching and scrolling to typing, while visual and audio distractions should also be reduced with the right acoustics and easy control over lighting.



Steelcase Learning and Innovation Centre (LINC)

Innovation and creativity were central to the design and build of the newest Steelcase Learning and Innovation Centre in Munich (LINC), which was conceived as the next step in exploring how creative thinking can be nurtured and supported by physical space and technology. One of the top mandates of the LINC was to support the culture shift from seeing the workplace as the “corporate office”, to viewing it as a “creative studio”, where people can move fluidly through the creative process, building and iterating on each other’s ideas. The space is designed to instill the culture that failure is accepted and an integral part of learning, so as to strengthen the creative confidence of employees and liberating them to take calculated risks in search of breakthroughs. The LINC is driven by three guiding principles for innovation:

- Embrace design thinking in every function
- Create an environment of creative collaboration
- Practice the seven habits of innovation:
 - Raise central questions
 - Be observers, listeners and learners
 - Make ideas visible
 - Share and co-create
 - Make others successful
 - Be an optimist
 - Fail faster to succeed sooner

With an ecosystem of interconnected and interdependent environments, the LINC gives employees choice and control over how and where they work, based on the task at hand and their state of mind at any particular moment. Employees can choose between spaces for focused individual work, one-to-one conversations and more dynamic, interactive group activities, including a model shop for prototyping and hands-on problem-solving.

For more information on creativity and the workplace, explore **The Creative Shift** from Steelcase 360 Magazine.