



**InnoLead Members' Meeting**  
**Physical and Virtual Innovation Spaces**  
**February 18, 2022**

Some companies with large innovation labs are looking at reopening them as potential hybrid offices — a place to convene people more casually.

Other companies, especially those without headquarters located in major cities, rely on their innovation centers in urban locations as a way to host events and activations, train employees, and plug in to the external ecosystem.

One member based in Silicon Valley argued that with any videoconference-based innovation activity or online conference, “it can be a challenge to get engagement. We think in-person is where it’s at.” His facility has been open and active through much of the pandemic. Another member added, “We treat [our innovation] space as a prototype that’s always changing; we rearrange it based on how people feel it would work best.”

But that same member said his team had put a lot of work over the past two years into making online collaboration sessions more engaging. He looked at the videogame streaming site Twitch for examples of how streamers held the attention of the people watching their channel. “It was almost like we had to treat virtual meetings as a TV show,” with polls, word clouds, ice breaker activities, etc. “When you’re asking for three hours of someone’s time [for an innovation workshop], you must make sure they’re engaged,” he said.

Accenture recently [purchased](#) 60,000 VR headsets so they can collaborate better in a virtual environment. Some InnoLead member companies have done the same so that colleagues can connect in a virtual environment.

Members talked about dealing with VR challenges, including keeping meetings in the 20 to 30 minute range, and providing hands-on training to senior execs who may not have used a headset before. Giving access to people outside of a particular company to custom-crafted VR spaces remains a challenge.

One member mentioned the meeting platform [Glue](#), and using headsets from Oculus and Pico to give people access. Another said he'd tried platforms like Mozilla's [Hubs](#) and [NextMeet](#), with an eye toward software that could remain stable even when being used by a large group of people.

One CPG company has built out a CAVE physical VR space for use in prototyping store environments, and often takes people there as part of innovation process to understand how people look at shelves, and walk around it stores. The next version could be set up as a VR environment, with people logging in from their homes.

It sounded as though any sort of group activities in virtual environments required not only hardware purchases, but a fair amount of tech support to get people onboard.

Several members are inviting startups into their physical innovation spaces to foster collaboration and lend a sense of energy and activity. But one member who had done that prior to the pandemic cautioned, "There were pros and cons. When you try to get the real estate teams and business units involved, they want to know if it is a loss leader? Will it generate revenue? If you promise to make money, you will have to prove that. And that's so unpredictable."

"The future of innovation is showing — not telling," said one participant. In the past, those demonstrations have typically occurred in physical innovation centers. Increasingly, they may happen in the metaverse.