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# THE FUTURE OF WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE — TYING IT TO BUSINESS OUTCOMES

BY KATE LISTER & DEBRA MORITZ

For nearly a decade, we have used sensors and software to understand how offices, conference rooms, and entire workplaces are used. But most sensors offer only a snapshot of what happened at a point in time and in a given place.

We've used surveys and focus groups as a way of capturing employee attitudes, likes, dislikes, wants and needs. While these tools can offer great insights, low participation rates and survey overload can limit their value.

Recently, we've embarked on a mission to optimize the workplace experience. However, we've struggled to measure our progress or tie it to business outcomes.

Using these traditional methods to prescribe workplace design and work practices is like trying to coach a football team when all you have to go on is a few game photos, interviews with a few of the players, and the ending score of their most-recent game. All that is about to change.

Sensors have become so small they're almost invisible, so cheap they're practically free, and so unobtrusive they're easy to forget. They're increasingly embedded in the things we use and wear, and even in environments in where we live and work. These sensors talk not just to us, but with one another. When combined with other hardware and software, they can learn from experience, predict outcomes, prescribe solutions and even take corrective action.

If you think about this network of sensors as a kind of peripheral nervous system with the information they collect being stored in and analyzed by a virtual brain, you can begin to imagine where all this is going. The places and spaces where we live, work, and play will all be connected. They will learn from us and we from them. They will respond in real-time, more accurately predict and prevent problems, and allow us to collect feedback from occupants without the risk of survey bias.

Software hardware and software solutions have taught us a great deal about where people work, what they do, and how they work best. We've learned that almost any type of workplace can be effective, if the occupants have a variety of spaces from which to choose. We can predict what size conference rooms are needed most, we can reduce maintenance costs by only cleaning the rooms that were used, and much more.

We've also made good progress in applying neuroscience to workplace design. We know individuals and teams need places for both contemplation and interaction if creativity and innovation are to flourish. We know that lighting can be used to alter our natural body rhythms. We know that playing a quick game can quickly

build trust between strangers. And we know that exposure to nature can soothe the soul.

Wearables and other technologies already allow us to track location, sense movement, and detect whether the wearer is sitting or standing, working on a computer, or talking on the telephone. Sensor technologies are already able to provide information about who talks to whom, how often, how energetically they're speaking, whether they're stressed, and even their gender and ethnicity. These and similar advances are helping us answer questions such as:

- Are people collaborating more after a workplace change initiative?
- Does the succulent wall improve air quality?
- Is everyone in the meeting being heard, or just those with the biggest voices?

The critical question, one that few organizations can

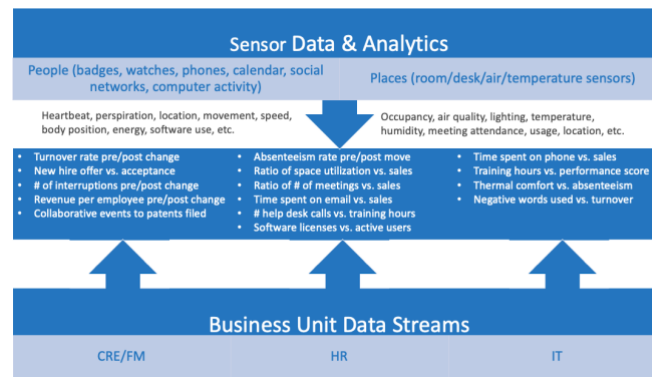
answer today, is whether the changes we make to our workplaces and work practices help attract and retain talent, increase productivity, foster creativity and innovation, reduce costs, boost revenue, or help achieve other business goals. This is where the real opportunity lies. If we expect to create workplace experiences that optimize outcomes,

we need to correlate what the sensors and analytics tell us about how people perform in various environments with business results.

## Creating the Workplace Experience: Today vs. Tomorrow

The "Workplace Experience" is an amalgamation of every interaction a person has with the work they do, the people they work for and with, the places they work, the company's brand, and more. It begins even before someone is hired based on all they have experienced with the organization as a customer, shareholder or observer. It never ends in some cases. Even after someone leaves, they will talk to other people, potential customers, vendors, and even perhaps reporters about their experience. Some may even return as contractors or employees.

FM/CRE, HR, IT and other organizational units are scrambling to enhance the employee experience, but most do little more than remove barriers to success. They are reactive, rather than proactive. They address extrinsic, rather than intrinsic motivators — the ones that that have the biggest impact on employee engagement.



## Let's Talk Privacy

We live in an age when lights can hear, watches can record sleep patterns, and conference software can gauge attention levels. Employees blithely give up the right to privacy with a stroke of a pen their first day on the job. That means their online activity, phone conversations, location, and even keystrokes are fair game for employers to use as they like. Some countries have passed regulations to protect employee privacy, but in the U.S. and elsewhere, these protections do not exist or are easily waived, often unknowingly.

