54% of meeting leaders agree that finding an available meeting room is a continual problem.

65% of meeting leaders said that less than half of their weekly meetings were productive.

56% of meeting leaders spend an average of six or more minutes troubleshooting a technology issue once it has occurred.

Meeting by Numbers: How Data Capture is Transforming the Meeting Room

By Jay McArdle

Your institution may capture an enormous amount of data about facilities, enrollment, alumni, student retention, and so on. But, are you also capturing data from the various conference rooms, group study rooms, and collaboration rooms scattered all over your campus? If not, you may be missing significant opportunities to improve the user experience.

Meeting-room data capture has come a long way since it was first employed to track projector bulb life. The focus has shifted toward improving the user experience both inside and outside the meeting. New technological advances allow campuses to track conference technology, scheduling assistants, and the room environment itself. Data has become the foundation of the "smart" meeting room.

Tracking data within the meeting room will become increasingly important as we look to solve the "productivity problem." According to a recent State of the Meeting Room survey, 65 percent of meeting leaders said that less than half of their weekly meetings were productive. Only 11 percent said that three out of four meetings were productive. Those are sobering numbers.

If your campus needs to correct these productivity problems, consider the ways advanced data-capture technologies can provide solutions to your meeting-room woes—and how undergoing such an initiative can actually improve the facility itself.

SOLUTION #1: REDUCING PAIN POINTS INSIDE THE MEETING ROOM

Your users expect a certain level of technology to be available in their meeting rooms. The problem,

however, is that the more technology we install in a meeting room, the greater the chance that something will go wrong with it. In fact, our survey found that 56 percent of meeting leaders spend an average of six or more minutes troubleshooting a technology issue once it has occurred. The solution lies in the way we leverage data to monitor any deviations from standard operating procedures.

One way to learn more about these technology hiccups, and how to ultimately avoid them, is by supplementing readily available room data with sensors. We can use the application program interfaces (APIs) within individual components to determine how well these devices communicate with each other, and use sensors to monitor variables such as room temperature and room lighting. Once this data is collected, integrated software can harness this information to detect issues that arise, and either troubleshoot the problem or contact IT services directly.

Additionally, campus facilities managers can solve meeting-room problems through smoother implementation of post-meeting feedback. Quick surveys prompted by meeting-room technology can provide valuable information regarding meeting success and participant satisfaction. They can also reduce the chance that users will ignore a technical issue to avoid owning the repairs. This data can be employed by campus facilities managers to determine which rooms are most in need of improvements—and what technology is the best fit to solve the problem.

SOLUTION #2: SIMPLIFYING SCHEDULING AROUND THE MEETING ROOM

Facilities managers know that the problems with meeting rooms aren't limited to the rooms themselves. Our research discovered that 54 percent of meeting leaders agree that finding an available meeting room is a continual problem.

The solution: Implement data capture to help users better understand how rooms can be optimized. Using meeting-room data, facilities managers can track the number of occupants in each room, the prevalence of meetings, and the volume of attendees based on room size. This understanding is critical for determining whether the current room inventory is meeting campus needs, and which meeting-room sizes are most in demand.

Data can also solve the recurring problem known as "zombie rooms." Zombie rooms occur when someone schedules a reoccurring meeting, but participants repeatedly fail to attend—leaving the rooms reserved but empty week after week. Doing so pre-

vents others from using the rooms, as the scheduling tool displays the space as reserved. Room usage data allows facilities managers to track these occurrences, and the scheduling tool can automatically release these rooms back into available inventory.

SOLUTION #3: CONTRIBUTING TO A MORE SUSTAINABLE OPERATION ACROSS THE BUILDING

Meeting-room data capture doesn't just impact your users—it impacts the building as a whole. Even taking simple steps in our meeting spaces can lead to more efficient and sustainable operation.

Consider the problems faced by a night custodian. If a room went for the entirety of the previous day without occupants and was cleaned the night before, it doesn't need to be vacuumed or have its trash emptied. Without visibility into room occupancy, however, the custodian may spend extra time searching the room for trash or vacuuming clean carpet. Proper sensors and integrated software could provide the custodian a map of which rooms can be skipped, saving time and reducing energy consumption.

Data capture also helps us solve meeting-room problems that don't involve humans. For example, energy-consuming devices such as displays and projectors are occasionally left active on nights and weekends, draining energy and increasing electricity bills. By cataloging working hours and cross referencing that information with data input from occupancy sensors, smart meeting rooms can switch off unused devices and reduce energy consumption.

MEETING ROOMS ARE THE PROBLEM. DATA IS THE SOLUTION.

If you are a campus facilities manager who continually hears complaints about your meeting rooms, whether they are about the temperature or the technology, you don't need to meet those complaints with a shrug. You can leverage data-capture technology in your meeting rooms to better diagnose the problem and find the solutions that power a more efficient campus—both inside and outside the meeting room. 𝕵

Jay McArdle is vice president and chief information officer at RoomReady, and can be reached at *jaymcardle@roomready.com.* This is his first article for *Facilities Manager.*