Interestingly, research shows employees are willing to share private data provided there's something in it for them; it makes their job easier, provides a learning opportunity, or offers some other benefit. But any organization that cares about its reputation must be completely open and transparent about how the data will be used and protected, and include only those employees who have explicitly opted in.

## About IFMA's Workplace Evolutionaries

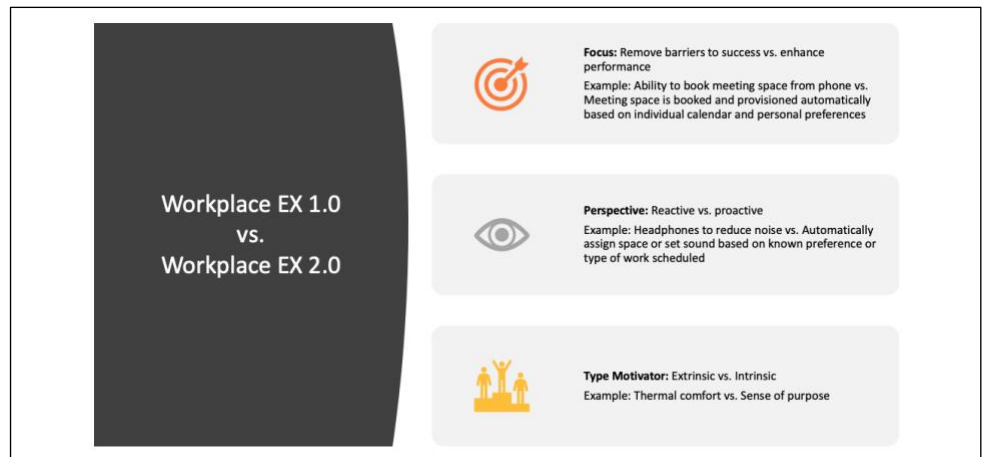
Workplace Evolutionaries is a global Community of Practice within IFMA. Its nearly 1,000 members are workplace strategists, change managers, facilities managers, architects, designers, office furniture experts, IT managers, HR experts and academics who are changing the world, one work-place at a time.

WE offers its members monthly WE:binars, a bi-monthly WE:brief with important news and the latest workplace research/member-only research papers, as well as a full agenda of exciting WE content at Facility Fusion, World Workplace and World Workplace Europe. WE has more than two dozen WE Hubs around the world to help members engage in local conversations and add to its global intelligence.

Join WE or learn more at [WE.IFMA.org](http://WE.IFMA.org)

Twitter:  
<https://twitter.com/weworkplace>

LinkedIn Group:  
<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/4891376/>



As new data sources emerge, existing ones are unlocked, and data streams are combined, we will finally be able to easily measure the impact of workplace change on business, and privacy notwithstanding, even personal outcomes.


The primary focus for change initiatives will be to enhance performance. They will be proactive, rather than reactive and will foster intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation.

The nervous system and virtual brain we envisioned earlier will grow in complexity (more connections between sensors and data streams) and knowledge (from data analyzed over time and under different conditions). As it does, we will increasingly be able to develop insights not just about broad populations, but also by industry, job category, geography and much more.

## A New Game for a New Decade

We still have much to learn about human behavior and motivation, about how people perform in various environments, and, in particular, about measuring outcomes in an age where it's brains, not brawn, that create organizational value."

As employee privacy issues are resolved, new datasets will become available. They will include information about how people work, what frustrates/delights them, what work they should be doing more of or less of, where training is needed, and more. They will inform leadership of flight risks, manager effectiveness, and unwanted behavior. They will identify opportunities for outsourcing and in-sourcing. They will identify high-potential employees, reveal under-performers, and uncover reskilling and upskilling opportunities. And, together with rapidly evolving tools and technologies, they will allow us to measure the impact of the workplace environment on an organization's most important asset, its people.

Imagine a football coach who has every play ever played in his head, knows what his players will do almost as quickly as they do, and continually adjusts his strategy to keep every player performing at his peak. Welcome to Workplace EX 2.0—coming to a workplace near you. 

**Kate Lister** is a highly regarded speaker, writer, and thought leader on the future of work. She is president of Global Workplace Analytics, a research-based consulting organization that helps employers and communities understand and communicate the people, planet and profit business case for a wide range of workplace strategies. She has co-authored three business books, contributed chapters to two others, and written scores of articles for major media outlets. She is a member of IFMA's Workplace Evolutionaries (WE) Leadership team where she heads up research initiatives and curates the WE Brief, a favorite member-only benefit.

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